Instructor: Sarit Smila
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Teaching Assistant: David Bauman
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Texts: Beauchamp and Walters (eds), Contemporary Issues in Bioethics 7th ed.
Texts posted on Ares (password ‘BIOMEDICAL’)

Course Work: 3 Take-Home Exams (33% each).

Course Requirements and Policies:

Preparation and participation – students are expected to come to every class and to have carefully read the assigned reading prior to the class meeting in which they are to be discussed students are also expected to participate in discussions regarding the materials. An essential part of this course is critical thought and discussion of philosophical issues – that is, doing philosophy, not just reading about it. Note that a crucial part of participation involves respect for other people in the class and for their views.

Exams – specific details regarding the format and content will be provided in the weeks prior to the exams due dates. The exams will focus on the readings and on class discussions. Late exams will be penalized, 1/3 of a grade will be taken off for every day late. NO ELECTRONIC SUBMISSIONS ARE ALLOWED UNLESS OTHERWISE INSTRUCTED.

Plagiarism – plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course. Please see me if you have any questions about proper citation or incorporation of other texts into your work.

Challenging a Grade – students are often unhappy with a grade they received. Grading exams take time and reflection and explaining the grading process does too. If you feel
that you got a lower grade than you deserve, write a brief account, explaining why you think that is the case and put it in my mail box in the Philosophy Department. The person who graded your exam will then reply with a detailed explanation of the reasons for the grade. If you are still unsatisfied, another instructor will grade your paper (this may be one of the three instructors for this course or someone else from the department). Whatever grade you will receive on the second grading will be your grade for the exam so grades can go down as well as up by this procedure.

Discussion Groups

To facilitate class discussion, the class will break into three small groups. There will be six small groups meeting over the course of the semester and the instructors will rotate between the different groups so that each instructor will meet each group twice. Information about assigned groups will be provided during the first week of classes.

*The syllabus below provides an outline of the course and a list of corresponding readings. Note that the syllabus is subject to change and supplementation, and that it is the responsibility of each participant to follow these changes.

Course Outline:

W – January 20 – Introduction

Ethical Theories and Principles

F – January 22 – Types of Ethical Theory, pp. 12-21

M – January 25 – Types of Ethical Theory, cont’d

W – January 27 – Ethical Principles, pp. 21-28

F – January 29 – Discussion Groups

M – February 1 – DVD

Doctor-Patient Relationship – Confidentiality, Truth Telling, and Informed Consent

W – February 3 – Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California, pp. 140-144


M – February 8 – Thomasma, “Telling the Truth to Patient”, pp. 149-152

W – Feb 17 – Faden and Beauchamp, “The Concept of Informed Consent” pp. 166-170
F – Feb 19 – Discussion Groups. First Take-Home exam distributed in class.

M – Feb 22 - No Class, work on exam at home

Abortion and Reproduction

Take-Home Exam is due at the beginning of class.


W – Mar 3 – Cohen, “Give Me Children or I Shall Die!” (Ares)

F – Mar 5 – Discussion Groups

Mar 8 – Mar 12 – Spring Break

Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide


W – Mar 17 – Cohen and Lynn, “Vulnerable People”, pp. 446-452


M – Mar 22 – Velleman, “Against the Right to Die”, (Ares)

W – Mar 24 – Engelhardt, “Physician-Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: Another Battle in the Culture Wars”

F – Mar 26 - Discussion Groups

Controversies in Research Ethics

M – Mar 29 – The Nuremberg Code, pp 70-71, Declaration of Helsinki, pp. 72-75

F – Apr 2 – No Class, work on exam at home

M – Apr 4 – King, “The Dangers of Difference”, pp. 82-85
Take-Home Exam is due at the beginning of class

W – Apr 7 – Mastroianni and Kahn, “Swinging on the Pendulum” pp. 86-91


M – Apr 12 – Singer, “Animal Experimentation”, (Ares)

W – Apr 14 – Frey, “Animals”, pp. 111-123

F – Apr 16 – Discussion Groups

Justice and Health

M – Apr 19 – Buchanan, “The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care”, pp. 596-601


M – Apr 26 – Childress, “Putting Patients First”, pp. 505-511

W – Apr 28 - Howard, “Hope Versus Efficiency”, pp. 511-515

F – Apr 30 - Discussion Groups
Final Take-Home Exam distributed in class.

F – May 7 - Final Exam is due by 5 pm at the Philosophy Department.