PHL 116: Bioethics

(Sec. 1B, Fall 2014)

Professor: Jason Gray  email: jgray004@uab.edu

Office: 419 HB (Humanities Bldg.)  Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 1:30-3, and by appointment

Class Time/Location: M,W,F; 9:05-9:55; HB 309


Some of the assigned reading cannot be found in either of the assigned texts. In such cases you will either be expected to obtain a copy of the reading by using UAB library resources, online resources, or I will distribute copies of the reading to you (via email or as hard copies in class).

INTRODUCTION

This is a course in bioethics. Specifically it is a course in medical and research ethics. That means we will be carefully examining the way that doctors, nurses, and medical researchers ought to view and treat the center of gravity of their profession: persons (and other sentient beings). We will consider a range of topics this semester including euthanasia, abortion, research on both animal and human subjects, equality and justice in the distribution of health care, medical enhancement (e.g. steroids in sports), and (time permitting) issues relating to the way medical professionals interpersonally engage with their patients. Although this is largely an applied medical ethics course (i.e. we will concern ourselves with the ethics of specific issues), we will begin the semester with an introduction to theoretical ethics/governing ethical principles (and you will need to keep these in mind throughout the semester). The hope is that one day you will be a medical professional or in a position to influence the medical profession. It is important to keep in mind that the way things are is not necessarily the way they ought to be, and that it is smart, capable people who will help bring about ethical change in the future (where it is necessary). It is not primarily the purpose of a philosophy class to make you aware of what current practices are, but to give you pause to consider whether or not those practices are ethically justified. Acquiring a disposition to this sort of thinking will serve you, your profession,
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and patients well. Do not forget that within just the last 70 years medical experiments (e.g. the Tuskegee Syphilis Study) and medical practices have taken place (in the U.S.) that we find ethically abhorrent today. It is possible that we are not as ethically far along as we think we are, and it is up to the medical professionals of tomorrow (you) to help make that determination.

I strongly encourage your participation. Given the nature of this class some of our discussions may evoke strong feelings. However, you should give due respect to the authors we will read and to your fellow students, who may hold an opinion different from your own. Your most effective course in opposing positions you believe to be wrong is not by simply dismissing them or shouting them down, but in finding flaws in the reasoning used to support them (we will discuss a number of fallacies of reasoning during the first week). If you follow this course of action, then this class should present you with some interesting intellectual challenges.

It is vital that you keep up with the reading during the course of the semester. I believe that it will be exceptionally difficult to ‘cram’ for our exams given the extensive and sometimes difficult nature of the reading we will be doing. I encourage you to email me, meet with me during office hours, or make an appointment if you feel you are falling behind.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance is required (and punctuality is strongly encouraged). Given the size of the class it is impractical to take attendance daily. However, we will have frequent examinations in this class (a total of 4, so an average of one about every four weeks) and you will be responsible for material from both the books/articles and from class (I almost certainly will introduce things in class that will not be in the reading).

Feel free to email me with questions. I have a 24 hour email response policy (excluding holidays and Saturdays). Usually I will respond to your emails within just a few hours, but you must allow at least 24 hours for me to respond. This means that questions emailed to me at 11pm the night before an exam may go unanswered (until it is too late!), so please plan accordingly.

I call on students in class to answer questions or to give me their views. It is alright if you are unsure of an answer or uncertain of your position. The important thing is that you show that you have given some thought to the material we are covering. Students whose participation is exceptional in terms of quality and quantity are eligible to receive up to a 6% boost to their course letter grade (e.g. one might easily go from a B to an A). I will discuss what I believe constitutes exceptional participation.

If you miss an exam for an excusable reason you must make an arraignment with me to make up the exam within one week of either the missed examination or the end of your excusable reason for missing school, if that excuse extends beyond the day of the exam (e.g. if you have a doctor’s excuse that extends 2 days beyond the day of the examination the week you will have to arrange to make-up the exam will not begin until the expiration of the doctor’s excuse).
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Academic misconduct (i.e. cheating) of any type will not be tolerated. If I have good grounds to believe you have cheated you will automatically receive a failing grade for the course (If you like you may make an appeal to Dr. Gregory Pence, Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy). You are expected to follow the UAB honor code which may be found online:

http://catalog.uab.edu/undergraduate/academicstudentresources/progresstowardadegree/#conductcomplainttext

This code defines and outlines academic misconduct (cheating) as I use the term.

GRADED COMPONENTS

You will need to purchase 4 blue books for this course.

Exams will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions. The final exam is NOT comprehensive.

Exam 1 - 25%
Exam 2 - 25%
Exam 3 - 25%
Final/Exam 4 - 25%

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

Note: The reading should be completed before the class meeting for which it is assigned. As an example, you should be finished reading (Hope pp.1-6 and 58-74) prior to our class meeting on Wednesday of week 1. I will not enforce this policy during the first week, but you are expected to have both books by the beginning of week 2. (Unless noted with a ‘*’ all readings appear in the required textbooks.)

