

Medical Ethics: PHIL 164

Syllabus

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Office Hours: W & TH 1-2

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T & TH, 11:30-12:45
Hasbrouck Ad 113

Description

This course will constitute an examination of a few important ethical issues for medical practice. The issues on which we focus—abortion, euthanasia, and disability—draw out important broad ethical questions for medicine.

- When (if ever) should medicine be used not to prolong life, but to bring about death?
- What should medicine be used for?
- How should we weight freedom of choice against well-being?
- What is a person?
- What is health, and what is a disease?

We will create a safe and respectful environment for fruitful discussion of questions like these, and students will learn to see the nuance in different points of view on the topics. While we will focus a great deal on a small number of topics, this will allow us to gain a deeper understanding generally of the nature, scope, and value of medicine. It will also equip students with a method for approaching any ethical issue in medicine.

As a 4-credit course, the expected amount of work outside of classroom time by university standards is 8-12 hours per week (which includes reading, taking notes, preparing for class, and working on assignments and your project).

Objectives

The goals of this course include enabling you to:

- Identify, properly interpret, and evaluate the philosophical views and arguments of a variety of philosophers writing on topics in medical ethics.
- Engage in reflective and respectful discussion with your peers on topics in medical ethics.
- Reflect meaningfully on the relevance of what you've read and discussed for living a good life.

- Develop your own answers to the questions we discuss, as well as an increased ability to communicate them and argue for them by written means.

I'll measure your progress in these objectives by recording your performance on the assignments mentioned below.

Communication

I will be available to contact via email every weekday before 5pm and will endeavor to respond to an email within 48 hours. To make sure your email is responded to in a timely manner, please put "PHIL 164" in the subject line.

If I email you, the email will be sent to your UMass email, so you should check that once per day on weekdays. If my email requires a response, please respond within 48 hours.

Communication in class and via email must always be respectful; I won't tolerate rude behavior, unnecessary vulgarity, or abuse of any kind (towards myself or any others). If you aren't sure what counts as any of those things, you should read the [UMass Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect](#). Students who engage in rude, vulgar, or abusive forms of communication in the classroom are subject to being asked to leave, at my discretion.

Also if you're contacting me to ask a question about the course, an assignment, or something related, make sure to check the syllabus, Moodle, or the assignment instructions first! Communication doesn't just need to be about assignments, though. If you want to email me or come to office hours to talk about life or how your semester is going, please do so!

Texts

All required readings will be made available via Moodle. Students must print all of the readings at the beginning of the semester and bring them to class every day so that class discussion can easily refer back to them.

Assignments and Grading

Your grade for this course will be determined by your performance on several short essays, a group presentation. **If you fail to turn in any Short Essay, or if you fail to turn in 2 or more SNT Responses, you will automatically fail the course.**

SHORT ESSAYS	SHORT ESSAY 1	10%
	SHORT ESSAY 2	15%
	SHORT ESSAY 3	20%
	SHORT ESSAY 4	25%
GROUP PRESENTATION		15%
SNT RESPONSES		15%

Short Essays

There will be four short writing assignments in this class, which will grow progressively in both length and total worth to your final grade. The first assignment will summarize an argument and an objection to that argument. The second will summarize an argument and an objection to the argument. The third will summarize an argument and an objection to the argument, and a reply to the objection. The fourth will be a full paper, incorporating everything you did in the second essay but including an introduction and conclusion and allowing you to weigh in with your own appraisal of the topic. The first three papers will be done produced in partnership

with other students. The last paper will be produced on your own. Detailed instructions will be provided in a separate document on Moodle.

Group Presentation

You'll also complete a group project by the end of the semester, in groups of 4-5. This will require you to assemble a group, find a contemporary question in medical ethics, compile some empirical background on the question, and survey some of the philosophical arguments on two sides of the question. Group members will then prepare a 12-minute presentation on the topic explaining the question and analyzing one compelling argument on each side. Groups will present during the last two days of class. Detailed instructions for this assignment will also be made available on Moodle.

Socratic Note-Taking Responses

Finally, you'll regularly turn in responses to particular readings in a Socratic style. Socratic note-taking involves asking yourself questions about the reading as you are reading it and then answering those questions as best you can. The timeline for which readings require SNT responses (as well as for all other assignments) can be found below. More detailed instructions on SNTs are available on Moodle.

Attendance & Participation

Attendance for the course is mandatory. The well-functioning of our classroom environment depends on students studying the material, showing up, and being active and enthusiastic participants in class discussion. Your ideas, questions, and interactions with your classmates are crucial, both for your education and for theirs.

Every unexcused absence will reduce your overall grade by 2%. So, if you have 5 unexcused absences your maximum grade will be 90% in the course. However, I will take attendance only randomly. I make no guarantees on when or how often attendance will be taken. The method by which I take attendance will be to have students hand in a slip of paper (it can be a scrap torn from a notebook or something of that sort) with their name on it, handed to me at the end of class on the way out. Excuses will be granted for students who alert me ahead of time by email or word of mouth; only for health reasons, school functions, family emergencies, or religious reasons; and only with official documentation when appropriate. Exceptions may be made for last minute emergencies.

