Bioethics

Rutgers University  
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Instructor: Danny Forman

Email: Forman.danny@gmail.com

Course Description

This is a crash course in Bioethics. Bioethics is the study of social, moral, and political issues which arise out of thinking about human biology and recent advancements in medical technology. In this course, we will pay special attention to questions concerning life and death. We will focus on three broad, but related families of questions: What is the value of life? When is it morally permissible to end life? And when is it morally permissible to create life? Each of these broad questions will receive one week of our attention, and you will have the opportunity to read and write about each of these issues at considerable length.

Course Materials

No course materials will need to be purchased for this course. All articles, essays, and book chapters will be uploaded to the 'Resources' Tab on Sakai.

Office Hours

Office hours will be held by appointment via Skype. Don't hesitate to email me to schedule an appointment or with any questions about anything related to the course.

Weekly Coursework

Each week, you will be assigned a set of 4-5 readings which will introduce you to the bioethical issue we are considering that week. In addition to the readings, I will post mini-lectures; these mini-lectures will be between 5 to 15 minutes and cover various aspects of the readings.

Each week, everyone must write (two) blog posts about two different readings of your choosing. Each blog post can consist in a few comments, objections, questions, extensions, or anything else you're interested in pursuing in conversation with your classmates. These blog posts are meant to do two things: (1) Start a conversation with your classmates and (2) test your own comprehension of the material. I will read and comment on the blogs, so put effort into them!

Each week, you will be required to comment on one of your classmates' blog posts. Your comment should engage the ideas that the post raises. You can expand on those ideas, discuss some concerns about them, or pose some questions about them, or explore some answers to questions that they raise, or something else. Just make sure to be respectful.

Grade Breakdown

Your grade will be determined by how many points score. You can score up to 101 (!) points. These points will be translated into letter grades as follows:

* 101 = A (with eternal bragging rights)
* 90 – 100 Points = A
* 89 – 85 Points = B+
* 84 – 80 Points = B
* 79 – 75 Points = C+
* 74 – 70 Points = C
* 69 – 65 Points = D+
* 64 – 60 Points = D
* 59 – 0 Points = F

Points will be assigned based on:

* 6x **Blog Posts** – 9 points each

Each blog post should be about 250 words.

(I will include an instructive example and some tips about how to write a great blog post on Sakai.)

* 3x **Response Posts** – 9 Points each

Each response post should be about 100 words.

(I will include an instructive example and some tips about how to write a great response post on Sakai.)

* 1x **Concluding Post** – 20 Points

The concluding post should be about 500 words.

(A detailed description of this assignment will be posted to the course website. Roughly, the concluding post will require an extended original thought about any topic covered.)

I strongly encourage engaging in conversations with your classmates on your blog posts beyond the assigned response posts outlined above. I reserve the right to award bonus points at my own discretion to students whose conversations back-and-forth on the blog are particularly engaged and fruitful.

Respectful Debate

I encourage you to openly disagree with each other and try to think about why you disagree. But our topic in this course concerns some very difficult moral, social, and political issues. I therefore require respectful discourse. I have a Zero-Tolerance Policy for personal attacks: if you personally attack someone, you will receive No Points for your blog tasks that week. I expect that I won't need to invoke this policy at any point during our course.

Academic Integrity

All student are beholden to the standards of Academic Integrity set forth by Rutgers. This means that all plagiarism or failures to properly attribute the ideas, opinions, or words of others will be reported to Rutgers. For more information on the standards, visit here: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/

Late Work

Due to the flexibility of the course and out short time frame, no late work will be accepted. You may email me to appeal this policy if you believe you have an extraordinarily good excuse. But, in general, I won't accept a late work.

Questions About this Syllabus?

You are beholden to the requirements of this syllabus no matter what. So, if something is unclear to you or you have some questions. Please don't hesitate to ask! You're more than welcome to email me at any point about anything related to the course.

Week 1: Valuing Life

• Readings:

1. ``Why I Hope I Die at 75'' by E. Emmanuel
2. “Is the Sanctity of Life Ethic Terminally Ill?'' by P. Singer
3. ``The Badness of Death and the Goodness of Life'' by J. Broome
4. “What Does It Mean to Die?” by R. Aviv

• Assignments:

1. By 12/27 (11:59pm) post a blog about one of the readings.
2. By 12/28 (11:59pm) post a blog about one of the other readings.
3. By 12/29 (11:59pm) respond to a classmate’s blog post.

Week 2: Ending Life

• Readings:

**Euthanasia**:

1. ``Physician-Assisted Suicide: The Philosopher's Brief'' by R. Dworkin et al.
2. ``A Right to Choose Death?'' by F. M. Kamm
3. “A Right of Self-Termination?'' by J. David Velleman

**Abortion**:

1. ``Why Abortion is Immoral'' by D. Marquis
2. ``A Defense of Abortion'' by J. J. Thomson

• Assignments:

1. By 1/3 (11:59pm) post a blog about one of the euthanasia readings.
2. By 1/4 (11:59pm) post a blog about one of the abortion readings.
3. By 1/5 (11:59pm) respond to a classmate’s post.

Week 3: Creating Life

• Readings:

**Procreation**:

1. `` Better Never to Have Been, Ch. 1 by D. Benatar
2. ``Procreation, Adoption and the Contours of Obligation'' by T. Rieder

**Eugenics**:

1. The Moral Obligation to Create Children with the Best Chance of the Best Life'' by J. Savulescu et al.
2. ``The Case Against the Case for Procreative Beneficence'' by A. Holland

• Assignments:

1. By 1/10 (11:59pm) post a blog about one of the procreation readings.
2. By 1/11 (11:59pm) post a blog about one of the eugenics readings.
3. By 1/12 (11:59pm) respond to a classmate’s posts.
4. By 1/13 (11:59pm) post a concluding post.