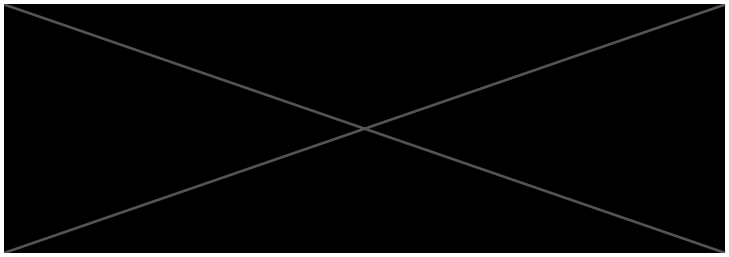
PHIL 265 – Bioethics



Course Description: Bioethicists investigate the ethical issues raised by healthcare, public health policy, and biomedical research; indeed, any field which confronts the concerns of living beings must take bioethical questions seriously. In this course, we shall critically engage with a survey of such bioethical questions. Topics to be discussed include (but are not limited to) euthanasia; abortion; disability; paternalism; and healthcare access.

Course Texts

Required Texts: We'll be reading various papers and selections from books: you can also find all these readings on Blackboard.

Additionally, we'll supplement these readings with selections from Bonnie Steinbock's and Paul T. Menzel's *Bioethics: What Everyone Needs to Know*. You can freely access all chapters from this text on Blackboard.

Assignments and grading

Your grade will be determined by the following items: **three writing assignments, one take-home test, an online journal, and class participation.**

Writing Assignments: We'll cover these in greater detail in class. But here's what you should expect:

(1) 2-3 pages. Identify a claim from one of the philosophers we've discussed, object to that claim, and explain why your objection is an objection.
(2) 4-5 pages. Investigate how normative considerations, empirical considerations, biases, and expert disagreement bear on the debate over the proper criteria (e.g. neurological or cardiovascular) for death.
(3) 5-7 pages. Present an argument from one of the philosophers we've discussed. After that, either *defend* or *argue against* their position.

Take-Home Test: A mix of multiple choice and true/false questions. Covers some groundwork from the first two weeks.

Online Journal: Once a week, I'll provide you a prompt related to the that week's reading and you'll respond with a 100-200 word journal entry. You're required to respond to at least five

prompts over the course of the semester. Your posts are due by Thursdays at 11:59 PM**.** Late journal entries will not be accepted.

Participation/Classtime*:* Participation is an integral component of this course. As such, you must first and foremost attend all class meetings in order to complete the course objectives. Your participation grade will be determined by your attendance, your engagement in discussion, and your engagement in in-class activities.

Grading scheme

Writing Assignment #1 (due 2/15): 15%
Writing Assignment #2 (due 3/22): 25%
Writing Assignment #3 (due 4/26): 30%
Take-home test (due 1/25): 10%
Online journal: 10%
Participation: 10%

Class policies

- You're allowed two unexcused absences. After that, you should contact me and let me know about any extenuating circumstances. Each further unnotified absence will result in a 1/3rd of a letter grade being deducted from your participation grade.

- Papers turned in late will be penalized 1/3rd of a letter grade for every day they are late. For instance, a paper that's turned in a week late will lose $2\frac{1}{3}$ letter grades. This means that I will grade it starting at a C+.

- If you send me an email, you can expect a reply from me within 24 hours (except for weekends; I'll reply first thing Monday morning).

- I will evaluate extension requests on your behalf should unexpected circumstances arise. Note: the fact that you may have similar due dates for other courses isn't an unexpected circumstance. I'm sympathetic to the vicissitudes of your lives – but plan accordingly!

- You're not permitted to use generative AI in writing your papers for this course. If I suspect the use of AI in your work, I reserve the right to request a meeting with you.

- If you're reading the syllabus this closely, great job! Email me a picture of a plate of food.

- You don't need an appointment to meet with me during my official office hours. Feel free to stop by! Talking through your writing projects, or the course material more generally, with another person is one of the best ways to succeed in this course.

Reading and writing philosophy

You'll find that reading philosophy, and writing philosophy papers, is quite different than reading and writing papers on other subjects in the humanities. I encourage you to reach out via email or stop by my office hours if you have any questions, want to discuss paper structures, etc. Additionally, here are some external resources that you may find helpful:

- Connie Rosati, "Some Suggestions for How to Approach Reading a Philosophical Article or Book"
- Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"
- Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"
- Elijah Chudnoff, "A Guide to Philosophical Writing"

Reading/Assignment Schedule

Week 1: January 12, 14 [What is health?]

- **Read**: Kingma, "What is it to be healthy?"

Week 2: January 19 (MLK day – no class), 21 [Moral theory]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 1
- **Read**: Toumlin, "The Tyranny of Principles"

Week 3: January 26, 28 [Paternalism]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 2
- **Read**: Savulescu, "Rational Non-Interventional Paternalism: Why Doctors Ought to Make Judgments of What Is Best for Their Patients"

TAKE-HOME TEST DUE MIDNIGHT ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

Week 4: February 2, 4 [Advance directives]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 3
- **Read**: Berghmans, "Advance Directives and Dementia"

Week 5: February 9, 11 [Human experimentation]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 4
- **Read**: Freedman, "A Response to a Purported Ethical Difficulty with Randomized Clinical Trials Involving Cancer Patients"

FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE MIDNIGHT ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Week 6: February 16, 18 [Death]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 5
- **Read**: Green and Wilker, "Brain Death and Personal Identity"

Week 7: February 23, 25 [Euthanasia]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 6
- **Read**: Foot, "Euthanasia"

Week 8: March 2, 4 [Abortion]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 7
- **Read**: Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"

Week 9: March 9, 11 (Spring break – no class)

Week 10: March 16, 18 [Disability]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 8
- **Read**: Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability"

SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE MIDNIGHT ON SUNDAY, MARCH 22

Week 11: March 23, 25 [Assisted reproduction]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 9
- **Read**: Anderson, "Is Women's Labor a Commodity?"

Week 12: March 30, April 1 [Healthcare justice]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 10
- **Read**: Menzel, "Justice, Liberty, and the Choice of Health-System Structure"

Week 13: April 6, 8 [Healthcare access]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 11
- **Read**: Weinstein et al., "QALYs: The Basics"

Week 14: April 13, 15 [Drug pricing]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 12
- **Read**: Jecker & Lederman, “Three for me and none for you? An ethical argument for delaying COVID-19 boosters”

Week 15: April 20, 22 [Genetic engineering]

- **Read**: Steinbock & Menzel, ch. 13
- **Read**: Sparrow, “Yesterday’s Child”

THIRD WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE MIDNIGHT ON SUNDAY, APRIL 26