Syllabus: Fall 2012

PHIL 233: Biomedical Ethics

Charlie Kurth
Mon/Wed, 1:00-2:30 (Cupplies II, L015)
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Office Location: Wilson 116

Course Overview

Doctors, medical teams, and researchers provide extremely valuable services that have the potential to improve and save lives. But the practice of medicine is, at nearly every step, rich in ethical issues. Even seemingly easy questions, like determining who is dead, turn out to ethically complex. In this course, we will explore some of these issues. In the first part of the course (sections 1-3), we will look closely at the ethics of organ transplants. Organ transplants have proven successful in saving people's lives and improving their well-being. But these procedures also raise serious questions that shape and challenge our thinking across a range of ethical issues. For instance: When and by what means can we harvest organs from others? Given the scarcity of organs available for transplant, how should we decide who gets them? Exploring these issues will raise more general questions about how doctors ought to manage the responsibilities that they have both to their patients and to society more generally. So, in the second half of the course, we will turn to debates about the ethics of healthcare, and issues involving the doctor-patient relationship.
The readings, lectures, and assignments in this course will not only introduce you to a variety of important moral issues in medicine and medical research, they will also help you develop the critical thinking skills that you will need to be able understand and assess these bioethical debates. As we will see, there are no settled answers to the bioethical questions that we will be exploring. So sorting out which proposals might be better will require us to identify and assess the arguments given in defense of the answers that we get from philosophers and medical professionals. What central assumptions are being made in these arguments? Are these assumptions plausible? Have important features of the situation been left out or given insufficient consideration? Working through these questions is crucial: if we don’t understand the arguments given to defend a particular answer to a bioethical issue, we will be unable to understand whether that answer makes any sense.

Texts
Selected readings available from the course web site

Assignments
This course will have three graded components:

- **Short writing assignments & participation (25%).**
  You will be asked to complete four short writing assignments (two double-spaced pages each) throughout the semester. These assignments are designed to allow you critically engage with the readings and to help prepare you for our class discussions. They will be evaluated for accuracy and effort. These short papers will be combined with your class participation to determine your performance for this portion of the course.
  - You need to turn in your short paper (by email, details below) before the start of class on the day that it is due. You should also bring a hard copy of your paper with you to class.
  - Please email your assignment to Jason prior to class. Please also type "Phil 233 Assignment #" in the subject line of your email, and save the document using your last name, first name, and the assignment number (example: KurthCharlie-SW1)

- **First long writing assignment (30%).**
  The first long writing assignment will cover material on sections 1 and 2 of the course. I will provide you with the
prompt approximately one week before it is due. The assignment will be due at 3:30pm on Friday, October 19.

- **Final exam (45%).**
The second long writing assignment will cover material from sections 3-5 of the course and will be due at 3:30pm on Monday, December 17 (details to come). I will provide you with the prompt during the final week of class.

**Advice and Resources**
Many of the reading assignments for this course are short. But don't let that fool you—philosophy is hard. How do you deal with this? Well, here are some suggestions: (i) Read the material more than once. (ii) After reading an essay, try and summarize the main claims and arguments in your own words—this will help you come up with questions and objections. (iii) Start the written assignments early (doing this will help you review your answers with a clear head). (iv) Most importantly, if you're puzzled about something, ask questions!

**Policies**
In order to help ensure a successful class, please heed the following rules and policies:

- **Due Dates.**
  Baring unusual circumstances, the due dates on the syllabus are non-negotiable. If you think you have reason to miss an assignment, it is best to inform me well in advance.

- **Classroom Environment.**
  Please arrive to class on time. All cell phones must be turned off during class. Texting is not permitted. Abuse of these courtesies may lead to penalties.

- **Statement of Academic Integrity.**
  Upon arrival at Washington University, you signed a statement indicating that you understand that you will abide by the University's Academic Integrity Policy. In this class, you will be expected to honor that commitment. This means that all work presented as original must, in fact, be original; the ideas and contributions of others (be they quotes, summaries, or paraphrases) must be appropriately acknowledged.
Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Introduction
Wed., Aug. 29:
- Course overview

Section 1: Who is Dead?
It seems like a simple question—who is dead? But, as we will see, this question proves to be very difficult to answer. Moreover, how we answer it has significant implications for the supply of organs available for transplant surgeries. So understanding the nature and ethics of death is central to debates about the permissibility of organ transplantation.

