

PHIL 165: General Description

Introduction

Does respecting human life require us to do all we can to promote human life and human interests? Or, does respect for human life require us merely not to act against it in certain ways, as we would by unjustly killing or damaging it? These represent the two extreme poles of thought informing the moral debates that arise in the context of human health care. This class will trace these two opposed conceptions (as well as more moderate positions which lie in between these poles) of what it means to value human life and to respect humans within the context of medicine as we discuss a number of contemporary moral issues that pertain to human health: abortion and reproductive technologies, end of life treatments, respect for patient autonomy, and US healthcare policy.

It is sometimes thought that moral questions have no “right” or “wrong” answers. However, even if this is the case, it does not follow that there are no better or worse reasons for holding one position rather than another. This class is designed for students to become better equipped to recognize what these reasons might be and the logical implications of these reasons.

Course Objectives

The main objectives of this course are for you to:

- appreciate the moral and philosophical complexity of the issues that arise in the context of health care and biological sciences
- charitably, persuasively, and clearly present the views of others—regardless of whether you think such views are correct
- articulate and defend your own well-reasoned and logically consistent positions on the questions of value that arise in these contexts.

Required Materials

See the course description for required materials.

Requirements and Structure

Course Requirements

You are required to complete twelve lessons and a final exam in order to receive credit for this course. Ten lessons consist of a reading assignment, some short-answer questions to help you focus your reading and thinking (approximately one or two sentences for each part of each question), and a brief essay (around 250–300 words) that will require you to demonstrate reading comprehension, critical analysis, and independent thought. The other two lessons are

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longer writing assignments (1,000–1,250 words) that require to you apply what you have learned in earlier lessons to a bioethical case study of your choosing. After each lesson, you will receive detailed commentary (a lesson wrap-up), in response to your written work and/or about the content of the lesson. Consider this required reading. It is much like the lecture portion of a classroom-based course.

You will take a final exam after completing all lessons. It will consist of several short essays. **You must pass this exam in order to receive credit for the course.** The final exam must be scheduled and supervised. See the Exam Request Form at the end of this manual for more detailed information about scheduling your final exam.

Lesson Structure

Because they presuppose knowledge and skills acquired in earlier lessons, it is important to complete lessons in the order they are given. I will send you detailed commentary (a lesson wrap-up) after each lesson. **Each lesson wrap-up is required reading.**

Most of the reading for your lessons consists of an introductory reading, two philosophy papers, which are followed by the lesson wrap-up. The introductory reading will acquaint you with some of the relevant scientific background, define and explain key terms and concepts, and/or help you situate the core readings within the overarching debates regarding the issues.

The philosophy papers the readings in which the author gives an argument for a particular position. You should spend the bulk of your reading time on these. Be prepared to read them more than once. I strongly encourage you to review them after (or while) you read the lesson wrap-up. Doing so will help you to see how the authors construct their arguments and will help you to better understand and critique them in your future lessons.

The final reading of each lesson will be the lesson wrap-up, which will be sent to you along with your graded writing assignment. It is similar to the content that would be delivered in classroom setting, and will vary depending on the level of understanding you display, and/or the objections or worries about the reading that you bring up. It is best to provide you with this material only after you have completed the readings and critically reflected on them in your writing. This way you get a chance to think independently about the readings and do philosophy, rather than simply repeating points made about the materials. (Note: As I'm grading your short-answer and short-essay assignments, I take into account the fact that your writing assignments are written before I've sent you the lesson wrap-up.)

Course Grading

Your course grade will be determined by the following breakdown:

Grading Breakdown

| Assignment | Percentage |
|--|-----------------------------|
| ten short-answer and short-essay assignments | 40 percent (4 percent each) |

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| two long-essay assignments | 40 percent (20 percent each) |
| final examination | 20 percent |

Note that you must pass the final exam in order to pass this course.

Grading Scale

| | |
|-----------|-------------|
| A: 93–100 | C: 73–76 |
| A-: 90–92 | C-: 70–72 |
| B+: 87–89 | D+67–69 |
| B: 83–86 | D: 60–66 |
| B-: 80–82 | F: below 60 |
| C+: 77–79 | |

Grading is a matter of comparing and ranking student work. When your work is being graded, it’s being compared to the work of other students (present and past) of introductory philosophy classes. Your work will be approached with the assumption that it is of average quality (about C+/B-) and then given a lower or higher grade if it shows itself to be above or below average quality. This is why an assignment that commits no obvious errors may not receive a top grade: Other students (present or past) have written responses that show a greater depth of understanding, more critical thought, more ingenuity, or simply were better organized and/or written.

