

Philosophy 233F: Biomedical Ethics

Summer 2021

Course Information

Time: MTWRF 11:00A–12:45P

Instructor Name: Ge Fang

Email: gfang@wustl.edu

Office Hours: F 13:00P–15:00P or by appointments

Course Description

This course introduces students to the ethical issues in clinical practices, medical research, and public health policies. The range of topics in these fields is too broad to be covered in a one-month class, so our lectures focus on several important topics in biomedical ethics: the ethics of Covid-19, doctor-patient relationship, communication of science, reproductive control, and euthanasia. Instead of inculcating information about these controversial issues, the teaching focus will be set on developing of practical reasoning skills, which can be applied in a wider range of contexts. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Judge whether or not an issue we encounter in our daily lives is morally controversial by consulting literature in ethics.
- Identify theses and define key terms from philosophical articles.
- Reconstruct important arguments from readings in a charitable way.
- Evaluate arguments written by other authors.
- Construct valid arguments to support or counter a thesis.
- Write clear academic essays to communicate philosophical arguments.

Course Format

This course will be fully synchronous for two reasons. First, having a regular learning schedule can potentially help us transition into a classroom teaching environment in the fall semester. Second, an important component of doing philosophy is to debate about controversial issues through verbal communication. The practice required to hone the relevant skills can only happen during group meetings. My role in these meetings is to provide contexts to the reading materials and provoke discussion. Although I will not keep record or count discussion participation toward the final grade, active participation is expected and should be its own reward.

Certain sessions have assignment in the form of documentaries, youtube videos, etc. Students are expected to finish watching the videos before joining the discussion. Some videos are assigned as replacements for readings, while others replacements for lecture. For the latter type, the corresponding zoom session will be reduced to 40 minutes. Such sessions are marked with "short meeting" in the schedule. Short meetings also start at 11:00A.

Readings and videos

No textbook is required. All readings will be uploaded onto the canvas site of this course. All the required videos are provided in the schedule as clickable links.

Course assessment and policies

There are only two kinds of assignments: quizzes and paper. The procedure for writing a paper is split into several phases, each with its own assignment.

Quizzes (30%): The quizzes in this course will not be conducted in classes. In the first two weeks, each reading assignment will be accompanied by a quiz. Think of each quiz as a helpful set of questions that help you to comprehend the material. You are encouraged to reflect about these questions while you read the text. There is no time limit for the quizzes.

In the second half of the course, I will still publish quizzes with reading assignments, but with reduced amounts. For each reading, you are also responsible for designing part of the quiz: think of a sensible question to ask after reading the introduction or skimming through the reading, and answer your own question after a careful reading of the main content.

Paper (50%):

- Research question (5%). After the lectures of first week, you will be asked to come up with a research question for your final paper. I will share tips on how to select a research question. The research question will be due at the end of the first week (July 25).
- Argument construction (5%). After the lectures of the second week, you need to come up with a valid argument to support one answer for the selected research question. This will be due at the end of the second week (August 1).
- Premise elaboration (10%). With the feedback from me, you need to elaborate on ONE of the key premises on your argument (you can adjust your argument if you like). Write several paragraphs to convince your readers that this premise is true. The length for such an elaboration might vary depending on how controversial your premise is. If you find that the premise can be defended with a few words, then it is very likely that you have picked the wrong premise to elaborate on. The ideal length for this assignment is between one to three pages. This assignment is due at the end of the third week (August 8).
- Peer evaluation (10%). After the submission of premise elaboration, you will look at one of your peer's work, and give comments to them from the perspective of the opponent to their premise: Is the essay successful in establishing the controversial premise? Is there any evidence that can suggest the contrary conclusion? What would the opponent most likely say in response to the argument? The feedback to your peer's premise elaboration is due at the end of the fourth week (August 15).
- Final paper (20%). The length of the final paper should be between six to eight pages in length, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and a standard 12-point font. To write the final paper, you need to do the following (not necessarily in this order): (1) repeat the process of argument elaboration for all the other premises; (2) connect the several parts of elaborations with proper connectives or sign posts; (3) write an introduction to your research question at the beginning. The final paper is due on August 21.

Attendance

Attendance and participation determine the rest 20% of your grade. Please attend our meetings,

or let me know before the meeting if you cannot come due to family emergency, illness, or other urgent business. Attendance will be recorded for each session via Zoom's attendance report. After two unexcused absences, every further absence will count against the final grade.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (July 19–July 23): Pandemic ethics and general survey of topics

19 (Mon): Introduction. No reading assignment.

20 (Tue): Ethical theories and biomedical ethics: mapping the fields.

Reading: **Savulescu, Persson, and Wilkinson, 2020, "Utilitarianism and the pandemic."**

21 (Wed): Scarce resource allocation. Survey of topics in clinical ethics.