Participation involves not just showing up, but being a prepared and active member of class. That means studying the reading ahead of time, showing up on time, paying attention, answering and asking questions, and allowing for others to do the same. An ideal classroom has a balance between participants, so that voices are heard fairly equally. This means if you tend to be more quiet you need to endeavor to say more, and if you tend to be more of a talker you should probably try to listen more and ask questions of other students. Additionally, if you fail to be an active participant in your group papers and group project, this will be reported to me and your final grade will suffer as a result.

Late Work

Turn things in on time. The penalty for late assignments is one third of a letter grade per day. For example, an assignment that would've been an A, if handed in one day late would instead be given an A-. If handed in two days late it would instead be given a B+. I will not accept late Group Presentations unless there is a verifiable emergency. Work is to be submitted on Moodle on the day it is due before the start of class. Work will be considered one day late if it is to me between any time in the 24 hours after the due date, two days late if to me between 24-48 hours of the due date, and so on.

Extensions

I am happy to grant extensions on assignments for a variety of reasons if you communicate with me ahead of time. Think of your essays as projects, and of me as your project manager. I'm trying to help you manage your time and resources to do well on your projects, and the only way I can do that is if you are communicating with me.

Technology

I have a No Screen Policy in class. Notes should be taken by hand. Laptops, phones, and tablets [distract people](#), they [detract from face-to-face connection and empathy](#), and they [worsen your retention of information compared to hand-writing notes](#). So put them away when you come into class.

If any student has a disability that makes it such that they need the use of a laptop or other technology, please email me or come to me privately. I'll be happy to lift the technology ban for the whole class if any particular student needs it for this reason.

Academic Dishonesty

Don't plagiarize. I'll know if you do, and you will receive a 0 on the assignment (and possibly fail the course) when I catch you. It's also immoral and you'll be worse off as a person if you do it. You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is. If you aren't sure whether something counts as plagiarism, ask me. Simple cases are things like copying words or ideas from others, using a paper (or section of a paper) you wrote for another class, or helping anyone else do any of those kinds of things. You can research our school's stance on plagiarism and related issues here:

<http://www.umass.edu/honesty/>

<http://www.umass.edu/writingprogram/geninfo/plagiarism.html>

Students with Disabilities

If you desire accommodations for this class on the basis of physical, learning, psychological or emotional disability, you should contact Disability Services. Disability Services is located at:

161 Whitmore
181 Presidents Drive
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003-9313

It can be reached by calling 413.545.0892. Visit <https://www.umass.edu/disability/students> for more information. Make sure to plan ahead if you are going to ask for adjustments to assignment requirements.

Tentative Course Schedule

Our course lasts for 26 days over 13 weeks (give or take). On the following page you will find a schedule of how—tentatively—the readings and assignments will break down over those weeks. All readings will be made available on Moodle and each one should be finished *before* attending the associated class that day.

Dates	Unit	Reading Due	Assignments Due
01/23	1—Philosophy		
01/25	2—Morality	Midgley (1981), “Trying Out One’s New Sword”	SNT 1, print readings
01/30	3—Abortion	Thomson (1971), “A Defense of Abortion”	SNT 2
02/01			
02/06		Kaczor (2011), “Is it Wrong to Abort a Person?”	SNT 3
02/08		Beckwith (1992), “Personal Bodily Rights, Abortion, and Unplugging the Violinist”	SNT 4 Form Essay 1 Groups
02/13		Marquis (1989), “Why Abortion is Immoral”	SNT 5
02/15		Jung (1988), “Abortion and Organ Donation”	SNT 6
02/20	4—Euthanasia	Didion (2005), “The Case of Theresa Schiavo”; Aviv (2015), “The Death Treatment”	Essay 1
02/22		Rachels (1975), “Active and Passive Euthanasia”	SNT 7
02/27		Sullivan (1977), “Active and Passive Euthanasia: An Impertinent Distinction?”	SNT 7 Presentation Topics
03/01		Keown (2005), “Suicide and Euthanasia”	SNT 8
03/06		Velleman (1999), “A Right of Self-Termination?”	SNT 9 Form Essay 2 Groups
03/08			
03/20	5—Disability	This American Life, # 490: “Trends with Benefits” (2013), or Invisibilia: “How to Become Batman” (2015)	
03/22		Levy (2002), “Deafness, Culture, and Choice” Anstey (2002), “Are Attempts to Have Impaired Children Justifiable?”	SNT 10 Essay 2
03/27		Goering (2015), “Rethinking Disability”	SNT 11
03/29		Barnes (2016), “Bad-Difference and Mere-Difference”	SNT 12 Presentation Sources
04/03			Form Essay 3 Groups
04/05		Koon (draft) “Defending the Medical Model of Disability”	SNT 13
04/10	6—Health	Engel (1981), “The Clinical Application of the Biopsychosocial Model”	SNT 14
04/12		Richter (1999), “Chronic Mental Illness and the Limits of the Biopsychosocial Model”	SNT 15
04/19			Essay 3
04/24		Gold & Lichtenberg (2014), “The Moral Case for the Clinical Placebo”	SNT 16
04/26		Ereshefsky (2009), “Defining ‘Health’ and ‘Disease’ ”	SNT 17
05/01			
05/07			Essay 4