Biomedical Ethics  
Summer IV 2013

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Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays after class (and by appointment)  
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Course description:  
Medical practitioners provide services that have vital, life or death, importance. Accordingly, medicine is, at nearly every step, rich in ethical issues. Even seemingly easy questions, such as “when do we declare someone dead?” turn out to ethically complex. In this course, we explore a few of these issues.

In the first part of the course we examine the ethics of organ transplants. Organ transplants save people’s lives and improve quality of life. But they also raise serious questions that shape and challenge our thinking across a range of ethical issues. For instance: When and how can we harvest organs from others? Given the scarcity of organs available for transplant, how should we decide who gets them? Exploring these issues raises more general questions about how doctors ought to manage the responsibilities that they have to their patients and to society more generally. So, in the second part of the course, we turn to debates about the ethics of healthcare, and issues involving the doctor-patient relationship, such as how doctors should make treatment decisions when their informed medical opinions conflict with the wishes of a patient.

Besides introducing a variety of important moral issues in medicine and medical research, this course will help you develop critical thinking skills that will help you understand and assess these bioethical debates. As we shall see, there are rarely settled answers to the ethical questions that we are exploring. Sorting out which proposals are better requires us to identify and assess the arguments given in their defense by philosophers and medical professionals. What central assumptions are made in these arguments? Are these assumptions plausible? Have important features of the situation been left out or insufficiently considered? Working through these questions is crucial: if we don’t understand the arguments for a particular answer to a bioethical question, we cannot understand whether that answer makes any sense.

Course Materials:  
Readings are available online, here:  
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/y314ht5ish8nqvj/JSetQZOGXO

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 to 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 in class!

Graded work:  
(1) You must complete three short writing assignments (two or three double-spaced pages each)
throughout the semester. These assignments are designed to help you critically engage the readings and to help prepare you for our class discussions. They are also designed to cumulatively help you build the skills peculiar to writing a philosophical essay. They will be evaluated for accuracy, effort, and ingenuity. You should turn in each short paper by email before the start of class on the day that it is due. You must put "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: GardnerJason-SW1). You should also bring a hard copy of your paper with you to class. (Proportion of course grade: 3 X 10%)

(2) You will be graded for class participation. This grade depends on your attendance, as well as on the quantity and, more particularly, the quality of your contributions to class discussion and in-class group work. A large part of philosophical debate is learning from one's peers, and using others to challenge, strengthen, or reject your own ideas and arguments. (20%)

(3) The final essay is a long writing assignment (six double-space pages) the requires you to exhibit the skills developed in the short writing assignments while synthesizing different arguments found in readings from the course, and arguments of your own. (50%)

Course Policies:
Barring unusual circumstances, the due dates on the syllabus are non-negotiable. If you think you have reason to miss a due date, it is best to inform me well in advance. In no case will a foreseen circumstance (another exam, vacation, sporting event) be considered an adequate reason. When I think you do have grounds for an extension, it will in all but the direst circumstances be accompanied by a penalty.

Please arrive to class on time. All cell phones must be turned off during class. Texting and surfing the net are not permitted. Any abuse of these courtesies will be considered in the assessment of your class participation.

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 are 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. Any apparent violations of the honor code will be prosecuted and penalized as harshly as possible.

Mon, July 15:
Monty Python skit on Organ Donation.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aclS1pGHp8o

Question 1: What is death?
It seems a simple question: who is dead? But, as we shall see, it proves very difficult to answer. Moreover, the answer has significant implications for the supply of organs available for transplant surgeries. So, understanding the nature of death is central to debates about the permissibility of organ transplantation, as well as other issues such as when it is permissible to remove life support.

July 16:
Read: Syllabus, University’s Academic Integrity Policy, Jim Pryor, "How to read a philosophy article"
Question 2: How should we acquire scarce vital resources?
Certain resources are vital: there are people who need them in order to survive. For those who have terminal organ diseases, transplant organs are vital resources. Unfortunately, they are also scarce. There are simply not enough livers for everyone who needs a liver, for instance. So, what actions are we permitted to take in order to increase the supply of transplant organs? Can we take all viable organs from recently deceased patients, regardless of whether they would want us to? Is it permissible to set up a market for the sale “redundant” organs, such as kidneys?
Question 3: How should we distribute scarce medical resources?
Given the shortage of organs available for transplant, we must make very hard choices about who will get them. We must 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? Should the probability of success be given greater weight? Should one's age or ability to contribute to society matter? Should those who made unhealthy choices (e.g., alcoholics, the obese) be given lower priority?

July 30:

July 31:
Childress, “Putting Patients First”
Kluge, "Designated Organ Donation"

Aug 1:
Moss & Siegler, “Should Alcoholics Compete Equally for Liver Transplantation?”

Fri, Aug 2:
Cohen, "Alcoholics and Liver Transplantation"
**Short writing assignment 3 due**

Question 4: How should healthcare be distributed?
The ethical challenges of allocation don’t just concern specific treatments like organs or vaccines. There are also ethical questions about how to allocate healthcare more generally. 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?

Mon, Aug 5:
Munson, Healthcare in the US
Munson, Summary of Affordable Care Act (Obama Healthcare Law)
Singer, "Why We Must Ration Health Care"

Aug 6
Harris, "QALYfying the Value of Life"

Aug 7
Daniels, "Justice, Health, and Healthcare"
Bradley & Taylor, "To Fix Health, Help the Poor"

Aug 8
Engelhardt, "Rights to Health Care, Social Justice, and Fairness in Health Care Allocations"
Question 5: How far can/must doctors go in honoring patients' wishes?
In this final section of the course, we look at ethical issue 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 require to when doctors discuss treatment with their patients? Can a doctor override a patient’s preference about treatment? 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?

Fri, Aug 9
   Katz, “Informed Consent—Must it Remain a Fairy Tale?”
   **No writing assignment due – begin working on long writing assignment!**

Mon, Aug 12
   Dworkin, "Paternalism"

Aug 13
   Munson, Paternalism Cases ("Healing the Hmong", "Health Cops")

Aug 14
   Bayne & Levy, “Amputees by Choice”

Aug 15
   Butler et. al., “Face Transplantation: When and for Whom?”
   Freeman et. al., “Justifying Surgery’s Last Taboo: The Ethics of Face Transplants”
   **Long writing assignment due!**