

## PHIL 3608: Ethics and Medicine – The Beginnings and Ends of Life

TR 9:30-10:45am in Buttrick Hall 204

**Professor:** Sarah Raskoff

**Office:** Furman Hall, room 105

**Office Hours:** TBD

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### Course Overview

This course will explore a variety of ethical questions about the beginnings and ends of life, focusing on procreation, abortion, and death. We will start with procreative ethics. Having a child creates a vulnerable and needy person whose life could go well or badly. It also adds another person to the planet who will likely go on to pollute, consume animals, and emit greenhouse gases. Is it ethically acceptable to intentionally have a child? Is it always better to adopt? Should assisted reproductive technologies be used to “enhance” future children or prevent the birth of children with certain conditions? Next, we’ll turn to reproductive ethics. What is moral status, at what point during a pregnancy does it arrive on the scene, and what, if anything, does this imply about the ethical acceptability of abortion? What are the effects of laws restricting abortion and what happens when someone who desires an abortion is denied one? We will end with death and the ethical complexities that arise in end-of-life care. Should physicians provide people with terminal illnesses assistance in ending their lives? What about those with psychiatric but non-terminal illness, such as depression? And how do we respect the wishes of patients with progressive and incurable dementia?

### Course Goals

- To read and understand contemporary philosophical texts.
- To grasp the ethical issues, concepts, and arguments related to procreation, abortion, and death and dying.
- 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 and Perusall. If you have any issues accessing the material, please reach out to me!

Perusall: Perusall is a free service that allows students to annotate readings as they read. Your annotations will be visible to the instructor as well as other students, and you can respond to other students’ annotations. You will need to register for an account and then for the course on Perusall. Instructions for doing so will be provided on Brightspace.

### 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

### **Annotation Assignments (Submitted through Perusall) Due by MW at 11:59 PM**

Readings will be posted to Brightspace and Perusall. Your annotations will be visible to other students, and you can (and indeed should!) respond to other students' annotations. Instructions for annotation assignments can be found on Brightspace and will be discussed Week 1.

Assigned readings will total 20-30 pages per class session. Some class sessions will have multiple readings assigned, but even in those cases, the readings will still total ~30 pages. If multiple readings are assigned for one course session, please split your Annotation Assignment comments between them.

There will be 21 Annotation Assignments but only 18 will count toward your grade, so you can skip 3 without penalty.

### **Blue Book Exams (In Class, Weeks 6, 11, Finals Week)**

Each unit will end with an exam consisting of a list of short essay questions designed to test your comprehension of the philosophical arguments we have read and discussed. From this list, you will select some number of questions—usually 3 or 4—to answer in a clean blue book. 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 near the beginning of each unit, so you will have the whole unit to prepare.

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

### **Participation (In Class)**

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

Annotation Assignments: 15%

Blue Book Exams: 3 x 25%

Participation: 10%

## Academic Integrity

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)

Week 1: Introductions, Learning, and Moral Concepts for Medical Ethics

R, 8/24: Henry L. Roediger III, Mark A. McDaniel, and Peter Brown, "Learning is Misunderstood" (excerpt from *Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*); Tom L. Beauchamp, "The 'Four Principles' Approach to Health Care Ethics"

### Unit 1: Procreation

Week 2: Radical Anti-Natalism

T, 8/29: David Benatar, "Why It Is Better Never to Come Into Existence"

R, 8/31: David DeGrazia, "Is it Wrong to Impose the Harms of Human Life? A Reply to Benatar"

Week 3: Against Procreation

T, 9/5: Stuart Rachels, "The Immorality of Having Children"; Thomas Young, "Overconsumption and Procreation: Are they Morally Equivalent?"

R, 9/7: Tina Rulli, "The Unique Value of Adoption" (excerpt)

Week 4: In Defense of Procreation

T, 9/12: Kalle Grill, "Procreation vs. Consumption: Harms and Benefits"; Christine Overall, *Why Have Children* (excerpt)

R, 9/14: Anca Gheaus, "Could There Ever Be A Duty to Have Children?"

Week 5: Genetic Selection

T, 9/19: Julian Savulescu, "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children"

R, 9/21: Adrienne Asch, "Prenatal Testing and Selective Abortion"; Herjeet Kaur Marway, "Procreative Justice and Genetic Selection for Skin Colour"

Week 6: Unit 1 Blue Book Review and Exam

T, 9/26: Review/Spillover

R, 9/28: **BLUE BOOK EXAM UNIT 1**

### Unit 2: Abortion

Week 7: Abortion and Moral Status

T, 10/3: Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, "The Wrong of Abortion"; Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"

R, 10/5: Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"; Perry Hendricks, "The Impairment Argument Against Abortion" (excerpt, first four pages)

Week 8: Abortion Regardless of Moral Status

T, 10/10: Judith J. Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"

R, 10/12: NO CLASS

Week 9: Abortion Regardless of Moral Status

T, 10/17: Gina Schouten, "Fetuses, Orphans, and a Famous Violinist: On the Ethics and Politics of Abortion" (Skip intro, start at section 1, end before "others' noncompliance")

R, 10/19: FALL BREAK—NO CLASS

Week 10: Abortion in the Real World

T, 10/24: Susan Sherwin, “Abortion Through a Feminist Lens”

R, 10/26: Dorothy Roberts, “Reproductive Justice, Not Just Rights”; Katie Watson, “The Ethics of Access: Reframing the Need for Abortion Care as a Health Disparity”

Week 11: Unit 2 Blue Book Review and Exam

T, 10/31: Review/Spillover

R, 11/2: **BLUE BOOK EXAM UNIT 2**

### **Unit 3: Death and Dying**

Week 12: The Right to Die and Physician-Assisted Suicide

T, 11/7: Michael B. Gill, “A Moral Defense of Oregon’s Physician-Assisted Suicide Law”; James Rachels, “Passive and Active Euthanasia”

R, 11/9: J. David Velleman, “Against the Right to Die”; Ezekiel J. Emanuel, “What Is the Great Benefit of Legalizing Euthanasia or Physician-Assisted Suicide?”

Week 13: Physician-Assisted Suicide and Treatment Resistant Depression

T, 11/14: Bonnie Steinbock, “Physician-Assisted Death and Severe, Treatment-Resistant Depression” (optional: Udo Schuklenk and Suzanne van de Vathorst, “Treatment-Resistant Major Depressive Disorder and Assisted Dying”)

R, 11/16: Thomas Blikshavn, Tonje Lossius Husum, and Morten Magelssen, “Four Reasons Why Assisted Dying Should Not Be Offered for Depression”

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14: Dementia and Autonomy

T, 11/28: Ronald Dworkin, “Life Past Reason”

R, 11/30: Rebecca Dresser, “Dworkin on Dementia”

Week 15: Immortality

T, 12/5: Bernard Williams, “The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality”; Ezekiel J. Emanuel “Why I Hope to Die at 75”

R, 12/7: Review/spillover

W, 12/13, 9am: **BLUE BOOK EXAM UNIT 3**