Week 1

8/25 Intro/What we will be studying
8/27 Hope, “A Toolbox for Reasoning” (pp.1-6, 58-74)
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8/29 Pence, Ch. 1, “Ethical Reasoning, Moral Theories, Principles, and Bioethics” (pp.1-18)

Week 2 (Exam 1 Theme- Ethics at the end and beginning of life)

9/1 Labor Day (no class)

9/3 Pence cont’d; Hope “Euthanasia: Good Medical Practice or Murder?” (pp.7-25)

9/5 Pence, Ch. 2, “Requests to Die: Non-Terminal Patients” (pp. 19-36)

Week 3

9/8 Pence cont’d (no new reading)

9/10 Pence, Ch.3, “Requests to Die: Terminal Patients” (pp.38-56)

9/12 James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” (Handout)*

   Winston Nesbitt, “Is Killing No Worse than Letting Die?” (Handout)*

Week 4

9/15 Pence, Ch. 5, “Abortion: The Trial of Kenneth Edelin” (pp. 83-104)

9/17 Pence Ch. 5 cont’d

9/19 Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (handout or email)*

   Margret Little, “The Morality of Abortion” (handout or email)*

Week 5

9/22 Finish Thomson/Little

   Review for Exam 1

9/24 EXAM 1 (you will be responsible for the chapters on ethical principles and reasoning)

   (Exam 2 Theme- Research Ethics, Medical Discovery, and Patient Autonomy)

9/26 Pence, Ch. 9, “Medical Research on Animals” (pp.170-83)

Week 6

9/29 Pence cont’d (no new reading)
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10/1 Peter Singer, “The Case for Animal Liberation” (handout or email)*
   Carl Cohen, “The Case Against Animal Rights” (handout or email)*

10/3 Singer/Cohen cont’d

   Pence, “Medical Research on Vulnerable Human Subjects” (pp.186-206)

Week 7

10/6 Pence cont’d
(Clinton’s speech apologizing to the subjects of the Tuskegee Experiments---accessible online)*

10/8 Pence, Ch. 7, “Embryos, Stem Cells, and Cloning” (pp. 128-48)

10/10 Pence cont’d (no new reading)

Week 8

10/13 Pence, Ch. 15, “Involuntary Psychiatric Commitment: The Case of Joyce Brown” (pp.280-94)

10/15 Pence cont’d

   Hope, “Inconsistencies About Madness” (pp.75-85)

10/17 Review for Exam 2

Week 9

10/20 EXAM 2
(Exam 3 Theme- Justice and Fairness in Medicine)

10/22 Pence, Ch. 18, “Ethical Issues of the Affordable Care Act” (pp.333-354)

10/24 Pence, cont’d (no new reading)
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**Week 10**

10/27 Hope, “Is Medical Research the New Imperialism” (pp. 99-112)

10/29 Pence, Ch.17, “Ethical Issues in Stopping the Global Spread of AIDS” (pp.315-331)

10/31 Pence, cont’d

Hope, “Why Undervaluing ‘Statistical’ People Costs Lives” (pp. 26-41)

**Week 11**

11/3 Pence, Ch. 12, “Just Distribution of Organs: The God Committee and Personal Responsibility” (pp. 228-46)

11/5 Pence cont’d (no new reading)

11/7 Review for Exam 3

**Week 12**

11/10 **EXAM 3**

(Exam 4 Theme: Medical Enhancement, Genetic Testing, Transgender Persons, and Professional Humanism)

11/12 Pence, Ch. 19, “Ethical Issues in Medical Enhancement” (pp. 356-64)

11/14 Pence cont’d

Pence, Ch. 16 “Ethical Issues in Testing for Genetic Disease” (296-312)

**Week 13**

11/17 Pence cont’d

Pence, Ch. 14, “Ethical Issues of Intersex and Transgender Persons” (pp.267-78)
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11/19 Pence cont’d (no new reading)

11/21 Medical Professionalism in the New Millennium: A Physician Charter (available online)*

Week 14

Thanksgiving (no class 11/24-11/28)

Week 15

12/1 Willems, et al, “Socio-Economic Status of the Patient and Doctor-Patient Communication: Does it Make a Difference?” (Either a handout, email, or an online link will be provided)*

12/3 Haque and Waytz, “Why Doctors Should be more Empathetic—But Not Too Much More”

   Scientific American April 26, 2011 (accessible online)*

12/5 Review for Exam 4

Exam 4 will take place during UAB’s scheduled time for this class’ final examination. That time is Wednesday, December 10; 8am-10:30. The final exam will not be longer than any of the other exams given during the semester, it should not take 2.5 hours, however you will be able to make use of the entire final exam period if you wish.