

## **PHL 232: Bioethics**

### **Important Details:**

PHL 232 meets Tuesday and Thursday from 2:30 to 3:45 in Old Main 407.

**Your host:** Dr. Michael P. Wolf

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**Office Hours:** Tuesday and Thursday 8:30-10:30

### **Required Texts**

Beauchamp, et al, *Contemporary Issues in Bioethics*, 7th ed. Belmont, CA: Thomson-Wadsworth, 2008.

### **What Is This Course About?**

My aim in this course is to make you do some philosophy. Just what it means to “do some philosophy” is a matter of some debate, though. If you asked twenty philosophers what it means to do philosophy, you would get somewhere between twenty-five and thirty answers. Just which questions are important, and just how we ought to pursue answers for them are not matters on which all philosophers agree. The one element that seems to be common to all these conceptions of philosophy seems to be that we must give and ask for reasons for what we believe. We may judge that some reasons are better than others, and so some views may become more plausible to us in time. Giving and asking for reasons is a practice that belongs to all rational animals - Earthly or extraterrestrial, human or not - and this is what we will focus our attention on this course. Any of the theories suggested are fair game for both criticism and defense, so long as you give good reasons to accept or reject them. Just what will count as a good reason is something we will address.

More specifically, our concern here will be with the ethical issues surrounding contemporary medicine and medical technology. It has been said that ethics and morality are the social institutions that set out to protect us when we are at our most vulnerable. Being in the hands of a doctor or other source of health care certainly fits this description. Most of us lack the knowledge and expertise to chart a course for ourselves, especially when our lives are quite literally at stake. The profusion of new technologies to sustain life beyond what we took to be its limits and to create life in ways we could never have foreseen has generated a novel set of philosophical problems surrounding the ethics of life, death and the medical care we receive between the ends of our lives. In this class we will address some of these issues, including euthanasia, genetic research and cloning and universal access to health care. More succinctly, our course goals might be stated as follows:

1. You will read primary sources in philosophy, and to do so in a critical manner. You will read actual books and articles from philosophers, using secondary sources for assistance in some cases. Without reading these primary sources, it will not be possible to pass the class, and your reading of them will require more than passive recall.

2. You will write critically about these sources, including presentations of your own arguments with respect to the material. There will be an expectation that you are ready to write college-level papers and develop your own ideas in them. The failure to do this – either by writing poorly, not engaging the material and arguments at hand, or simply not making arguments at all – will be seen as a failure to complete all or some of the assignments.
3. You will become familiar with a number of important problems from the history of philosophy and from contemporary debates. While this is not a history class per se, and it would be unsatisfactory to have a purely descriptive understanding of this material without further critical engagement, a command of the original material and what it actually says will be a prerequisite for moving forward on the work we do.

### **Assessment**

Two policies should be laid out here. First, I do not like to take roll, but that inclination to be liberal on my part has come in for more abuse in recent years, so I will have a firm policy on attendance. More than three absences without documented reasons will lead to a full letter grade drop in your final grade, e.g. from a B+ to a C+. I will expect to receive any such documentation within a week of your absence and to receive it in advance of any planned absences. Second, any late work - whether in-class, written work or online - will only be accepted with proper documentation. If you get sick, talk to a doctor or go to student health and document this. If there is a family emergency, get some form of documentation on this. I will only accept such documentation if it passes through the Dean's Office (see Dean Hannon or McCrae for this) first.

Class participation is an important issue to me, especially in a small class like this. I expect you to come to class with the readings done and ready to discuss them. In order to get you involved in these ways and as an exercise in immersing yourself in the debates that motivated different philosophers to adopt the views they did, each student in this class will take part in a panel discussion or debate over the course of the semester. This will involve your researching and developing a debate in the philosophy of mind in some greater depth and working with fellow students to present an ideal case for some position. The level of preparation expected here is roughly the same as a five-page paper. Details of the format and topics will be made available as we progress. This will count for **20% of your final grade.**

You will also find a series of dates on the syllabus below listed as "class discussion" days. On these days, you will break up into small groups and discuss issues and material that we have covered in class. You should be sure to have all recent material read and be prepared to take some notes about your discussions. Online, you will find assignments for each of the discussion days. You will be asked to provide arguments for and against various positions in the debates. These should be written up formally, as I write arguments out in handouts and lectures, with elaboration wherever necessary. They will be due by the midnight before, and will provide the basis for discussion on the day. If you are not present in class on the day of discussion and do not have a documented excuse as described above, then you are not permitted to complete the assignment and will lose the points for that day. (Translation: So don't miss class those days.) **Each of these discussion assignments will be worth 4% of your total grade, and there are five such assignments, which make up 20% of your final grade.**

Over the course of the semester, you will also have to write two papers of about 2000-2500 words, which works out to about 8-10 pages in Times 12-point double spaced with one-inch margins. The two assignments will correspond roughly with the two halves of the course. I will offer you a set of paper topics well in advance of the due date and you may choose from there. You may also suggest your own paper topic and write on it **SO LONG AS YOU CLEAR THE TOPIC WITH ME FIRST**. Each one of these papers will be worth **30% of your final grade for a total of 60% of your grade**. More information on the assignments and how to approach these papers will be available in class. Since people now ask me this every semester, let me say something explicitly. As a policy, I will not read rough drafts of papers. It is not fair to do so for some students and not others, and scheduling does not permit me to read multiple drafts of everyone's papers. I am happy to talk about papers during office hours, via email, or in time set aside for such matters in class, but rough drafts will not be read in advance of the assignment due date.