Reading: **Jansen and Wall, 2021, "Weighted Lotteries and the Allocation of Scarce Medications for Covid-19"**

22 (Thu): Ethics and politics. Survey of topics in public health ethics.

Reading: **John, 2020, "The Ethics of Lockdown: Communication, Consequences, and the Separateness of Persons"**

23 (Fri): Risky research in the pandemic. Survey of topics in biomedical research ethics.

Reading: **Chappell and Singer, 2020, "Pandemic ethics: the case for risky research"; Holm, 2020, "Controlled human infection with SARS-CoV-2 to study COVID-19 vaccines and treatments: bioethics in Utopia"**

Paper topic due on July 25, 23:59pm (Sun)

Week 2 (July 26–July 30): Doctor-Patient relationship

26 (Mon): Autonomy and informed consent.

Reading: **Beauchamp and Childress, 2019, "Principles of Biomedical Ethics", Chapter 4, from the start to the section of understanding).**

27 (Tue): Truth-telling.

Reading: **Cullen and Klein, 2008, "Respect for Patients, Physicians, and the Truth"**

28 (Wed): Models of doctor-patient relationship.

Reading: **Emanuel and Emanuel, 1992, "Four Models of the Physician-Patient Relationship"**

29 (Thu): Cross-cultural comparison.

Reading: **Macklin, 1999, "The Doctor–Patient Relationship in Different Cultures"**

30 (Fri): Autonomy revisited. (Short meeting 11:00A–11:45A)

Watch: [Kukla on autonomy](#)

Recommended Reading: **Kukla, 2005, "Conscientious autonomy"**

Paper argument due on August 1, 23:59pm (Sun)

Week 3 (August 2–August 6): Public health, science and communication

2 (Mon): Government intervention.

Reading: **Sunstein and Thaler, 2003, “Libertarian Paternalism”**

3 (Tue): Obesity.

Reading: **Brownell et al., 2010, “Personal responsibility and obesity”**

4 (Wed): Communication of statistics.

Reading: **Gigerenzer et al., 2009, “Knowing your chances: What health stats really mean”.**

5 (Thu): Cancer screening. (Short meeting 11:00A–11:45A).

Reading: **Quanstrum and Hayward, 2011, “Lessons from the Mammography Wars”**

Watch: [Plutynski on cancer screening](#)

6 (Fri): Vaccine hesitancy and communication of science.

Watch: [Goldenberg on vaccine hesitancy](#)

Recommended Reading: Goldenberg, 2016, “Public Misunderstanding of Science? Reframing the Problem of Vaccine Hesitancy”

Premise elaboration due on August 8, 23:59pm (Sun)

Week 4 (August 9–August 13): Disability and technology

9 (Mon): Human enhancement and disability. (Short meeting: 11:00A–11:45A)

Watch: [Fixed: the Movie](#)

Reading: Starting on Tuesday’s reading.

10 (Tue): Disability.

Reading: **Barnes, 2014, “Valuing Disability, Causing Disability”**

11 (Wed): Reproductive control.

Reading: **Purdy, 1995, “Genetics and Reproductive Risk: Can Having Children Be Immoral?”**

12 (Thu): Surrogacy.

Reading: **Satz, 2010, “Markets in Women’s Reproductive Labor”**

13 (Fri): Digital medicine.

Reading: **Klugman et al., 2018, “The Ethics of Smart Pills and Self-Acting Devices”**

Peer evaluation due on August 15, 23:59pm (Sun)

Week 5 (August 16–August 19): Death

16 (Mon): Euthanasia. (Short meeting 11:00A–11:45A)

Watch: [How to Die in Oregon](#)

17 (Tue): Killing vs letting die.

Reading: **Callahan, 1992, "When Self-Determination Runs Amok"**

Recommended readings: Nesbitt, 1995, "Is Killing No Worse Than Letting Die?"; Kuhse, 1998, "Why Killing is Not Always Worse – and Sometimes Better – Than Letting Die"

18 (Wed): Euthanasia.

Reading: **Singer, 2003, "Voluntary Euthanasia: A Utilitarian Perspective"**

19 (Thu): Justice and health care.

Reading: [SEP article on "Justice and Access to Health Care", \(You only need to read Section III\)](#)

Final paper due on August 21, 23:59pm (Sat)

Academic Honesty

Students are bound by the WUSTL policy on academic integrity in all aspects of this course. One of the most common violations of academic integrity is plagiarism. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, copying someone else's exact words, paraphrasing their sentences, or summarizing their thoughts or ideas, without giving credit to the original author. Here is a web resource on when to cite:

http://tiger.uic.edu/~edelberg/crediting_others/index.htm

Disability

Students with disabilities may request accommodations to ensure equal access and equal academic opportunities. Requests for accommodation are coordinated through WUSTL's Disability Resources. More information may be found at its website: <https://students.wustl.edu/disability-resources/>. Should accessibility issues arise, be sure to reach out to your instructor about your Accommodation Plan.