

Medical Ethics

Philosophy 164 – Fall 2021
RAP: Perspectives in Health Topics
(Gen Ed designation: AT)

Basic course information

Instructor: Justin Mooney
Email: jmooney@umass.edu
Office: South College E410
Office hours: TBD

Course dates: Sept 1 – Dec 8, Fall 2021
Days: Tuesdays and Thursdays
Time: 1:00pm - 2:15pm
Room: Emerson Room 140

The best way to communicate with me outside of class is via the email address listed above. I will do my best to answer emails within 48 hours at most, and usually sooner.

Course description

This is a class about difficult ethical questions and decisions that arise in medical contexts. We will discuss topics such as pandemics, abortion, euthanasia, disability, and more. We will learn arguments for and against different positions that one can take on these topics, and we will develop the skills needed to evaluate those arguments.

The objectives for this course are the following:

1. Learn some of the arguments and views that philosophers have defended on various subjects in medical ethics, including abortion, euthanasia, pandemics, and disability.
2. Develop the skill of evaluating an argument for validity and soundness.
3. Write and revise a philosophical paper arguing for or against a philosophical thesis on a topic in medical ethics.

Philosophy 164 satisfies the gen ed designation AT primarily because it includes a writing component with a focus on developing the skill of clearly expressing arguments and critiques of arguments. Good writing is an art, and it is essential to philosophy.

This is a four-credit course. It will include readings, exercises, and writing assignments to be completed outside of scheduled class hours. You can expect to spend about six hours per week working on these assignments outside of class.

This course is a Residential Academic Program (RAP) course. It is equivalent in content, credit, and workload to the course section taught on the main campus. The advantage of

a RAP course is that it is intended to facilitate a smooth transition to college life. This means that we will talk about some of the different campus resources that are available to you (e.g. Writing Center, Learning Resource Center, Five College Libraries and databases). We will also cultivate the skills that will help you in all of our college courses step by step, and we will make connections between this course, other courses, and life experiences. We will check in on these different components regularly throughout the semester because self-reflection is a key step to know how we learn and how we can improve our learning skills, too. As a part of your participation in this RAP course, you are **required** to attend a *RAP Wellbeing Session* once during the semester dates and details will be provided. You will also be required to complete the **RAP Mid-Semester Feedback Survey** in class using your laptop, during week six of the semester.

Assignments

Argument evaluations: You will be asked to complete a total of four argument evaluations: 1-1.5 page critical discussions of the philosophical arguments that I will introduce to you in class lectures. These argument evaluations will help you master the ability to evaluate an argument for validity and soundness – a skill we will begin learning very early in the course. They will also prepare you to write the final paper. More details about these argument evaluations will be provided in class.

Final paper: You will be asked to write a 5-6 page final paper in which you defend a position on a topic in medical ethics. You should use one of your argument evaluations as the foundation for the final paper. One class period near the end of the semester will be a peer-review session where you can get feedback on a draft of your paper before turning in the final version. More details about the final paper will be provided in class.

Participation: this is a discussion-based class, and participation will be important to your learning experience. In this class, participation has three main components.

- (i) Attending class regularly. Poor attendance may negatively impact your grade. (See below for my attendance policy.)
- (ii) Completing the assigned readings on time. In the course schedule below, each reading is listed next to the date that we will discuss it in class, and should be completed by the start of class on that date.
- (iii) Speaking up regularly during small group discussions and class discussions. Most class sessions will include both a small group discussion time and a full class discussion time. To ensure that you get full points for participation, you should always contribute to small-group discussions, and you should aim to say something during full-class discussions about once a week or more.

Grades

Your final grade in this class breaks down as follows. The four argument evaluations are worth 60% of your final grade (15% each). The final paper is worth 30% of your final grade. And the remaining 10% is based on class participation.

This class will use a standard grading scale:

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|----|---------|----|--------|
| A | 93-100% | C | 73-76% |
| A- | 90-92% | C- | 70-72% |
| B+ | 87-89% | D+ | 67-69% |
| B | 83-86% | D | 65-66% |
| B- | 80-82 | F | 0-65% |
| C+ | 77-79% | | |

Policies

Attendance: Regular attendance is expected. However, students are permitted three unexcused absences with no penalty. More than three unexcused absences may result in a deduction of points from the student's final grade. Students with more than three unexcused absences will also be required to meet with me to strategize about how to improve their attendance.

Extensions: Extensions may be granted in special circumstances. Otherwise, assignments will be deducted by 1/3 letter grade for each day they are late (e.g. a B+ paper drops to a B paper if it is one day late; it drops to a B- if it is two days late; etc.). Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted.

Class Discussion: There will be many opportunities for in-class discussion during this course, including both small-group and whole-class discussion. Students are expected to be respectful of others. To help ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute during class discussions, we will use "the finger system", which I will explain on the first day of class.

