

# Introduction to Bioethics

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## Course Description

When is it acceptable to end one's care for a patient? What are acceptable methods in planning and giving birth? Do we have the right to make autonomous decisions about our care, and if so, how can we be guaranteed this right? Does it extend to animals? This course introduces the problems of bioethics through these and related questions. Students will learn to place ethical problems in the context of first-order ethical frameworks, evaluate them using good arguments and case studies, and form their own views about them. The course is organized into six main topics.

- First-order ethical frameworks
- End of life care
- Autonomy and rights
- Allocation of scarce resources
- Beginning of life care
- Social obligation

The first-order ethical frameworks such as consequentialism, deontological ethics, and virtue-based approaches provide large-scale philosophical perspectives on the problems of bioethics that will be our concern. End of life care confronts ethical problems arising at the end of life: the killing/letting die distinction, incompetence and personhood, euthanasia, and doctor assisted suicide. Allocating scarce resources means determining how to fairly distribute resources when we don't have enough to meet the need. Autonomy and rights asks the extent to which an agent's preferences should be respected in caring for them, as well as how to do so. Here, some common probabilistic fallacies such as base rate neglect are emphasized. Beginning of life care deals with questions of birth, such as abortion and assisted reproduction. Social obligation asks the extent to which we must provide care to those who need it, on both small and large social scales.

The overall aim is to equip students with the tools and the abilities needed to formulate and justify their own views on problems in bioethics, using clear, robust philosophical arguments. Along the way, students will also practice the techniques of good philosophical writing. It's never too early to start learning about this; for an introduction, see my "7 steps to a better philosophy paper": <http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~bwrobert/teaching/Guide.pdf>.

## Required Textbooks

- [1] Pence, G. E. (1998). *Classic works in medical ethics*. McGraw-Hill, Inc. A volume of collected articles that are both accessible and wide-ranging.
- [2] Pence, G. E. (2004). *Classic Cases in Medical Ethics: Accounts of Cases That Have Shaped Medical Ethics, with Philosophical, Legal, and Historical Backgrounds*. McGraw-Hill, Inc., 4th edition. Most of the topics in the previous volume can be supplemented with an appropriate section of this textbook.

## Evaluation

30%	weekly reading notebook (any 30 out of 36 readings)
15%	7-minute in-class presentation
30%	midterm exams (best 2 out of 3)
25%	term paper (2000 words)

## **Presentations**

You must sign up for a 7-minute presentation before the second class meeting begins, by visiting the online sign-up sheet available through the course website. Presentations can only be given on the day scheduled, so be sure you schedule yourself for a day that you know you will be able to come to class.

Presentations should include a description of the problem, and of the author's thesis and main arguments. Be sure to provide any background information you consider relevant. You should include a few discussion questions for the class, and be prepared to give your opinion.

## **Notebooks, Midterms, Term Paper, and Late Policy**

Your notebooks will be due twice during the semester. Notebook 1 must be submitted online through Turnitin.com before class begins on week 8. Notebook 2 must be similarly submitted before class begins on week 15. Each notebook must contain 15 entries, one for any 15 out of the 18 readings assigned during that period. Each entry must contain a thesis, a paragraph describing the argument, and a paragraph describing your reaction, as detailed on the course website.

Midterms will be given at the beginning of class on week 6, 11 and 15. They will not be cumulative, but do build on concepts previously learned. Only your best 2 out of 3 will count toward your final grade. The uncounted "freebie" midterm is meant to be used in case of emergency, and it is suggested that you use it wisely.

The term paper must be submitted before midnight on this course's final exam day, through Turnitin.com. In 2000 words, you will describe an ethical problem, discuss another author's view of the problem, evaluate that author's argument, and finally argue for your own view, as detailed on the course website. 10% of your grade for this paper will be given if you provide a brief paper description, which you must bring at the beginning of class in week 14.

Please note that **no late course work will be accepted in this course**: no late notebooks, midterms, term papers, or presentations. Since you are expected to add to your notebooks throughout the semester and may submit them anytime before they are due, there is no excuse for not turning them in on time. If you have an emergency on a midterm day, you are free to miss it, and apply your uncounted "freebie" midterm.

## **How to do well in this course**

If you have never thought hard about these issues, you're going to be glad you did. These are some of the most pressing problems in society today, and you may some day have to confront them on a personal level. But recognize that mastering these problems requires diligence and practice. Come to class having studied the readings as best you can, take notes in class, and then review the material again when you go home. Discuss the material with your classmates. Complete your reading notebook as you go, and ask questions about what you don't understand. You are very, very welcome to get in touch with me to discuss difficulties when you run into them. I am available in office hours, and will respond to email within 24 hours. Remember, philosophy takes some time to process. That is normal. The more time you give yourself, the more likely you'll be to succeed.

## Course readings

P1998 = Pence (1998); P2004 = Pence (2004).