Short Essay Grading Rubric

The table below explains how the short essays you’ll complete during most lessons will be graded.

| Letter Grade and Score | Explanation |
|------------------------|---|
| A (90–100) | insightful analysis that shows a deep understanding of the relevant issues; writing is clear and easy to follow; no major errors |
| B (80–89) | displays a good understanding of the relevant issues; writing is clear and easy to follow; no major errors |
| C (70–79) | displays a fair understanding of some of the relevant issues; writing is clear and easy to follow; contains at least one major error |
| D (69 and below) | unclear whether author has an understanding of the relevant issues and/or writing is difficult to follow; contains one or more major errors |

Long Essay Grading Rubric

The table below shows how essays 1 and 2 (assigned during Lessons 6 and 12) will be graded. The grading rubric for these papers is the same as the scale shown above.

| Task | Weight |
|---|------------|
| Summarize a Case: Does your paper explain the details of the case that will be relevant to subsequent discussion clearly and concisely? | 10 percent |
| Clearly state the bioethical issues or ethical conflicts that arise in this case and clearly articulate a coherent position with respect to these issues: Is it clear what ethical conflict(s) the case presents? Do you have a coherent and logically consistent position in your paper, or is your view unclear or logically inconsistent? | 20 percent |
| Convincingly and thoroughly defend your position: Does your paper provide the reader with good reasons for thinking that your answer(s) to the bioethical question(s) that arise in the context of the case you have selected are correct? To receive credit for this portion of the assignment, it is not enough for your paper to merely explain your position and detail the way it differs from opposing views. Your paper must also explain why your position has some advantage over opposing views. A paper that does not address at least one potential objection to the position that it aims to defend will not earn top marks in this category. | 30 percent |
| In the course of defending this evaluative stance, demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of relevant material from the course readings: Do you show that you fully understand the various (relevant) philosophical positions that we have studied in the course? Does your writing demonstrate that you have thought deeply and critically about the relevant material from the readings? | 20 percent |
| Craft prose that clearly communicates ideas: Is your paper organized effectively. Do your sentences express your thoughts clearly and are they structured so that they are easy to understand? Does your writing style makes the reasoning or way of thinking transparent to the reader? | 20 percent |

Course Policies

Since this is a self-paced course, you can set your own schedule for completing the course, as long as you complete it within nine months of enrolling. There are no strict deadlines for this class, but make sure to allow for at least one week for me to read, grade, comment upon, and return your assignments after I have received them, not including mailing times if applicable. I strongly advise you to set yourself a schedule at the beginning of this course and stick to it. Feel free to share this schedule with me. It will help me to anticipate when I will receive assignments from you and allow me to set aside time to grade them. This can greatly speed up return times.

In addition, sharing your schedule with me can help you to feel more accountable, and can encourage you to stick with and successfully complete the course.

Consulting (quality) outside sources and discussing the topics of the course with others is permitted. However, it is very important to give credit where credit is due, particularly in your written work – please cite such sources both in the body of your paper and in your works cited section. Failure to do so is a form of academic dishonesty.

Honor Code

As a Self-paced Courses Online student, you are bound by the Honor Code: It shall be the responsibility of every student to obey and support the enforcement of the Honor Code, which prohibits lying, cheating, or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University students or academic personnel acting in an official capacity.

Courses like this are only possible if instructors are able to trust that the work submitted is the student’s own, so the University Honor Code will be strictly enforced at all times. For more information about the Honor Code, please visit the website <http://honor.unc.edu>.

Course Outline

| Lesson | Topic |
|--------------------------|--|
| Lesson 1 | Arguments |
| Lesson 2 | Autonomy vs. Beneficence I: Paternalism and Autonomy |
| Lesson 3 | Autonomy vs. Beneficence II: Truth-Telling and Confidentiality |
| Lesson 4 | Informed Consent |
| Lesson 5 | The Ethics of Human Research |
| Lesson 6 | Long Essay 1: Application to Case Studies |
| Lesson 7 | The Ethics of Abortion |
| Lesson 8 | The Ethics of (Prospective) Parenting |
| Lesson 9 | Prenatal Testing, Selective Abortion, and Disability Rights |
| Lesson 10 | Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide |
| Lesson 11 | Access to Health Care and Justice |
| Lesson 12 | Long Essay 2: Application to Case Studies |
| Final Examination Review | |
| Final Examination | |