

Contemporary Social Issues: Bioethics

PHI 1308-02

Baylor University Spring 2020

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What is this course about?

Human beings are embodied, and because of this, much of how well our lives go depends on our health. Medicine aims to make embodied life better by promoting health and curing or preventing illness. But since medicine deals with *human persons* with wills and values which ought to be respected, not every way of achieving the goal of medicine— health— is good or even permissible.

Moreover, human beings are social creatures. What is good for individuals depends on what is good for other individuals and their communities. In pursuing health, we also have reason to respect the rights of others, distribute medical resources fairly, and balance community health with the free decisions of individuals regarding their health.

Finally, embodied human beings live in an environment alongside other animals. Our choices, actions, and institutions affect the environment and other animals, as does our use of these as resources in our pursuit of human wellbeing.

In this course we will explore together answers to questions about how best to live and act given how we are situated bodily, socially, and environmentally.

The primary way you will learn bioethics is by *practicing it*. You'll investigate cases that raise prominent bioethical issues and decide together how those involved should respond, given their common aim of living a good life.

What should I know and know how to do by the end?

The course is designed to help you cultivate critical reasoning skills, moral perception, and

the ability to communicate well with others about bioethical issues. We have five core course objectives:

- (1) Identify important ethical considerations in cases
- (2) Accurately and clearly restate philosophical arguments about a bioethical matter raised in our texts
- (3) Engage respectfully and thoughtfully with others in the class
- (4) Communicate charitably and articulately with others about the positions you hold and why you hold them
- (5) Construct valid and persuasive arguments that justify positions on tough ethical cases

You should expect to achieve these goals by the end of the course if you are carefully reading the texts, regularly engaging in class lectures and discussion, and completing assignments well.

Bioethics is not an abstract science. It brings us face to face with concrete difficulties faced by **real people** in challenging circumstances. Doing bioethics well is like walking a tightrope—it takes a delicate balance between being a sympathetic interlocutor, being able to see things from many peoples' perspectives, and being an incisive thinker, challenging the status quo.

I will ask that you help make our class an environment where we can learn to strike that balance by showing humility, sensitivity, respect, and openness to others as we share ideas, experiences, and arguments. If you invest in this class, I hope you will emerge equipped to advance fruitful discussions about these issues with your friends, family, and fellow citizens.

What will we read?

We will read articles and book excerpts in bioethics and its attendant disciplines. All readings and the up-to-date reading schedule will be posted to Canvas.

If you have trouble accessing a reading, let your TA know at least 24 hours in advance so we can ensure you get access in time to read before class.

What are we doing and when?

Readings. Come to class having prepared the reading assignment listed for that day. When called on, you should be ready to identify or summarize relevant passages. As the course progresses, you will be expected to be able to engage critically with the reading in assignments.

I recommend that you **take notes** on the readings or make argument maps that you can then read aloud or use as a springboard to participate in class. This ensures that those very

comfortable with speaking make comments and ask questions that are well thought through, and it makes it easier for those who aren't normally comfortable speaking impromptu to be heard.

Any changes in the reading assignments will be reflected on the reading schedule on Canvas online. You are responsible for checking for changes.

Discussion and group work. Every class period will have time for class-wide discussion and activities in small groups. Participating in discussions and group work is required to pass the course. You will learn the Mindmup software to participate. A prerequisite of achieving the basic objective of engaging respectfully and thoughtfully with others is being present. (See attendance policy for details.)

I expect you to engage thoughtfully—giving me and others your undivided attention, preparing for class with thorough reading, being mindful of how often and long you speak relative to others, and communicating your thoughts clearly by choosing your words carefully.

I expect you to engage respectfully—taking a posture of readiness to learn from me, your TA, and others, listening closely to others' comments and questions, giving due recognition to your peers for their insights and ideas, and responding directly or incorporating the comments of your peers in your own comments and questions.

Position Paper. The major writing assignment in the course is a 2500-3000 word paper on one of the cases discussed in the course. The paper must follow Chicago or APA style guides and include a proper bibliography.

An excellent final paper will clearly state your position, identify important ethical considerations, integrate accurate discussion of arguments on the topic in the literature, construct an original, valid, and convincing argument on behalf of your position. You will complete this in several stages. Each stage must be completed before moving to the next stage.

Stage 1: Argument Outline. In the first stage, you must meet with me or your TA and present your initial assessment of the ethical issues raised by the case, an outline or Mindmup map of arguments of the relevant arguments from the course texts. This is due on **3/6** by 11:59 pm; place a hard copy in the instructor's box, electronic copy on Canvas.

Stage 2: Draft. The second stage of the paper is the draft. This should be a complete, formatted version of the paper. It must follow the APA or Chicago manual of style and include a complete bibliography. You will receive feedback from the instructor and a peer on the draft. This is due on **4/8** by 11:59 pm; place a hard copy in the instructor's box, electronic copy on Canvas.

Stage 3: Peer Review. Another way you can demonstrate your ability to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with others is by giving feedback to a peer on drafts of your peer's position paper. You and an assigned peer will swap papers the day the paper draft is due. You have one week to read your peer's draft and complete the peer review worksheet. You will discuss your review of your peer's paper and your peer's review of your draft in class during the peer review workshop on. You must complete the peer review to submit the final version of your own position paper. This will occur on **4/29**.

Stage 4: Final paper. The third and last stage of writing your paper is the final paper. You must append a cover letter explaining how you revised the paper in light of feedback on your draft. This should be turned in **5/4** by 11:59 pm; place a hard copy in the instructor's box, electronic copy on Canvas.