### 1. First-order ethical frameworks

#### *Overview*

- 1.1 John Arras. "Theory and Bioethics" ([plato.stanford.edu/entries/theory-bioethics](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/theory-bioethics))

#### *Consequentialism, deontological ethics, feminist ethics*

- 2.1 J. C. Smart. "Extreme and restricted utilitarianism" ([jstor.org/stable/2216786](http://jstor.org/stable/2216786))
- 2.2 Robert Johnson. "Kant's Moral Philosophy" ([plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral))
- 2.3 Cheshire Calhoun. "Justice, Care, Gender Bias" ([jstor.org/stable/2026802](http://jstor.org/stable/2026802))

### 2. End of life care

#### *Letting die and incompetent patients*

- 3.1 James Rachels. "Active and Passive Euthanasia" (P1998 §1)
- 3.2 A. J. Weisbard and M. Siegler. "On Killing Patients with Kindness: An Appeal for Caution" (P1998 §2)
- 3.3 Joseph Fletcher. "The Cognitive Criterion of Personhood" (P1998 §3)

#### *Euthanasia and doctor assisted suicide*

- 4.1 D. W. Brock. "Voluntary Active Euthanasia" (P1998 §4)
- 4.2 J. A. Motto. "The Right to Suicide: A Psychiatrist's View" (P1998 §5)
- 4.3 Daniel Callahan. "Physician-Assisted Dying: Self-Determination Run Amok" (P1998 §6)

### 3. Autonomy and rights

#### *Autonomy and rights*

- 5.1 Jonsen, Siegler and Winslade. "Beliefs due to religious and cultural diversity: An excerpt from *Clinical Ethics* 6th edition"
- 5.2 Gregory Pence. "Involuntary Psychiatric Commitment" (P2004 §15)
- 5.3 Peter Singer. "All animals are equal" (P1998 §17)

#### *Providing autonomy: probability, base rate neglect, and Huntington's*

- 6.1 Ruth Macklin. "Moral Issues in Human Genetics: Counseling or Control?"
- 6.2 Gregory Pence. "Ethical Issues and Genetic Disease: Nancy Wexler" (P2004 §16)
- 6.3 David M. Eddy. "Probabilistic reasoning in clinical medicine: Problems and opportunities" in *Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases*, Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky (Eds), 1982.

### 4. Allocation of scarce resources

#### *Weighing difficult options*

- 7.1 Warren S. Browner. "Decision Analysis" in *Hospital Medicine*, Wachter, Goldman and Hollander (Eds), 2nd Ed, 2005.

- 7.2 Gregory Pence. "Allocation of Artificial And Transplantable Organs: The God Committee" (P2004 §13)
- 7.3 Gregory Pence. "Infants and Medical Research: Baby Fae and Baby Teresa" (P2004 §14)

*Scarce Resources*

- 8.1 Nicholas Rescher. "The Allocation of Exotic Medical Lifesaving Therapy" (P1998 §18)
- 8.2 Cohen et al. "Alcoholics and Liver Transplantation" (P1998 §19)
- 8.3 Ubel et al. "Rationing Failure: Ethical Lessons of Retransplantation" (P1998 §20)

## 5. Beginning of life care

*Abortion*

- 9.1 Judith Jarvis Thomson. "A Defense of Abortion" (P1998 §12)
- 9.2 Mary Anne Warren. "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion" (P1998 §13)
- 9.3 Don Marquis. "Why Abortion Is Immoral" (P1998 §14)

*Assisted reproduction: Embryos and Surrogate mothers*

- 10.1 Joseph Fletcher. "Ending Reproductive Roulette" (P1998 §9)
- 10.2 Herbert T. Krimmel. "The Case against Surrogate Parenting" (P1998 §10)
- 10.3 John A. Robertson. "Surrogate Mothers: Not So Novel after All" (P1998 §11)

*Assisted reproduction: Stem Cells and Cloning*

- 11.1 Gregory Pence. "Battles over Embryos and Stem Cells" (P2004 §7)
- 11.2 Gregory Pence. "Reproductive Cloning: Should We Clone Humans?" (P2004 §8)
- 11.3 Matti Häyry. (2003) "Philosophical Arguments for and Against Human Reproductive Cloning" ([dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8519.00360](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8519.00360))

## 6. Social obligation

*Ethics of Care*

- 13.1 Jenny Morris. "Impairment and Disability: Constructing an Ethics of Care that Promotes Human Rights" ([dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.tb00750.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2001.tb00750.x))
- 13.2 Peter Allmark. "Is caring a virtue?" ([dx.doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1998.00803.x](https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1998.00803.x))

*Access to medical care*

- 12.1 Richard D. Lamm. "Saint Martin of Tours in a New World of Medical Ethics" (P1998 §26)
- 12.2 Amy Gutmann. "For and against Equal Access to Health Care" (P1998 §27)
- 12.3 Richard Mohr. "How Society Should Respond to AIDS" (P1998 §28)