

Course Outline
Issues in Bioethics/Latham/Fall 2014

This course is a philosophical introduction to various topics and controversies in bioethics. It proceeds a bit strangely, though: instead of being organized topic-by-topic (abortion one week, assisted suicide the next), it is organized according to various commonly-invoked forms of philosophical argument. In a typical week, students will learn the form of a particular kind of philosophical argument, and then read examples of that argument's being applied across a range of different bioethics controversies. Students in the class will become familiar with many of the current bioethics debates; but will moreover become familiar with a set of philosophical arguments which are used widely within bioethics and beyond, in many branches of applied ethics (environmental ethics, animal ethics, professional ethics) and in legal reasoning.

All readings for the course are articles or excerpts from articles; there is no book to purchase. Readings will be posted on the Classesv2 server. Readings are drawn from philosophers and moral theologians discussing various forms of argument, and from contemporary bioethicists dealing with bioethical controversies.

The following is my current plan for the schedule of arguments/topics to be covered. Each of the weeks will have a folder on the Classesv2 server with related readings. I will talk about how to do & use the readings in class; some of them are very difficult, and some need only be skimmed.

Grading will be based on an in-class midterm (25%), a short paper (25%) and a final exam (50%). Attendance at weekly discussion sections is required, though section performance and participation will not be graded. Inadequate section attendance will reduce your final grade by a half-grade (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+).

August 28: Introduction. No readings required

Sept 2 and 4: Relativism and Intuition

Sept 9 and 11: Personhood: Abortion

Sept 16 and 18: Personhood: Non-Paradigm Humans and Non-Human Animals

Sept 23 and 25: Doing/Allowing: Withdrawal of Care

Sept 30 Oct 2: Foreseeing/Intending: Pain Medication, Withdrawal of Care

Oct 7 and 9: Slippery Slopes: End-of-Life Care, Gay Marriage, Broccoli

Oct 14: In-Class Midterm

Oct 16: Role Morality: Physician-Assisted Suicide

No Class Oct 21/23

Oct 28 and 30: Role Morality: Death Penalty, Torture, Research Ethics

Nov. 4 and 6: Complicity in Wrongdoing: Stem Cell Research, Abortion

Nov 11 and 13: Exploitation: Research on Human Subjects, Surrogacy, Organ Sales

Nov 18: Short Paper Due in Class

Nov 18 and 20: The Non-Identity Problem: Pre-Implantation Diagnosis

No Class Nov 25/27

Dec 2 and 4: The Idea of Rights: Demanding and Avoiding Public Health