

RELIGION 460: MEDICAL ETHICS

Thursday 2 – 4:50pm, THH B9

Spring 2012

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** Keep a hardcopy of this syllabus in order to keep up with your reading and writing assignments throughout the semester. You can also download a copy at any time from this courses' Blackboard site.*

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

When it comes to our healthcare, the stakes are as high as it gets:

Who will live? Who will die? Who will decide?

These are questions that center on issues of both moral principle and real world consequences. Our intense concern about them can be seen in our nation's currently heated debate about the management, distribution, and financing of health care. This debate also serves to remind us of the ethical complexity of related issues involving everyday medical practice. Some of the toughest decisions doctors, patients, and hospitals have to make are about more personal matters like whether to provide specific controversial treatments and what weight to give to patient autonomy. These are issues that mark lives deeply and sometimes end them.

This course will examine some of the ethical issues faced by medical professionals, various ethical decisions we make as a society that affect medical practice, and the fundamental moral principles and ethical values that underlie our view of the place of medical practices in our lives.

Course Organization:

This is an issue-centered seminar that, more or less, will address a different issue in medical ethics every week or two. Although, we will begin the course with some grounding in ethical theory and ethical decision-making, and will attempt to continue to build on our ethical wisdom related to medical contexts, most of the issues we will be discussing are largely independent from one another.

The course is, therefore, not cumulative. Our focus will be to examine each issue directly and deeply when we encounter it. For this reason, you will not be assigned a cumulative midterm or final exam/paper, but instead be asked to prepare or present something on the particular issue under discussion almost every week. (see Course Requirements and Assignments, as well as the Course Topics and Readings below, for further details)

Further, since this is a seminar, rather than a lecture, most of our time will be spend in class discussions you. Consequently, you will be expected to come well prepared for active mutual exploration of our discussion topics. Although I will usually lecture for a part of class in order to

help lay out our discussion and to clarify some of the more difficult philosophical concepts involved, the majority of our time will be spent in discussion about the issues that you and your classmates believe warrant our attention most and have something to say about. These discussions will be the heart and soul of our class. Preparing for them by completing the assigned reading and writing assignments before class is an absolutely key requirement of a class participants. Along with an open mind, these will help you bring your best to our conversations.

Course Objectives

While this course aims to familiarize you with some of the most pressing and interesting problems facing us today in medical ethics, keep in mind that this is merely an introduction to these topics. Moreover, there are many ethical problems you will no doubt encounter down the road as professionals, voters, policy makers, and patients that we will not have covered in this class because, as a society, we do not yet see them as issues demanding reflection. For this reason, a central aim of this course will be to provide you with the theoretical skills that will help you continue to explore ethical issues and to tackle new problems effectively on your own.

That said, we will be guided in our course by 3 central objectives:

- (1) To familiarize you with some of the ways medicine engages our choices and responsibilities, our understanding of ourselves as beings with moral value, and our vision of what constitutes human progress.
- (2) To help you differentiate between ethical (normative) and factual (descriptive) questions, facts, and points of disagreement in the debates we examine.
- (3) To provide you theoretical tools with which to identify ethical considerations, summarize ethically difficult situations, analyze these situations, and present well-supported written arguments for their resolution.

About the Place of Religion in this Course

Although this course is being taught in the Religion department, my own expertise is in secular ethics and it will be taught as a course in philosophical and practical ethics, rather than as a religion course. We will not directly consider themes that are of practical interest solely to a type of religious practitioner, nor entertain arguments that rely on any strictly religious premises. That said, the course touches on many personal issues that have profound religious and spiritual significance, including those of life and death, social justice, and the future direction of humanity.

REQUIRED MATERIALS: (AVAILABLE AT BOOKSTORE)

Intervention and Reflection: Basic Issues in Medical Ethics, 9th Edition (2011) by Ronald Munson (the 8th edition is also fine)

* Other required or recommended readings will be available on our course's Blackboard website.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

This course is graded on a pass/fail basis. In order to pass, you will need to do all of the following:

1. Attend class and participate in class discussions

Part of coming to grips with the topics in this course crucially involves you being able to both articulate your views and to respond to the comments and criticisms of others. This is something you can not do if you're not there, or if you are unprepared. You will be expected to arrive in class ready to discuss the material that we have covered in class for the week.

