

Phil 164 Medical Ethics

Syllabus

Spring 2021

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Time: M/W 2:30-3:45
Location: Zoom (Synchronous)
Course Website: Moodle
Office Hours: By Appointment
(via Zoom)

Course Description

Medical treatment is typically used to do two things: prolong life and treat disease or injury. In this course, we will look at three broad themes, two centering on times when medicine departs from its usual purpose, and the last focusing on more general concerns with the medical resources needed for that purpose. First: when should medicine be used not to avoid death, but to bring it about? We will look at two issues: abortion and euthanasia. Second: when should medicine be used to change our physical condition, in non-disease or non-injury contexts? We will again look at two issues: the nature of disability and questions concerning whether and when we may cause or remove disability and the permissibility of human enhancement. Finally, we will end the semester by looking at the question of how we should distribute medical resources in a variety of contexts, including elective surgeries, triage in pandemic cases, vaccine distribution and the anti-vax movement, and blood donations.

This is, first and foremost, a philosophy course, and specifically a course in *ethics*. While scientific and technological questions will be relevant to our inquiry, they will not be our focus. Our primary concern is with whether certain actions (or lack thereof) in medical contexts are morally permissible. These questions are complex and arise in both public discourse and likely in your own personal lives, regardless of whether you continue on in medicine. This class is an opportunity to think about these issues from diverse points of view.

Course Goals

This course is an introduction to medical ethics, the aim of which is to introduce you to some prominent questions, arguments, and views in the field. This course will also introduce you to philosophical methodology, focusing on reasoning and arguments that could support various positions in medical ethics. The goal is for you to be able to clearly articulate arguments for different views on controversial questions, analyze and evaluate different and competing lines of reasoning, and give reasoned and critical support for your own views. Crucially, we'll come to see that, as is generally the case with philosophy, the topics discussed are far more complex than they initially seem.

Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. All required readings will be posted to the course Moodle page as PDFs and if you have access to a printer you can print them out. Other required course materials, such as videos or podcasts or YouTube clips, will likewise be available on the course Moodle page.

Grading

Letter grades (corresponding to a 4-point scale: A=4, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, etc.) will be based on the following:

SNTs	20%
Case Study 1	15%
Case Study 2	15%
Case Study 3	15%
Take-Home Final	25%
Attendance and Participation	10%

The standard UMass conversion scale will be used and is included on the grading rubrics.

Assignments

Detailed instructions, grading rubrics, and due dates for each assignment are available on Moodle.

Socratic Note Taking (SNT):

The purpose of these assignments is to help you read articles more effectively, and to provide accountability for completing the readings. “Socratic Note Taking” is named after the philosopher Socrates, who famously taught by asking questions. In these notes, you will write questions as you read. Think of it as a reading quiz that you create yourself, along with an answer key. A set of notes is due for each reading. Students will be required to produce three questions and answers per reading. Collectively, these are worth 20% of your grade and they will be graded out of 3 points. They are due by the start of the class in which we are discussing the relevant reading. Complete and submit your questions/answers on Moodle.

Case Studies

There are three case study assignments each worth 15% of the final grade, spaced roughly evenly throughout the semester. Each will involve a specific, real life case study relating to one of the topics we discussed in class that you will analyze from a philosophical perspective, using the theories and concepts we learned this term. You will discuss the most important/relevant details of the case and then you will offer recommendations for the most ethical course of action, whether this agrees with that which was actually taken or not. Each case study assignment will be approximately 500-750 words.

Take Home Final

There is a take home final exam (cumulative over the semester) worth 25% of your final grade. These will involve a series of short and long answer questions based on the texts and topics we cover. You will have one week to complete and submit your take home final.

Attendance and Participation

There is an attendance and participation grade, worth 10% of your final grade. Your showing up and being attentive and engaged in lecture will be reflected in your attendance and participation grade. This grade will start off at 100%, but can be negatively affected by unexcused absences (you have two ‘freebies’) and if you are disruptive in lecture (on your phone, not at your computer, regularly arriving late, etc.). Students may gain participation marks by coming to office hours.

