

**PHIL 3632: Ethics and The Beginnings of Life**  
MWF 2:30-3:20pm in Calhoun Hall 203

**Professor:** Sarah Raskoff

**Office:** Furman Hall room 105

**Office Hours:** W 11:15-1:15pm (or by appointment)

**Email:** [sarah.raskoff@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:sarah.raskoff@vanderbilt.edu)

**Course Overview**

This course will provide a philosophical examination of some of the most pressing issues in procreative and reproductive ethics. Topics include: whether it is permissible (or perhaps even obligatory) to have children, arguments for and against adopting rather than procreating, the use of reproductive technologies for genetic “enhancement,” the moral status of fetuses, the moral and legal permissibility of abortion, and the social costs of abortion bans.

**Course Goals**

- To read and engage with contemporary philosophical texts
- To understand the ethical issues, concepts, and arguments related to procreation, adoption, genetic selection, and abortion.
- To engage in constructive discussion and analysis of ethical issues.
- To write clear explanations and evaluations of philosophical arguments.

**Required Course Materials**

*Textbook:* There is no textbook for this course. All readings will be uploaded to Brightspace. If you have any issues accessing the material, please reach out to me!

**Accessibility and Accommodations**

Vanderbilt University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. If you have disability or medical condition that you think will impact your ability to complete certain assignments or participate in class and you wish to seek accommodation, please contact the Student Access Center at [disabilityservices@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@vanderbilt.edu) or drop by the Baker Building, Suite 108. I also welcome you to contact me about any concerns you have in this regard.

**Assignments**

**Thought-Provoking Questions (or “TPQs”):**

To foster deeper engagement and generate discussion, each student must submit one TPQ about each assigned reading before class. The question should reflect careful consideration of the text and highlight a point of interest or confusion, or an objection. To receive a passing grade, TPQs must be uploaded to the discussion board on Brightspace by 10am on Mondays and Wednesdays. Each question should demonstrate thorough engagement with the content of the reading, be open-ended to prompt discussion, and relate to a significant theme or concept within the text.

Questions will be graded based on two criteria: the depth of engagement with the text and the potential to generate discussion. Each TPQ will receive a score as follows:

- **1:** The question fails to demonstrate careful engagement with the text and does not generate discussion.

- **2:** The question meets one of the criteria (either demonstrates careful engagement or generates discussion) but not both.
- **3:** The question is excellent, meeting both criteria by showing deep engagement with the text and prompting meaningful discussion.

At the end of the term, your final grade for TPQs will be determined by the sum of your 25 highest TPQ scores.

### **Discussion Leader**

Once per semester, each student will serve as a discussion leader for an assigned reading. This involves preparing a handout or PowerPoint on the reading and formulating questions to guide the class discussion. The discussion leader is responsible for leading the class through the main arguments and themes of the text. This role aims to develop your skills in synthesis, presentation, and facilitation. The PowerPoint or handout should be submitted to me 24 hours before class for review. You must email me notifying me of the reading you plan to lead discussion on no later than 11:59pm on August 30. If two students wish to lead discussion on the same reading, priority will be given to the student who emails me first, so you might also email me your second (or third) choice.

Your grade will be based on the clarity and completeness of the handout or PowerPoint, the relevance and thoughtfulness of the presentation, and the effectiveness in facilitating the discussion. Emphasis will be placed on effort and engagement rather than perfection, so please focus on being prepared and fostering a lively and thoughtful class discussion.

### **Tests (Friday, September 20, Week 5; Friday, October 20, Week 10; Saturday, December 13, Finals Week)**

Each unit will end with a test, which will include a small number of multiple-choice, true-false, and short essay questions. The bulk of the test will focus on the short essay questions, which are designed to test your comprehension of the philosophical arguments we have read and discussed. On the day of the exam, I will select a set of short essay questions. From this list, you will select some number of questions—usually 2 or 3—to answer. The questions you receive on the day of the exam will be drawn from a longer list of questions that I will upload to Brightspace ahead of time, so nothing will come as a surprise.

Please aim for clarity over style and be sure to respond to each part of the question.

### **Attendance and Participation (ongoing)**

Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings. A high participation grade will be awarded to all students who contribute to class discussions by engaging with the course material and with their classmates. This course will sometimes focus on sensitive and controversial issues about which members of this class may reasonably disagree. It is therefore especially important to be respectful and to interpret each other with charity.