Debates. We will hold three in-class debates about the cases from the case packet. These debates offer the chance to work together to come up with a position and then communicate your position and reasoning on a case. Debates occur in class on **2/12, 3/18, 4/24**.

You will be divided into teams at the beginning of the semester. Every team will compete in two of three debates and will prepare the four cases we have discussed in class periods prior to the debate. The case your team is called on to respond to in the debate will be randomly assigned at the start of your round of the debate.

An excellent debater will collaborate and prepare with your teammates, state your position clearly, explain convincing reasons for your position, accurately restate an argument from one of the course texts relevant to the case, and charitably and carefully respond to the opposing team's argument. See the Debate Best Practices Guide to prepare.

How is learning assessed?

Assessment in this class is based on the extent to which you achieve the core course objectives 1-5. You have many opportunities to meet the objectives. Grades correspond to how many objectives you achieve by the end of the semester and with what frequency.

We will follow the **specifications method** of grading which studies have shown to improve student outcomes in courses. This grading method should help you focus on cultivating skills and achieving meaningful outcomes and reflect those achievements by the end of the course, (rather than maintaining a certain grade average without growth). See the "Why Specifications Grading?" document for explanation and details.

On the Canvas gradebook, you will be able to see which objectives you have achieved so far. Each assignment will feature specific course goals you can achieve by doing the assignment well—earning a “Satisfactory” for that specific goal. For instance, one course goal is identifying important ethical issues in cases. If you achieve this in your position paper draft, then you will see “Satisfactory” for the goal “Identify Ethical Issue in Position Paper.” The bundle of specific goals you must achieve to earn a certain grade are detailed below and in the “Course Grading Scheme” document.

Grading Scheme.

D

- 2 Satisfactory marks for active class participation (in 2 units)
- 1 Satisfactory mark for identifying important ethical issues (in 1 position paper assignment or 1 debate)
- 1 Satisfactory mark for communicating your position clearly and charitably (in 1 debate or 1 position paper assignment)

C

- All D-level specific goals plus:
- 2 Satisfactory marks for identifying important ethical issues in 1 debate and 1 position paper assignment
- 2 Satisfactory marks for clearly and charitably communicating your position in 1 debate and 1 position paper assignment
- 1 Satisfactory mark for accurately restating argument from text (in position paper or debate)
- 1 Satisfactory mark for engaging thoughtfully and respectfully with others on bioethical matters in peer review

B

- All C-level specific goals plus:
- 3 Satisfactory marks for active class participation (in all 3 units)
- 1 Satisfactory mark for effectively explaining reasons for your position in 1 debate or 1 position paper assignment
- 2 Satisfactory marks for accurately restating argument from text (in 1 debate and 1 position paper assignment or 2 debates)

A

- All B-level goals plus:
- 2 Satisfactory marks for effectively explaining reasons for your position 1 debate and 1 position paper assignment
- 1 Satisfactory mark for constructing a valid and persuasive argument for your position on position paper

What are the course policies?

Academic Integrity. You are responsible for knowing and abiding by the University's regulations regarding academic honesty. Here is a good rule of thumb for avoiding plagiarism: If it's a direct quotation, cite it. If it's a paraphrase of someone else's idea, cite it. If it's an idea you got from a discussion or reading, cite it. If in doubt, cite it. The only ideas not cited are those you come up with independently or that belong to general knowledge.¹ Plagiarism may result in an automatic failure of the course.

Accommodation. Please notify me in the first week of class if you need academic accommodation. You will need to provide certification from OLA. Additionally, I encourage all students to make use of the Writing Center at the library.

Attendance. Attendance will be recorded every class period and regular attendance is a prerequisite (necessary but not sufficient) for passing the course. 5 or more unexcused absences are just cause for failure of the course. 3 absences are permitted while earning a B and 2 while earning an A. If you have a medical emergency or a university-sponsored event, you may present the office of student affairs with a note from a medical professional, director of the event, or your academic dean for an excused absence and have it forwarded to the professor or TA.

Assessment. All students are required to pass a **syllabus quiz** to ensure advance understanding of and agreement to the requirements of the course, assignments, grading system, and policies.

Any grievances about marks must be submitted to the instructor in writing **24 hours after** receiving the mark. The TA and instructor will then meet to discuss this, then discuss with student. If it cannot be resolved, we will follow university policy.

Correspondence. The course TA is available over email for questions regarding the course and assignments during business days (Monday- Friday). Allow *at least* 24 hours for response (it's not a good idea to leave an assignment to the last minute and get stuck with a question after business hours or on the weekend). Please be courteous and respectful in email and office hours, as the standards for respectful and thoughtful engagement extend to electronic correspondence and can affect your achievement of objective 3.

Electronics. Cell phones must be stowed and silenced during class. You may use a tablet for readings and laptops for argument mapping when the instructor calls for it only. If you have accessibility reasons for using a laptop, please let me know the first week of class and provide certification through OLA. Other use of electronics as an **unexcused absence** for that unit.

¹ I am grateful to Mark Murphy for this suggestion.

Important dates

- 1/29 Last day to drop
- 2/12 Debate 1
- 3/6 Argument outline due
- 3/18 Debate 2
- 4/8 Draft Position Paper due
- 4/24 Debate 3
- 4/29 Peer Review Workshop
- 5/4 Position Paper Final due