Class Expectations

- **Course Readings:** Students should do all the assigned readings *before* the class in which they’re discussed. All readings are available on the course webpage.

- **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance in class (via the Zoom link, which will be posted to the course Moodle page) is expected. I will take attendance and keep track of student contributions in class. You can miss up to 2 classes without penalty and without notifying me. Any further absences will need to be justified. It is your responsibility to contact me about any absences beyond the second one.
- **Electronics Policy:** Since this class is online, you need to use electronics. However, unless you're using a device to connect to Zoom, use of electronics is not permitted during class. This principally applies to cellphones but also other websites (e.g. Facebook, Amazon, ESPN, etc). If you require a special accommodation regarding electronics please contact me to request an exemption.
- **Communication:** You can contact me via e-mail. I will endeavour to respond within 24 hours, but usually don't respond after 5pm on weekdays nor on weekends. My principal method of communicating with you will be via your UMass e-mail, so be sure to check this daily. If e-mail is too clunky we can schedule a virtual meeting ("office hours") via Zoom.
- **Late Work Policy:** Late assignments without an extension will be downgraded by 1/3 of a letter grade per day after the due date (e.g. A to A-), up to a penalty of 2 full letter grades (after which they won't be accepted). Consult with me to request an extension. Extensions will not be granted for the SNTs; late SNTs will be graded as 0.
- **Grade Disagreement:** I am happy to discuss your graded assignments with you. I ask that you first read through my comments on your assignment, write down any questions you have, and then schedule an appointment with me. Note that I require a 24-hour "cooling off" period before discussing grades. If you think a grade you have received is unfair, please write a paragraph explaining why and send it to me via email. Note that this can result in your initial grade being *either raised or lowered*.
- **Extra Credit:** As a matter of general policy, no extra credit will be offered in this course unless *extremely* unusual circumstances arise which necessitate it.
- **Classroom Etiquette:** Students are expected to respect each other, allow others the chance to speak, and be open-minded to views different from their own. The topics covered may be controversial and evoke strong reactions. Please be aware of, and sensitive to, the feelings and experiences of others. We're here to learn and that's best done through community building, a prerequisite of which is respect and toleration.
- **Zoom Expectations:** Since this class will be online with synchronous lectures, you are expected to attend the class meetings at the designated class time via the Zoom link with your video connection turned on (use of a virtual background is totally fine). Online learning is difficult and uncomfortable but it is far more humane if we can all see each other – I don't want to stare at a field of blank squares. Your microphones should be muted so we don't hear background noise. To speak in class, I will use the raise hand function and call on you when it's your turn.

W Michael Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection” (2004)

Week 11: Apr. 12 **Distribution of Medical Resources**

M Nicholas Rescher, “The Allocation of Exotic Medical Lifesaving Therapy” (1969)

Week 12: Apr. 19, 20, 21 **Distribution of Medical Resources**

M Mannelli, “Whose Life to Save? Scarce Resources Allocation in the COVID-19 Outbreak” (2020)

T Persad et al. “Fairly Prioritizing Groups for Access to COVID-19 Vaccines” (2020)

W Sabatello et al., “Structural Racism in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Moving Forward” (2020)

SRTIs (in class)

Week 13: Apr. 26, 28 **Distribution of Medical Resources**

M Savulescu and Cameron, “Why Lockdown of the Elderly is Not Ageist and Why Levelling Down Equality is Wrong” (2020)

W Blankschaen, “The Ethics of Ordinary and Exact Justification in Blood Donation Deferral Categories for Men Who Have Sex with Men” (2018)

Third Case Study Due Friday, April 30th by 11:59pm

Week 14: May 3 **Ethics Education and the Pandemic**

M Lim, “Ethics Education for Successful Infectious Disease Control of COVID-19” (2020)

Friday, May 7th: Take Home Exam Due by 11:59pm (by email)

Final Grades Due Monday, May 17 by Midnight