So, in other words:

Class Discussion 1	4%
Class Discussion 2	4%
Paper 1	30%
Class Discussion 3	4%
Class Discussion 4	4%
Class Discussion 5	4%
Paper 2	30%
Panel debate	20%

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

A	≥ 92.5%
A-	≥ 89.5%
B+	≥ 87.5%
B	≥ 82.5%
B-	≥ 79.5%
C+	≥ 77.5%
C	≥ 72.5%
C-	≥ 69.5%
D+	≥ 67.5%
D	≥ 59.5%

There will be no curve on these final grades.

I should mention a few things in closing. First, you are of course bound by University policies here and any form of plagiarism will be severely punished. (Speak to me or consult a student handbook if you are unsure what counts as plagiarism.) An official University statement of this policy is included at the end of this syllabus. This does not mean that you cannot use another source, or discuss and consult with your classmates about your assignments. I permit you to do

the former and strongly encourage you to do the latter, so long as all the sources and classmates in question are properly cited in your paper.

I must also stress that you are responsible for anything stated or referred to on this syllabus. If it is here or you are pointed to it by something here (including the website listed above), it is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.

## A Schedule of Classes

**Class 1 - September 7:** Introduction

**Class 2 - September 9:** Core Concepts - Virtue Theory

Read selections from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

**Class 3 - September 14:** Core Concepts - Utilitarianism

Read selections from Mill's *Utilitarianism* and Beauchamp, pp. 1-12.

**Class 4 - September 16:** Core Concepts - Utilitarianism

Read selections from Mill's *Utilitarianism* and Beauchamp, pp. 1-12.

**Class 5 - September 21:** Core Concepts - Deontology

Read selections from Kant and Beauchamp, pp. 12-22.

**Class 6 - September 23:** Core Concepts - Deontology

Read selections from Kant and Beauchamp, pp. 12-22.

*Class Discussion 1:* online exercise due by midnight before class

**Class 7 - September 28:** Moral Principles and Applied Ethics

Read Beauchamp, pp. 22-35.

**Class 8 - September 30:** Informed Consent and Disclosure

Read Beauchamp, pp. 137-149.

**Class 9 - October 5:** Informed Consent and Disclosure

Read Beauchamp, pp. 149-176.

**Class 10 - October 7:** Informed Consent and Disclosure

Read selections from Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.

**Class 11 - October 12:** Informed Consent and Disclosure

Read Beauchamp pp. 65-70, 86-103

*Class Discussion 2:* online exercise due by midnight before class

**Class 12 - October 14:** *Presentations on Informed Consent and Disclosure*

*First Paper due October 20*

**Class 13 - October 21:** Genomics and Genetic Engineering

Read Beauchamp, pp. 205-215, 221-236.

**Class 14 - October 26:** Genomics and Genetic Engineering

Read Beauchamp, pp. 764-791.

**Class 15 - October 28:** Genomics and Genetic Engineering

Read Beauchamp, pp. 723-749

**Class 16 - November 2:** Genomics and Genetic Engineering

Read Beauchamp, pp. 236-266.

*Class Discussion 3:* online exercise due by midnight before class

**Class 17 - November 4:** *Presentations on Genomics and Genetic Engineering*

**Class 18 - November 9:** End-of-Life Issues

Read Beauchamp, pp. 397-418.

**Class 19 - November 11:** End-of-Life Issues

Read Beauchamp, pp. 418-437.

**Class 20 - November 16:** End-of-Life Issues

Read Beauchamp, pp. 437-457.

**Class 21 - November 18:** End-of-Life Issues

Read Beauchamp, pp. 457-473.

*Class Discussion 4:* online exercise due by midnight before class

**Class 22 - November 23:** *Presentations on End-of-Life Issues*

**Class 23 - November 30:** Justice and Health Care

Read Beauchamp, pp. 565-590.

**Class 24 - December 2:** Justice and Health Care

Read Beauchamp, pp. 590-609

**Class 25 - December 7:** Justice and Health Care

Read Beauchamp, pp. 609-623.

*Class Discussion 5:* online exercise due by midnight before class

**Class 26 - December 9:** *Presentations on Justice and Health Care*

*Second Paper due December 13*