Academic Honesty: As always, academic honesty is expected. The University policies regarding academic honesty will be followed in this class. For more information, see: <https://www.umass.edu/honesty/>

Accessibility: I intend this class to be accessible to all students. Students who need or would benefit from relevant accommodations should talk to me and also register with disability services. For more information, see: <https://www.umass.edu/disability/>

List of Readings

All of the required readings for this course will be provided on the course Moodle page. Those readings are listed below.

- Aviv, Rachel (2015). "The Death Treatment." *The New Yorker*. June 22, 2015.
- Barnes, Elizabeth (2014). "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability." *Ethics* 125(1): 88-113.
- Benatar, David (1997). "Why it is Better Never to Come into Existence." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34(3): 345-355.
- Blackshaw, Bruce (2019). "The Impairment Argument for the Immorality of Abortion: A Reply." *Bioethics* 33(6): 723-724.
- Bramble, Ben (2020). *Pandemic Ethics: 8 Big Questions of Covid-19*. Bartleby Books.
- Bortolotti, Lisa (2010). "Agency, Life Extension, and the Meaning of Life." *The Monist* 93(1): 38-56.
- Burley, Mikel (2013). "Retributive Karma and the Problem of Blaming the Victim." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 74(2): 149-165.
- Goering, Sara (2015). "Rethinking Disability: The Social Modal of Disability and Chronic Disease." *Current Reviews in Musculoskeletal Medicine* 8(2): 134-138.
- Hendricks, Perry (2019). "Even if the Fetus is Not a Person, Abortion is Immoral: The Impairment Argument." *Bioethics* 33(2): 245-253.
- Koon, Justis. "The Medical Model, With a Human Face." Manuscript.
- Marquis, Don (1989). "Why Abortion is Immoral." *Journal of Philosophy* 86(4): 183-202.
- Midgley, Mary (1981). "Trying Out One's New Sword." In *Heart and Mind*. St. Martin's Press.
- Rachels, James (1975). "Active and Passive Euthenasia." In *Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology* (S. Cahn, ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thomson, Judith (1985). "The Trolley Problem." *Yale Law Journal* 94(6): 1395-1415.
- Thomson, Judith (1971). "A Defense of Abortion." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1(1): 47-66.
- "Universal Love." From the *Mozi*. Available online via The Chinese Text Project at: <https://ctext.org/mozi/book-4>
- Velleman, David J. (1999). "A Right of Self-Termination?" *Ethics* 109(3): 606-628.

Class Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change.

Week 1: Introduction

Sept 2 – Intro

Week 2: Moral Relativism

Sept 7 – Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword."

Sept 9 – Argument basics: validity and soundness.

Week 3: Are Consequences All that Matters?

Sept 14 – The *Mozi*, “Universal Love,” Part I.
Argument exercise 1 due.

Sept 16 – Thomson, “The Trolley Problem” (selections).

Week 4: Pandemics

Sept 21 – Bramble, *Pandemic Ethics*, Chapter 1
Argument exercise 2 due.

Sept 23 – Bramble, *Pandemic Ethics*, Chapter 2

Week 5: Pandemics

Sept 28 – Bramble, *Pandemic Ethics*, Chapter 7

Sept 30 – Bramble, *Pandemic Ethics*, Chapter 8

Week 6: Abortion

Oct 5 – Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” (selections).
Argument Evaluation 1 due.

Oct 7 – Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion.” (selections).
RAP mid-semester feedback survey.

Week 7: Abortion

Oct 12 – Hendricks, “Even if the Fetus is Not a Person, Abortion is Immoral.”

Oct 14 – Blackshaw, “The Impairment Argument.”

Week 8: Disability

Oct 19 – Koon, “The Medical Model, With a Human Face” pp. 1-15.
Argument Evaluation 2 due.

Oct 21 – Barnes, “Valuing disability, Causing Disability.”

Week 9: Disability

Oct 26 – Goering, “Rethinking Disability.”

Oct 28 – Burley, “Retributive Karma and the Problem of Blaming the Victim.”

Week 10: Euthanasia

Nov 2 – Aviv, “The Death Treatment.”

Argument Evaluation 3 due.

Nov 4 – Velleman, “A Right of Self-Termination?”

Week 11: Euthanasia

Nov 9 – Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia.”

Nov 11 – no class (Veteran’s Day)

Week 12: Anti-Natalism

Nov 16 – Writing Workshop 1: how to write a philosophy paper.

Argument Evaluation 4 due.

Nov 18 – Benatar, “Why it is Better Never to Come into Existence.”

Week 13: Anti-Natalism

Nov 23 – Smuts, “To Be or Never to have Been.”

Nov 25 – no class (Thanksgiving)

Week 14: Life Extension

Nov 30 – Writing Workshop 2: peer review session.

First draft of final paper due.

Dec 2 – Bortolotti, “Agency, Life Extension, and the Meaning of Life.”

Week 15

Dec 7 – TBD

Final Paper due on Dec 16th at 5pm.