ATTENDANCE FOR THIS CLASS IS **MANDATORY**. A STUDENT MAY HAVE ONE EXCUSED ABSENCE FOR GOOD CAUSE. MORE THAN ONE ABSENCE WILL BE GROUNDS FOR NOT PASSING THE COURSE.

2. Help prepare and present two *group* case analysis presentations

3. Prepare 5 position papers on topics you are not presenting as a part of a group. (4 – 5 pages, double-spaced)

The papers will respond to ethically challenging cases by summarizing the ethical considerations relevant to the case, weighing the (ethical) strengths and weaknesses of the available courses of action, proposing a course of action, and defending it against at least one serious objection.

The cases you discuss can be taken from the *Decisions Scenarios* section at the end of each chapter or from other sources, as long as they relate to the topic the class is currently discussing.

Your papers should:

1. Include a summary introduction that briefly describes what is at stake and your position on the issue
2. Describe the case you are writing about
3. Discuss the various ethical considerations it raises
4. Weigh the (ethical) strengths and weaknesses of the available courses of action
5. Argue for a course of action
6. Defend that argument against at least one serious objection
7. Engage arguments or contextual information from your readings.

4. Prepare 2 position papers responding to recent medical ethics articles on topics you are not presenting as a part of a group. (4 – 5 pages, double-spaced)

While taking this class, you will find it interesting to browse through some of the latest articles published on issues in medical ethics. You can easily find such articles through our Medical Ethics Newsfeed at <http://college.usc.edu/medical-ethics-newsfeeds/>. These position papers will be identical in form to those you will write on topics covered by your book, but will discuss an issue presented by a recent article on a matter of medical ethics.

5. **Meet with me at least once during office hours before a presentation to discuss how it is that you are applying the process for ethical decision-making discussed in the course, suggested for your papers, and required for your presentations.**

Please come prepared to demonstrate to me how it is that you apply the process to your upcoming presentation or paper. The purpose of this meeting is to reinforce your awareness of the specific elements of the ethical decision-making process.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

In each assignment, performance is considered in light of these key activities:

Comprehension of the material: Your understanding of the concepts and facts presented in the readings and lectures.

Analysis of the material: The display of your understanding of the structure and relationship between the parts of a text or between texts.

Application of the material: Your ability to apply the concepts and frameworks discussed in the readings and the class to new cases or situations.

Synthesis of the material: Your ability to create new ideas or note interesting new conditions from the materials cover by the class.

Clarity of communication: Having good ideas is not particularly useful if you cannot also articulate these ideas clearly. Moreover, I can only credit you for work that I can comprehend directly from your written assignments. For these reasons, not only is it expected that all written assignments will be free from errors of spelling, punctuation, and syntax when they are handed-in, but you are also expected to present your ideas in a clear and coherent fashion. Presenting complex ideas in a coherent manner can be quite difficult to do and should not be taken for granted – especially if you have never written this type of paper before. I will supply you with some materials that can help you towards that end and urge you to see me or the folks at the Writing Center for questions on how to tackle this challenge.

PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

| WEEK | DATE | THEME | READINGS |
|---------------------------------|-------------|--|---|
| 1 | 1/12 | Introduction | Syllabus |
| 2 | 1/19 | Moral Theories and Guiding Principles | <i>Munson, pgs. 739-763</i> |
| 3 | 1/26 | Moral Theories and Guiding Principles | <i>Munson, pgs. 769-791</i> |
| 4 | 2/2 | Research Ethics and Informed Consent | <i>Munson, pgs. 3-25, 38-42, 44-72, 79-96</i> |
| 5 | 2/9 | Autonomy, Truth-Telling, and Confidentiality | <i>Munson, pgs. 97-138, 147-152, 154-173</i> |
| 6 | 2/16 | Genetic Control | <i>Munson, pgs. 276-303, 309-312</i> |
| 7 | 2/23 | Genetic Control | <i>Munson, pgs. 320-352, 359-363</i> <i>Watch: Gattaca</i> |
| 8 | 3/1 | Reproductive Control | <i>Munson, pgs. 364-406, 423-451</i> |
| 9 | 3/8 | Abortion | <i>Munson, pgs. 545-615, 617-621</i> |
| SPRING BREAK 3/12 – 3/17 | | | |
| 10 | 3/22 | Abortion | <i>Munson, pgs. 617-621</i> <i>Watch: The Last Abortion Clinic (Frontline)</i> |
| 11 | 3/29 | Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide | <i>Munson, pgs. 682-722, 725-738</i> <i>Watch: Mar Adentro</i> |
| 12 | 4/5 | Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide | <i>Watch: You Don't Know Jack!</i> |
| 13 | 4/12 | Scarce Medical Resources | <i>Munson, pgs. 453-508</i> |
| 14 | 4/19 | Paying for Health Care | <i>Munson, pgs. 509-544</i> <i>Watch: Sick Around the World (Frontline)</i> <i>Watch: Sick Around America (Frontline)</i> |
| 15 | 4/26 | Course Review | <i>No reading</i> |

