Philosophy 242: Introduction to Medical Ethics

Instructor: Asia Ferrin
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Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 4-5pm
(Office Hours: Savery 378 or through the Conference tool on Canvas)

Course Description
This course will cover several main topics in medical ethics, including the right to refuse treatment, physician assisted suicide, euthanasia, definitions of disability and disease, and prenatal testing. The course is suitable for non-majors, so a familiarity with moral philosophy or medicine is helpful, but not required. What is required is a willingness to read closely, think about what you are reading, provide arguments for your beliefs, and engage critically yet respectfully with other’s arguments and beliefs.

Learning Goals
By the end of this course, I hope that students will a) have a strong understanding of various moral issues in medicine and health care, b) be able to make connections between the content of the course and their own experiences c) be able to coherently express their ideas about the course content in verbal and written form, and d) be able to accurately interpret and charitably engage with others’ ideas.

Doing philosophy involves a unique set of skills, which we will develop throughout the course, including:
- Accurately and concisely summarizing arguments
- Charitably evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in arguments
- Developing one’s own arguments
- Recognizing one’s own assumptions and biases
- Applying theoretical commitments to specific, concrete cases
- Writing clearly, concisely, and straightforwardly
- Writing persuasively
- Making positive contributions to conversations about tough philosophical questions

Required Texts
- Some additional readings available on Canvas

Assignments and Grading:
1. Reading Quizzes: There will be regular reading quizzes throughout the term. There will be no make-up quizzes. Your lowest quiz will be dropped. The aim of the quizzes is to measure your understanding of the readings, serve as a “philosophical warm up,” and help guide our critical reflection during class. (15%)
2. **In-Class Skills Exercises:** In-class skills exercises provide students with an opportunity to practice the philosophical skills we will be learning. These will include assignments such as “outline the argument of a specific reading in premise/conclusion form,” “explain in one paragraph the significance of a particular reading,” and an in-class “Bioethics Bowl” toward the end of the quarter. (20%)

3. **Discussion Board Contributions:** Students will be asked to make contributions via the discussion board in Canvas. Guidelines for discussion board contributions will be distributed in class. (20%)

4. **Service Learning Component:** (25%) Service-learning provides students a unique opportunity to connect coursework with life experience through public service. Offered as an integral part of many University of Washington courses, service-learning provides students an opportunity to experience theories traditionally studied within classrooms come to life, through conversations with community-based organizations. Choosing to engage in service-learning is a way to demonstrate your commitment to your community and your ability to link your academic studies to practical, real-world experiences. Given the short term of this class, there will be three main components of our service learning:

   1) **Guest speakers** from various community organizations. Students will be required to bring prepared questions to class on the day of guest speakers

   2) Students will participate in an off-campus **service project** and follow-up discussion at the end of the term

   3) A **final paper** (3-5 pages) reflecting on your service learning experience

   *Students who are unable/prefer not to participate in the service-learning component will complete a writing component for the course instead. Please talk with me in the first week of class if you need/prefer to take this option.

5. **Cumulative Final Exam:** The exam will be administered in-class on July 22. It will cover the material for the entire course and will include short answer and essay questions (and possibly some multiple choice questions). It is crucial to your success in the class that you are in class for the final exam on July 22. Because of the short nature of A-term, I will not be able to administer the exam earlier or later than July 22. Mark your calendars, please. (20%)
Tentative Reading Schedule:

WEEK 1
Getting Started/Philosophical Thinking
Ann Baker, “Introduction to Philosophical Thinking”

Moral Theory
Bonnie Steinbock, John D. Arras, and Alex John London, “Moral Reasoning in the Medical Context”

WEEK 2
Right to Refuse Treatment
Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs, AMA, “Withholding and Withdrawing Life-Sustaining Treatment”
Keith Burton, “A Chronicle: Dax’s Case as it Happened”
Robert B. White, “Commentary”
H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., “Commentary”

WEEK 3
Advance Directives
Film #1: Facing Death (Frontline)
Rebecca Dresser and Peter J. Whitehouse, “The Incompetent Patient on the Slippery Slope”
Norman L. Cantor, “Testing the Limits of Prospective Autonomy: Five Scenarios”
Bernard Lo et al., “The Wendland Case—Withdrawing Life Support from Incompetent Patients Who are Not Terminally Ill”

WEEK 4
Euthanasia
James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”
Bonnie Steinbock, “The Intentional Termination of Life”
J. Gay-Williams, “The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia”
The Hastings Center Report, “Why Gender Matters to the Euthanasia Debate”
Susan Wolf, “Gender, Feminism, and Death: Physician-Assisted Suicide & Euthanasia”
Diane Raymond, “‘Fatal practices’: A feminist analysis of physician-assisted suicide and Euthanasia”

WEEK 5
Physician Assisted Suicide and At-Risk Populations
Margaret P. Battin, Rosamond Rhodes, and Anita Silvers, “Introduction: Physician
Assisted Suicide: Expanding the Debate
Leslie Francis, “Assisted Suicide: Are the Elderly a Special Case?”

WEEK 6
Physician-Assisted Suicide and At-Risk Populations
Film #2: Shamless: The Art of Disability
Jerome E. Bickenbach, “Disability and Life-Ending Decisions
Anita Silvers, “Protecting the Innocents from Physician-Assisted Suicide”

WEEK 7
Physician-Assisted Suicide and the Role of the Physician
Rosamond Rhodes, “Physicians, Assisted Suicide, and the Right to Live or Die”
Bernard Baumrin, “Physician, Stay Thy Hand!”

WEEK 8
Prenatal Testing, Disability Rights, and Parenthood
Deborah Kent, “Somewhere a Mockingbird”
Mary Ann Baily, “Why I had Amniocentesis”
Joan Hume, “Disability, Feminism and Eugenics: Who has the right to decide who should or should not inhabit the world?”

WEEK 9
Disability Rights and the Meaning of Prenatal Testing
Film #3: The Key of G: A Documentary About Disability, Caregiving, Community Integration And Interdependence
Eva Feder Kittay with Leo Kittay, “On the Expressivity and Ethics of Selective Abortion for Disability: Conversations with My Son”

WEEK 10
No reading assigned. Bioethics Bowl Preparation, Final Exam Review, and Bioethics Bowl

Note: All information in this syllabus is provisional and subject to revision at the instructor’s discretion