

Bioethics

Isaac Wilhelm (isaac.wilhelm@rutgers.edu, isaacwilhelm.com)

Philosophy 249

May 28 – July 5

Office hours: Th 12-1 and by appt

Course Description

Bioethics is the study of philosophical questions surrounding medical care and technology. In this course, we will pay special attention to questions concerning life and death. Why is life good, and why is death bad? When is physician-assisted suicide permissible? Is abortion moral or immoral? Do the advantages of stem cell research outweigh the moral risks? Is prenatal testing, or genetic modification, morally wrong? Students will explore these questions by reading articles and submitting discussion posts about them.

Course Requirements

1. Weekly lectures (20 points each).
 - Each week, students must watch all of the lecture videos for that week's assigned articles.
 - Each article will be accompanied by one or more videos.
 - Students must read the article, and watch the videos associated with it, by the date listed in the schedule at the end of this syllabus.
2. Weekly discussion posts (50 points each).
 - Each week, students should complete the following two tasks.
 - (i) Choose two of the readings assigned that week, and write two discussion posts about them: one post about one reading, and one post about the other.
 - Both posts are due by 11:59pm on Saturday.
 - (ii) Comment on one other student's discussion post.
 - Each comment is due by 11:59pm on Sunday.
 - For more details, see the "Weekly Discussion Posts" section below.
3. Final assignment: discussion post evaluation (150 points).
 - At most 600 words.
 - Due date: July 5.
 - Closer to the due date, a detailed description of this assignment will be posted to the course website.

For information about various course policies—for instance, the late assignment policy, the grade appeals policy, and the make-up work policy—see the course website:

1. Sakai course website: <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/site/a1687e83-82cb-4546-8768->

2b2069b0176a.

2. My course website: <https://isaacwilhelm.com/bioethics/>

Goals for the Course

By this course's conclusion, you should be able to

- describe several key issues in bioethics,
- construct arguments in support of your views,
- present views that differ from yours in a fair and charitable manner,
- write well, and
- discuss complex philosophical ideas respectfully.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Please adhere to the Rutgers University policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for violations of these policies can be severe: they include an automatic failing grade for the course, and possibly worse. A comprehensive overview of these policies can be found at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>.

Accessibility

This class should be a great, fun, and educational experience for everyone. And of course, everyone deserves equal access to all educational opportunities at Rutgers. Disabled students are encouraged to speak with me if that would be helpful, and to avail themselves of the services provided by the Office of Disability Services: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>.

Weekly Discussion Posts

Each week, you must (1) submit two discussion posts about that week's assigned readings, and (2) comment on a discussion post written by someone else. Here are the details.

(1) Discussion posts

- Each week, choose two of that week's assigned readings.
- Write two discussion posts: one for each of the readings that you chose.
- Your posts can be about anything at all that directly engages the readings. You can summarize the readings, or raise questions about them, or comment on them, or object to one of the claims that they contain, or something else.
 - Suggestions for your posts, as well as some examples to help guide you, are on the course website (both the Sakai website and my website).
- Each post must be *at least* 100 words and *at most* 200 words.

- Each post is due by 11:59pm on the Saturday of that week.
- Each post must be entered into the relevant forum on the course’s Sakai website (<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/site/a1687e83-82cb-4546-8768-2b2069b0176a>).
- Your posts must be respectful, both to the author of the reading you discuss and to the ideas in that reading. Disrespectful, mean, nasty, or otherwise unkind discussion posts will result in a significantly reduced grade for the course.

(2) Comment

- Write one comment on another student’s discussion post.
- Your comment should engage the ideas that the discussion post raises. You can expand on those ideas, or discuss some concerns about them, or pose some questions about them, or explore some answers to questions that they raise, or something else.
 - Some example comments are on the course website (both the Sakai website and my website).
- Each comment must be *at least* 100 words and *at most* 200 words.
- Each comment is due by 11:59pm on the Sunday after the discussion posts are due.
- Each post must be entered into the relevant forum on the course’s Sakai website (<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/site/a1687e83-82cb-4546-8768-2b2069b0176a>).
- Your comment must be respectful, both to the student whose post you discuss and to the ideas discussed in that post. Disrespectful, mean, nasty, or otherwise unkind comments will result in a significantly reduced grade for the course.

Schedule

The readings and videos will be posted to the course’s Sakai website. Readings must be completed—and the videos accompanying those readings must be watched—by the date listed below.

1. Introduction to Bioethics

- May 29: E. J. Emanuel, “Why I Hope to Die at 75”.
- May 31: J. Broome, “The Badness of Death and the Goodness of Life”.
- June 1: first pair of discussion posts due by 11:59pm.
- June 2: first comment due by 11:59pm.

2. Physician-Assisted Death

- June 3: E. J. Emanuel et al., “Attitudes and Practices of Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide in the United States, Canada, and Europe”.
- June 5: Dworkin et al., “Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers’ Brief”.
- June 7: J. Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”.
- June 8: second pair of discussion posts due by 11:59pm.
- June 9: second comment due by 11:59pm.

3. Abortion

- June 10: J. Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”.
- June 12: M. A. Warren, “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion”.

- June 14: D. Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”.
- June 15: third pair of discussion posts due by 11:59pm.
- June 16: third comment due by 11:59pm.

4. Stem Cell Research

- June 17: K. Devolder & J. Harris, “Compromise and Moral Complicity in the Embryonic Stem Cell Debate”.
- June 19: A. Siegel, “Ethics of Stem Cell Research”.
- June 21: J. McMahan, “Killing Embryos for Stem Cell Research”.
- June 22: fourth pair of discussion posts due by 11:59pm.
- June 23: fourth comment due by 11:59pm.

5. Prenatal Screening and Genetic Modification

- June 24: A. Asch & D. Wasserman, “Reproductive Testing for Disability”.
- June 26: B. Steinbock, “Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis and Embryo Selection”.
- June 28: J. McMahan, “Genetic modification of characteristic masculine traits: enhancement or deformity?”.
- June 29: fifth pair of discussion posts due by 11:59pm.
- June 30: fifth comment due by 11:59pm.
- July 1: no reading.
- July 3: no reading.
- July 5: no reading.
 - Final assignment due on this date by 11:59pm.