Philosophy 233: Biomedical Ethics

Time: Tu/Th: 1-2:20

Location: Somers Family, 249

Instructor: Anya Plutynski, Associate Professor, Philosophy

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Office: Wilson Hall, 107

OH: by appointment

This course is an introduction to ethical issues in medicine and public health. The course will begin with a discussion of concepts of health and disease, and an introduction to moral theory. Next we turn to particular topics in biomedical ethics, ranging from risk communication to end of life decision making. We will close with a discussion of justice and health policy. Many of the topics we will discuss are torn from the headlines. This course will make it possible for students to develop a critical understanding of the key issues on major topics within bioethics, and analyze as well as advance arguments defending their own views.

Readings:

We will read selections from several books and articles posted on Canvas.

Course Assessment and Policies:

Becoming an expert in philosophy is more like gaining expertise in a craft than mastery of a body of knowledge. The craft is reading carefully, learning how to identify and analyze arguments, and developing original arguments of your own. Each assignment below builds those skills. You will do best in this class if you attend regularly, and you come to class prepared to discuss the reading. That said, it’s ok if you don’t understand the reading the first (or even the 2nd time) you read it! If you don’t understand a passage, a term, or an argument, note this in your text and come prepared to class with questions. While I will lecture, my role in this course is not in the main to be a purveyor of information, but to provide context and provoke discussion. My goal in this class is not to tell you what to think, but how to think. Attendance and active participation is expected. When more than three unexcused absences occur, I will dock your grade 1 point for every further absence. I will note attendance in the first 5-10 minutes of class, so please try to be on time.

Apart from Attendance and Participation (5%), here are the main components of your grade:

- Tools & Strategies (15% of your grade): 5% each, "Key word," "Argument reconstruction," and "Mind map," assignments are due Week 2, 4, & 5. The aim is to develop these skills: identify key concepts in the reading and their definitions, map out and reconstruct arguments, and raise objections to readings. Please see "Assignments" link for details.

- Poster Presentation (15% of your grade): You will each present a poster in teams on a controversial question, and your team will present that poster at an end of term Symposium (the last day of class). Please rank your first preferences of topics, and I will endeavor to assign you to team of 3-4 students with the same preferences. See Assignments tab for details.

- Debate: (10% of your grade): Teams will be assigned opposing positions on a controversial question. Teams are chosen at random. We'll hold debates at about 1/3 and 2/3 of the way through the semester. Each team is required to turn in an outline of their argument 24 hours before the debate. Please see Assignments
- **Final Exam Essay Question submissions (5% of your grade):** Please submit 3 possible essay questions for the final exam. A good essay question (a) does not have a yes or no answer, (b) requires students to read carefully and critically, (c) requires critical thinking and argumentation of the student. A good essay question might involve defending one’s own view, or comparing and contrasting competing views from the readings.

- **Mid-term:** 20% - in class, blue book exam, with a series of short answer and one essay question out of a choice of 3.

- **Final, take home exam, with a choice of 2 essay questions from 6 total (30%).** You'll have a week to complete the exam from when the questions are posted.

**Important Dates:**

- September 11-14: Anya to Geneva for a conference
- Oct. 10: Midterm
- Oct. 12-15: Fall Break
- Nov. 27-21: Thanksgiving Break
- Dec. 5: Last day of class: Poster Presentations
- Dec. 15: Final Exams due

**Course Schedule**

**Unit 1: Health, Disease & the Aims of Medicine**

- August 29: Caplan, *Death as an unnatural process*; Emmanuel, *Why I hope to die at 75*


**Unit 2: Intro to ethics**

- Sept. 3: Vaughn, *Moral Reasoning in Bioethics*

  Anya's Lecture on Logic, Ethics, Metaethics, and Knowing the difference

- Sept. 5: Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* 1-2, Ch. 5 (on Kant's Ethics) Anya's Lecture on Utilitarianism, Deontology

  (You may also watch Sandel's lectures on the material covered in the book)

- Sept. 10: Guest Lecture by Ron Mallon, Disability Paradox.

  Recommended Reading: Miller, *Adaptive preferences, adapted preferences*
Sept. 12: Fixed: the Movie (viewing)

Unit 3: Risk Communication, Autonomy, & Informed Consent

Sept. 17: Gigerenzer, "Knowing your chances" Anya's Lecture on Gigerenzer

Recommended: Gigerenzer, "Helping Doctors and Patients Make Sense of Health Statistics."

Sept. 19: Quanstrum and Hayward, "Lessons from the Mammography Wars" Anya's Lecture on Cancer Screening


Sept. 24: Kukla, "How do Patients know?" & Emmanuel, "What makes clinical research ethical?" Anya's Lecture on Informed Consent

Recommended: Informed Consent (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy); O'Neill, "Paternalism and Partial Autonomy"

Sept. 26: Possible guest lecture, Josh Rubin, on Phase 1 Clinical Trials

Steinbrook, Gelsinger Case

Recommended: Dresser, "First in Human Trial Participants: Not a Vulnerable Population, but Vulnerable Nonetheless"

Unit 3: Biases, Medical Judgment and Contested Decisions: Race and Gender

Oct. 1: Somashekhar, S. 2016 "The disturbing reason some African American patients may be undertreated for pain."; Williams and Wyatt 2015 - Racial Bias in Health Care and Health - Challenges and Opportunities


Oct. 3: "Sex Categorization in Medical Contexts: A cautionary tale" Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal

Oct. 8: George, "Puberty-Blocking Treatment and the Rights of Bad Candidates" & Priest, "Transgender Children and the Right to Transition: Medical Ethics When Parents Mean Well but Cause Harm"

Unit 4: Paternalism and Public health: Vaccination, Obesity, Stress


Sandel, Ch. 3

Anya's Lecture on Libertarianism
Oct. 15: Fall break!

Oct. 17: Brownell, "Personal responsibility and obesity"; Kaplan, "Self-Care as Self-blame: Stress as personal and political"

Oct. 22: Midterm Exam

Oct. 24: Louise Aronson, "How Health Care fails older patients, and How it can be done better"; selections from Elderhood.

Oct. 29-31: Prep for debate, & Debate 1

Unit 5: End of life decision making

Nov. 5: Young, "Voluntary Euthanasia," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; Anya's Lecture on End of Life

Recommended: Oregon Death with Dignity Act;


Week 12: Precision Oncology: Hype & Hope

Nov. 12: Hey, et. al., "Epistemology, Ethics and Progress in Precision Medicine"


Week 13-end: Is Heath Care a Matter of Justice?

Nov. 19: SEP Entries, Daniels, "Justice and Access to Health Care" Anya's Lecture on Health Care and Justice

Nov. 21: Sandel, Ch. 6 (Rawls's theory of justice); Marmot, The Social Determinants of Health Inequalities; Wolf and Aron - 2018 - Failing Health of the United States

Last week of class: Debate & Final Presentations