

PHIL 165

Bioethics

General Description

Introduction

The medical fields, as well as the biological sciences, are filled with fascinating research and developments. But along with these come ethical dilemmas and disagreements. Even before the most recent breakthroughs in research, moral perplexity has surrounded issues such as euthanasia and abortion. As the name of this course suggests, bioethics deals with ethical issues and moral perplexities in biomedical fields. The word “bio” means, of course, life. And we will see that there is more than one sense of the word “life” that is relevant to these issues and perplexities. The objective of the course is to make you aware of complex situations in biology and medicine that require moral reflection, judgment, or decisions, while revealing how such moral thinking can be accomplished. In this course you will learn how to apply ethical theories to various biomedical problems. We may not be able to find solutions that everyone will agree to, but we will see how to present reasonable arguments toward advancing our understanding.

We will begin the course by surveying some central themes in philosophical discussions of ethical theory. We will then apply our understanding of concepts and theory to a wide range of issues including abortion, euthanasia, professional responsibilities in medicine, and the management of medical information. The advancement of medicine can only be accomplished through research and technological developments, but ethics must play a significant role in these developments, especially when research involves human and animal subjects. Finally, we will apply our ethical understanding to topics such as cloning and the AIDS epidemic. No one is immune to the issues discussed in this course. We will at one time or another

face some moral dilemma involving biomedicine. It is our hope that what you learn in this course will allow you to resolve your own dilemmas and become more aware of dilemmas facing others.

Textbook

The only text required for this course is *Contemporary Issues in Bioethics*, 6th edition, edited by Tom Beauchamp and LeRoy Walters (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2003). The textbook may be purchased from the Higher Grounds bookstore, either in person at the Friday Center, using the book order form included in this manual, or ordering online at <https://s4.its.unc.edu/HigherGrounds>.

Course Organization

You can see the material that is covered in this course from the table of contents. Some of the textbook readings are more difficult than others, and it is important to have a good grounding in some of the general philosophical matters in the first chapter before moving on to the specific topics of the later chapters. Accordingly, the material in the first chapter has been divided into three lessons. Do not be misled, however, into thinking that the relatively short reading assignments of these first lessons can be skimmed. In some respects, these more brief readings will present some of the most difficult challenges of the course, particularly if you have never before studied philosophy.

Study Suggestions

Reading philosophy is not like reading a textbook for information. It requires an understanding of the arguments presented in the articles. We suggest that, beginning with Lesson 4, you skim through the article you are asked to read, notice the subheadings, and then read over the conclusion if there is one. Then go back and read the article fully to grasp the author's position. In most cases the author is presenting an argument for a specific conclusion. Try to set this out in your own words. To understand the arguments presented in the articles, you will need an understanding of the theories of ethics presented in the first three lessons. If you have trouble understanding the theories, you may want to consult *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* by James Rachels. (This

paperback book is available at many bookstores.)

The notes in this course manual are **not** a substitute for the reading assignments in the text; they are supplements designed to help you understand the readings. You may want to read the notes first, read the text material, and then go back and reread the notes to help put your thoughts together.

Written Assignments

Each reading assignment is accompanied by a written assignment. Each written assignment has two parts: short-answer and essay, similar to the format of the final exam. The short-answer part will be a descriptive checkup for you on specific points in the theories and in the articles you read. The essays you will be asked to write will be critical analyses of positions (either yours or one discussed in an essay). Your analysis will require familiarity with the content of the readings (although not necessarily specific text citations). The method of **critical analysis** will be explained in Lesson 1. This method will help you become not only a clear thinker but a clear writer.

Final Exam

The final exam is designed to take from two to three hours and will be similar to the format of the written assignments. There will be two parts:

- ten short-answer questions
- one essay question.

You will have a choice of questions in both parts.

In your essay you will be asked to critically analyze a situation or scenario, state your position, and present a clear and coherent argument for that position. In writing your essay you must show some familiarity with the content of the articles assigned as well as an understanding of the ethical theories presented in Lessons 1 and 2.

Your final exam grade will be computed as 50 percent short-answer and 50 percent essay.

Grading

Your final course grade will be computed as follows:

- 50 percent will be the average of the twelve written assignments
- 50 percent will be your grade on the final exam.

You must pass the final exam to pass the course.