ASSIGNMENTS AND FORMAT:

- Paper assignments will be turned in electronically through the appropriately marked assignment on Blackboard. They are due by the beginning of class on the paper's due date.
- Any assignment you turn in should include your name, the course (Religion 460), and the assignment title.
- Formatting: Assignments must be double-spaced with 1.25 inch margins in Times New Roman 12 point font. There should be no extra spaces between paragraphs.
- All pages should be numbered in the bottom right-hand corner.
- All students are expected to keep a copy of their work and be able to produce it upon request.

COURSE POLICIES & POTENTIAL PITFALLS:

Religion 460 is, on many levels, a challenging course. You will need to put forth quite a bit of effort to reach your goals in the class, so I would suggest steering clear of some easily avoidable problems:

- (i) *Attendance* – As a pass/fail course, the single most important thing required of you is participation. You cannot participate if you are not there. For this reason, attendance is mandatory.
- (ii) *Late Work* – Turn your work in on-time. Procrastination is not a legitimate excuse for late work, neither is carelessness (e.g. “I left my paper at home”, “I left my paper at my friend's house”, or “I left it in the computer lab.”), nor are tangential tragedies have no relevance to your own coursework (i.e. “my roommate was sick this morning” will not count as an excuse).

Be particularly prepared to avoid technological difficulties. Excuses based on technological problems will not be accepted (e.g. “My printer wasn't working / ran out of ink”, “My computer hard drive crashed”, or “My disk has fatal errors and the file won't open”). Prepare for such difficulties by completing your assignments well advance of their due date, making back-ups of your work, and *always* having a printer card available so that you can print your papers at any of the many computer labs on campus.

- (iii) *Plagiarism* – Do not turn in anything which is not the original product of your own creative mind or whose origin you do not explicitly cite within your work. USC has NO TOLERANCE for plagiarism of any kind, and I have extensive experience identifying and proving academic dishonesty. Plagiarized assignments will receive an F, and the student or students in question will immediately be turned over to the Office of Student Conduct for punishment and possibly expulsion.

PLAGIARISM:

Each student is expected to know the University policy on plagiarism as it is stated in SCampus (<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/behavior.html>). Students caught plagiarizing on a paper, exam, or any assignment, will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and will be failed for the course. Proper citations are an easy way of avoiding this problem. If you are unsure about how to cite in your paper, please see me.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own.

Each student is expected to know the University policy on plagiarism as it is stated in SCampus (<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/behavior.html>). Students caught plagiarizing on a paper, exam, or any assignment, will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and will be failed for the course. Proper citations are an easy way of avoiding this problem. If you are unsure about how to cite in your paper, please see me.

YOUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

At this point in our academic careers, we should be working to establish a fun but professional learning environment. I expect considerate behavior from each of you in order to make the most of your time in class. Most situations that would fall into this discussion are simple common sense; below, though, are a few of the more prevalent distractions:

- Feel free to snack in class, as long as your “meal” will not cause a significant distraction. For example, yogurt or a Snickers bar would be fine, but Doritos (which tend to be VERY noisy) or a large salad (which would take up your entire desk space and much of your attention) are a bit extreme.
- Do not read non-class materials during class time (novels, the newspaper, textbooks for other classes, etc.)
- Please turn off cellular phones, pagers, or any other noisy/distracting device. Anything that might happen during class will be waiting for you when class is over.
- Participation is a central component of the course, but keep in mind that you should be considerate of other students when you are participating.

THE WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center is a valuable resource for students from all disciplines, backgrounds, and skill levels. The trained staff can help you in any stage of your process. You can call the Writing Center at 213-740-2691 for more information or to schedule an appointment. They also accept walk-ins.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5pm Monday through Friday. The telephone number for DSP is 213-740-0776.

*Syllabus subject to revision