

Bioethics
PHIL 2341
University of Hong Kong
Summer 2019

June 24-28, 2019
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Location TBD

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Course Description

This course will examine some of the most debated questions in bioethics. Some of the questions to be discussed are: Is abortion morally permissible? Is euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide ever justified? Should parents have a right or a duty to create genetically enhanced “designer babies”? Should we have a market for organs? What rights do patients have? Can doctors lie to their patients? While discussing these questions, this course will also explore concepts that are often encountered in arguments in bioethics such as coercion, dignity, and autonomy.

Course Objective

To give students the resources to think critically and constructively about philosophical questions concerning the nature of ethics in connection with the topics of medicine, life, death, and health.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will:

- enhance their critical thinking and argumentative skills with respect to the philosophical topics of the course,
- understand and appreciate the historical context behind the topics of the course, and its applicability to the present,
- apply the ideas in the course to contemporary current events,
- engage with fellow students on the ideas covered in the course, and
- develop the ability to think creatively about the problems and topics at issue, and formulate new and personal views on the topics.

Texts

Readings (see tentative schedule) are posted online to Moodle.

Course Structure

Because of the compressed nature of this course, the structure will be somewhat different than for a normal semester-long course. The course will include:

- Familiar lecture-cum-discussion classroom time. This is an opportunity to deeply and critically explore the readings for the course and the ideas and arguments within.
- Break-out time for students to discuss course readings and topics in small groups. This time will include time for (a) small group discussions, and (b) individual reflection and journaling on course material. These break-out sessions will then inform full-class discussion.
- Group presentations. Depending on class size, there will be group presentations and/or debates, either during class time or online.
- Other group activities to facilitate and apply the concepts discussed in the course.

Assessment

- Journal (25%)

The journal will be kept during the week of the course and offer students a chance to reflect on the readings and course discussions. Journaling will take place during class time and between class sessions. The journals are also an opportunity to prepare and think about full-class discussions.

- Group presentation(s) (25%)

The format, structure, and timing of the group presentation will depend on the ultimate size of the course.

- Term paper (50%)

The term paper is an opportunity for the students to apply their skills and knowledge to a deep and sustained analysis (approximately 1500-2000 words) of a topic of contemporary interest: the recent claims of a Chinese scientist to use CRISPR to use gene editing technology on humans. Papers should identify an ethical question relevant to the case, explain its significance, discuss the ethical considerations relevant to the question, consider competing views, and defend the student's view on the topic.

Inclusive Language

The Department of Philosophy, as part of the School of Humanities, is committed to the principles of inclusive language and asks all students to follow these guidelines:

https://soh.hku.hk/docs/SOH_Inclusive_Language.pdf

Grade Scale

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. I typically use the following grade scale, though I reserve the right to make necessary adjustments:

≥ 97.5%	A+	≤ 100%
≥ 92.5%	A	< 97.5%
≥ 90%	A-	< 92.5%
≥ 87.5%	B+	< 90%
≥ 82.5%	B	< 87.5%
≥ 80%	B-	< 82.5%
≥ 77.5%	C+	< 80%
≥ 72.5%	C	< 77.5%
≥ 70%	C-	< 72.5%
≥ 67.5%	D+	< 70%
≥ 60%	D	< 67.5%
≥ 0%	F	< 60%

Here are the Arts Faculty grade descriptions:

http://arts.hku.hk/file/upload/2485/grade_expectations.pdf

Academic Honesty

We take plagiarism very seriously at the University and in the Philosophy Department. Students who plagiarize might be referred to the University's disciplinary committee, and might be expelled from the University as a result. HKU has published a booklet on plagiarism setting out the official policy. Please read it. There is an online copy at <http://www.hku.hk/plagiarism>. If you have any doubts as to whether the work you're handing in constitutes plagiarism, please don't hesitate to consult with me beforehand.

Tentative Schedule

Readings are available on-line via Moodle. It is expected that you will have read the required readings before we begin discussing the topic in class.

June 24

Morning session: What is philosophy? What is ethics? What is bioethics?

Readings: James Rachels, "What is morality?"
James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Afternoon session: Ethics at the beginning of life

Readings: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"

June 25

Morning session: Killing and letting die: euthanasian and physician-assisted suicide

Readings: J. David Velleman, "Against the Right to Die"
Daniel Callahan, "When Self-Determination Runs Amok"
John Lachs, "When Abstract Moralizing Run Amok"

Afternoon session: Selling, donating, and snatching organs

Readings: Beecher et al., "A Definition of Irreversible Coma"
Radcliffe-Richards et al., "The Case for Allowing Kidney Sales"
John Harris, "The Survival Lottery"

June 26

Morning session: Genetics, Engineering, and CRISPR

Readings: Jonathan Glover, "Questions about Some Uses of Genetic Engineering"

Afternoon session: Cloning

Readings: Michael Tooley, "The Moral Status of the Cloning of Humans"

June 27

Morning session: Informed consent and patient rights

Readings: Tom L. Beauchamp, "Informed Consent: Its History, Meaning, and Present Challenges"
Carl Elliott, "Amputees by Choice"
Julian Savulescu, "Rational Desires and the Limitation of Life-Sustaining Treatment"

Afternoon session: Nurses, doctors, patients

Readings: Ruth Macklin, "The Doctor-Patient Relationship in Different Cultures"
Lisa H. Newton, "In Defense of the Traditional Nurse"

June 28

Morning session: Truth-telling in medicine

Readings: Joseph Collins, "Should Doctors Tell the Truth?"
Roger Higgs, "On Telling Patients the Truth"

Afternoon session: Catch-up and/or Group Presentations