### **Evaluation**

TPQs: 20%

Discussion Leader Session: 10%

Tests: 3 x 20%

Attendance and Participation: 10%

### Late Work Policy

The term goes by quickly. It is important to complete work on time. Except in exceptional circumstances, late work will be penalized at a rate of a partial letter grade per day (e.g. a B paper that is one day late receives a B-; a B paper that is two days late receives a C+; etc). Each weekend day counts as a day.

### Academic Integrity

All submitted work will be analyzed by Turnitin, which is a plagiarism-detection software. Cases of plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the assignment and will be submitted for review by the Honor Council. To avoid plagiarism, do not:

- (1) Present another's ideas without citing them.
- (2) Present another's words without quoting and citing them.

If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please email me. If you feel that your only chance to pass this course is to plagiarize or cheat, please email me. I am here to help!

### Course Schedule

(subject to change with reasonable notice)

<b>UNIT I: PROCREATION</b>			
Week 1	W	Aug 21	Welcome and introductions
	F	Aug 23	Ethics refresher
Week 2	M	Aug 26	David Benatar, "Why It Is Better Never to Come Into Existence"
	W	Aug 28	Seana Shiffrin, "Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm" (excerpt)
	F	Aug 30	<i>Spillover and discussion</i>
Week 3	M	Sep 2	David DeGrazia, "Is it Wrong to Impose the Harms of Human Life? A Reply to Benatar"
	W	Sep 4	Molly Gardener, "Beneficence and Procreation"
	F	Sep 6	<i>Spillover and discussion</i>
Week 4	M	Sep 9	Thomas Young, "Overconsumption and Procreation: Are they Morally Equivalent?"
	W	Sep 11	Stuart Rachels, "The Immorality of Having Children"
	F	Sep 13	<i>Spillover and discussion</i>
Week 5	M	Sep 16	Kalle Grill, "Procreation vs. Consumption: Harms and Benefits"
	W	Sep 18	Anca Gheaus, "Could There Ever Be A Duty to Have Children?"
	F	Sep 20	<b>Unit 1 Exam</b>
<b>UNIT II: ADOPTION AND SELECTION</b>			
Week 6	M	Sep 23	Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, "The Goods of Parenting"
	W	Sep 25	Tina Rulli, "The Unique Value of Adoption"
	F	Sep 27	<i>Spillover and discussion</i>
Week 7	M	Oct 1	J.D. Velleman, "Family History"
	W	Oct 3	Charlotte Witt, "A Critique of the Bionormative Concept of the Family"
	F	Oct 5	<i>Spillover and discussion</i>

Week 8	M	Oct 7	Tina Rulli, "On Preferring a Genetically-Related Child"
	W	Oct 9	Gretchen Sisson, <i>Relinquished: The Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood</i> (excerpt)
	F	Oct 11	<b>NO MEETING (FALL BREAK)</b>
Week 9	M	Oct 14	Julian Savulescu, "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children"
	W	Oct 16	Tomasz Zuradzki, "Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis and Rational Choice Under Risk or Uncertainty"
	F	Oct 18	<b>NO MEETING (INSTRUCTOR AWAY)</b>
Week 10	M	Oct 21	Adrienne Asch and Eric Parens, "The Disability Rights Critique of Prenatal Genetic Testing - Reflections and Recommendations"
	W	Oct 23	Elizabeth Barnes, "Disability and Adaptive Preference"
	F	Oct 25	<b>Unit 2 Exam</b>
<b>UNIT III: ABORTION</b>			
Week 11	M	Oct 28	TN SB1257 and TN SB745
	W	Oct 30	Lee and George, "The Wrong of Abortion"
	F	Nov 1	<i>Spillover and discussion</i>
Week 12	M	Nov 4	Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"
	W	Nov 6	Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"
	F	Nov 8	<i>Spillover and discussion</i>
Week 13	M	Nov 11	Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
	W	Nov 13	Perry Hendricks, "The Impairment Argument Against Abortion"
	F	Nov 15	<b>NO MEETING (INSTRUCTOR AWAY)</b>
Week 14	M	Nov 18	Susan Sherwin, "Abortion Through a Feminist Lens"
	W	Nov 20	Jessica Flanigan, "The Ethics of Prenatal Injury"
	F	Nov 22	<i>Spillover and discussion</i>
BREAK	Nov 23-Dec 1		<b>NO MEETING (THANKSGIVING)</b>
Week 15	M	Dec 2	Diane Green Foster, <i>The Turnaway Study</i> (excerpt)
	W	Dec 4	Diane Green Foster, <i>The Turnaway Study</i> (excerpt)
<b>EXAM</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Dec 13</b>	<b>Unit 3/Final Exam (3-4:15pm)</b>