Mon., Sept. 3:
- No Class—Labor Day

Wed., Sept. 5:
- Read: Syllabus, University's Academic Integrity Policy, Jim Pryor, "How to read a philosophy article"
- Harris, "New for Aspiring Doctors, the People Skills Test"
- Harvard Medical School Definition of Brain Death
- Presidential Commission Report [read pp. 3–12, 31–38 only]

Mon., Sept. 10:
- Veatch, “The Whole–Brain–Oriented Concept of Death”

Wed., Sept. 12:
- Singer, “Is the Sanctity of Life Ethic Terminally Ill?”
- Short writing assignment 1

Mon., Sept. 17:
- McMahan, “The Metaphysics of Brain Death” [read at least pp. 91–101]

Wed., Sept. 19:
- Stein, "Technique Spots Patients Misdiagnosed as
Being in 'Vegetative State'"

- Veatch, "The Definition of Death: Problems for Public Policy"

Mon., Sept. 24:

- Discussion continued

Section 2: Ethical Issues in Organ Procurement

The number of people in need of organ transplants greatly exceeds the number of organs that is available. In light of this fact, doctors, philosophers, and policy makers have considered various—and morally contentious—ways of increasing the supply. But since these proposals have only had limited success, they have also had to consider how best allocate these scarce medical resources given that there is not enough to go around. In this and the next section, we take up these two sets of issues. While our focus will be on questions about what to do given that we don't have enough transplantable organs, our investigation will help us understand some of the ethical issues concerning scarce medical resources more generally.

If you're interested in registering as an organ donor, click here.

Wed., Sept. 26:

- Veatch, "Gift or Salvage: Two Models of Organ Procurement"

Mon., Oct. 1:

- Veatch, "The Myth of Presumed Consent"

Wed., Oct. 3:

- Spital & Erin, "Conscription of Cadaveric Organs for Transplantation"

- Short writing assignment 2

Mon., Oct. 8:

- Kluge, "Organ Donation and Retrieval: Whose Body is it Anyway?"

Wed., Oct. 10:

- Matas, "The Case for Living Kidney Sales"

Mon., Oct. 15:

- Caplan, "Transplantation at Any Price?"
Kahn & Delmonico, "The Consequences of Public Policy to Buy and Sell Organs"

YouTube clip: trailer for the movie Indecent Proposal

Section 3: Resource Allocation: Who Gets the Organs?

Given the undersupply of organs available for transplant, we need to make decisions about who should get them. But we want to be able to do this in a way that is morally justifiable. In this part of the course, we investigate questions like the following: Should we give priority to the neediest patients? Or should the probability of success be given greater weight? Should one's race or ability to contribute to society matter? Should those who led unhealthy lives (e.g., alcoholics) be given less priority?

Wed., Oct. 17

Alexander, "They Decide Who Lives, Who Dies"

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19: First Long Writing Assignment Due

Mon., Oct. 22

Childress, "Putting Patients First"

Wed., Oct. 24

Moss & Siegler, "Should Alcoholics Compete Equally for Liver Transplantation?"

Mon., Oct. 29

Atterbury, "The Alcoholic in the Lifeboat"

Section 4: Access to Healthcare—How Much and for Whom?

The ethical challenges of allocation don’t just concern specific treatments like organs or vaccines. There are also more general ethical questions about how to allocate healthcare in general. In this section of the course, we look at recent debates about healthcare policy in the U.S. Do individuals have a right to healthcare? What kinds of healthcare services, if any, do people have a right to? Why?

Wed., Oct. 31

Munson, Healthcare in the US
Section 5: Ethical Dimensions of the Doctor-Patient Relationship

In this final section of the course, we look at ethical issues that concern doctors' relationships with their patients. We've already seen that questions of patient consent and autonomy are important. But what does respecting autonomy amount to when doctors discuss treatment options with their patients? Can a doctor override a patient's decision about what treatment they want? What about new or experimental medical technologies—how are doctors and medical professionals to balance the need to assess the potential of a new medical technology while, at the same time, ensuring that their patients get the best treatment available?

Wed., Nov. 14

- Katz, "Informed Consent—Must it Remain a Fairy Tale?"

Mon., Nov. 19

- Savulescu & Momeyer, "Should Informed Consent Be Based on Rational Beliefs?"
- Short writing assignment 4

Wed., Nov. 21

- No Class—Thanksgiving

Mon., Nov. 26
Kolata, "Genes Now Tell Doctors Secrets They Can't Utter"

Wed., Nov. 28

Bayne & Levy, "Amputees by Choice"

Mon., Dec. 3

Wiggins, et. al., "On the Ethics of Face Transplantation Research"

Photos of face transplant patients HERE (note: graphic images)

Wed., Dec. 5

Butler et. al., "Face Transplantation: When and for Whom?"

Freeman et. al., "Justifying Surgery's Last Taboo: The Ethics of Face Transplants"

INTERVIEW with Charla Nash, face transplant recipient.

Carlos Atterbury—Alcoholic in... Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Bayne—AmputeesByCh... Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Bradley—To Fix Health ...Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Butler—FaceTransplant... Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Caplan—Transplantatio...Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Childress—Putting Pati... Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Daniels—JusticeHealth... Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Engelhardt—Frustratio... Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Freeman—LastTaboo—F...Charles Kurth, ...

Carlos Harris—QALYfying the ... Charlie Kurth, ...

Carlos Harvard definition.pdf... Charlie Kurth, ...
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