

Philosophy 257: Bioethics and Social Justice
Professor Carol J. Moeller
Fall 2015

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Class Meets: T, H: 10:20 – 11:30 a.m., PPHAC 101

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 9 a.m. – 10 a.m., 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., and by appointment.

Required Textbooks:

Abraham, *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure of Healthcare in Urban America*

Powers and Faden, *Social Justice: The Moral Foundations of Public Health and Health Policy*

Course Description

What is health, and how does it relate to social justice issues? How do such factors as income, race, and gender correlate with health? In health research and healthcare delivery how do lingering patterns of inequality get rewritten into the social fabric or transformed out of it? How can we learn from the legacies of unethical medical experimentation and other ugly parts of medical history?

New technologies, genetic testing, cloning, reproductive assistance technologies, human subject research, and many other topics raise important questions of justice. In this course, we will explore a broad range of these topics. We shall seek to go beyond a mere survey of the “hot topics” of bioethics to a deep analysis of social justice and health.

This course includes attention to bioethics issues of race, gender, and class. Experiments on slave women, issues of breast implants and safety, minority access to health care, the correlation of socio-economic status to health, as well as other health disparity questions are incorporated into the analysis.

As a philosophy course, this course will go beyond descriptive analysis about issues of health and social justice. For example, we will look at how many people in the U.S. do not have health insurance, and how many (whether insured or not) are constrained in their medical options because of economic issues. Some descriptive analysis is necessary to examine these complex health issues. However, the heart of our study is normative. What does justice require in the area of people's access to the healthcare? How should costs factor into people's health care in a society concerned with justice? That is, the questions are not just "What *is* the world like?," but also "What *should* the world be like?"

Course requirements include attendance and discussion participation, two 3-4 page essays, one 10-12 page essay, three examinations, other in-class quizzes or exercises, and an oral presentation.

This course can fulfill the Moral Life LinC requirement.

As a Moral Life course and as a philosophy course, the student outcomes expected are the following:

1. an awareness of the complexity of moral issues and of the need for interdisciplinary understanding for informed moral decision-making;
2. grappling with the student's own values and moral position-taking;

3. enhanced capacity for moral discernment, criticism, and argument.

In addition to these Moral Life (LinC category) outcomes, specific goals to this course are that students:

4. achieve a broad understanding of the field of bioethics, with a particular sensitivity to social justice and to how culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and economic class issues impact access to quality health care.
5. strengthen skills for fair and sympathetic treatment of competing views and for critical reflection upon them.
6. develop verbal, writing, and thinking abilities to take positions, argue for them, and defend against competing views.

The Theoretical Context for Studying “The Moral Life” in "Bioethics and Social Justice"

As a Moral Life course, “Bioethics and Social Justice” offers (1) an introduction to two or more theoretical frameworks for reflection upon a moral life, and (2) multiple realms of application for these frameworks (i.e., two or more significant contemporary issues that will be explored in light of these theoretical considerations).

(1) This course will use philosophical ethical systems such as utilitarian and Kantian ethics, historical methods, competing theories of justice, as well as various philosophical accounts of respect, rationality, consent, empowerment and other concepts arising in relation to health,

(2) applying them to such areas as:

- a) health care reform and health insurance reform (e.g., how has managed care raised questions of justice? What are the strengths and weaknesses of plans purporting to be more egalitarian? How have health disparities been impacted by recent changes to managed care payment structures),
- b) human subject research (e.g., what was wrong with the Nazi medical experiments, and the Tuskegee syphilis study, and should the data from them be used), and
- c) informed consent for treatment and research (e.g., can a child give consent? Can consent be truly voluntary across great differentials of wealth and power and across a divergence of cultures?)
- d) reproductive choice, freedom, and technologies issues (e.g., how has the history of sterilization abuse influenced policies on reproduction and their popularity?, what is it for a person to make an informed voluntary choice about abortion or sterilization – does it include the person thinking they have other options?)
- e) physician-assisted suicide (e.g., disabilities activists claim that such actions would take a discriminatory form against people with disabilities; they point out that many of Kevorkian’s assisted suicide cases were non-terminal

people with disabilities. Is this concern valid, and if it is, is it sufficient to defeat all other arguments for physician-assisted suicide? Should a person have the right to end her/his own life in the face of suffering, and is it different for mental versus physical suffering?)

Course Requirements (as percentage of final grade)

Attendance and participation, in-class oral presentation	5%
Average on quizzes, in-class exercises, group project	10%
One 5-6 page essay	25%
Three examinations: 3 exams @ 20% each	<u>60%</u>
	100%

Course Requirements (Further Explained)

Attendance and Participation, Oral Presentation (5%): Attendance and participation are required. Unexcused absences or failure to participate will detract from your grade. (Participation need not always be overtly verbal; however, students ought to be prepared, present and attentive, having read the assignments thoroughly, engaging in the material somehow even if one is fairly quiet in class.) Details will follow about the **oral presentations**.

Occasional outside of class events and video screenings may be assigned, either required or for extra credit. It is up to each student to be aware of these, to schedule make-up opportunities in advance if a conflict with such required attendance occurs.

Average on quizzes, in-class exercises, group project (5%): Occasional quizzes, in-class exercises, as well as a group project (week of

Exams: Three Exams (60%): For the final exam, most of the material will be drawn from the last series of readings, and the remainder will come from those covered earlier in the term.

5-6 Page Essay (25%): The longer essay will be 5-6 pages on a topic (from a set of choices) that allows you to apply several of our course readings to the issue at hand. The topic may be selected from those I distribute, or it may be your own proposed topic with my written approval. Please type, double spaced 10-12 font (no decorative fonts please), use 1-inch margins (top/bottom/sides) and properly document sources. Use a complete bibliography. It is preferable to use parenthetical references (name of author, page of reference), in the body of the paper. Be sure to cite the page in question, so your documentation is complete. Also, please note guidelines on Internet use. Come see me for any help or for feedback on a draft of your essay.

Class Etiquette: Since we are all adults, I need not specify all of the various ways in which we ought to treat each other with respect, being silent (especially while another person is speaking), being on time, having cell phones and pagers turned off, etc. Treat one another with kindness and respect. Be sure to make any criticisms as constructive as possible, challenging an idea without attacking a person. Anyone appearing to be disruptive or

disrespectful will be asked to leave class. On a second occurrence the person would be dismissed from the course altogether.

Students with disabilities/learning disabilities should contact the Academic Support Services Office as soon as possible to arrange for any necessary accommodations, Lower Level, Monocacy Hall, 610-861-1401. Official authorization is necessary for accommodation eligibility.

If you know or suspect you might be in need of learning assistance, in anything from study skills or time management to possible disability issues, please contact Academic Support Services as soon as possible. This is particularly urgent if you know or suspect you might need accommodations to negotiate disability issues with the class. The office would simply contact me about the accommodation requested; they respect privacy.

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is required, as is actual participation, not simply being a warm body in the room. Unexcused absences (beyond one) will detract from your final grade, pushing your course average ~ and final grade - down by .5 % points per miss from the course average. For example, if you have 3 unexcused absences (which would be 2 beyond the 1 "freebie" allowed); your final average will be lowered by $2 \times .5$, which equals 1. If your grade would otherwise be an 80.1 (B -), it will become a 79.1 (C +). If the final score remains right on the borderline between two letter grades, your participation level will be taken into account (as opposed to simply attendance).

Academic Integrity: Be sure to observe strictly Moravian College policies on academic integrity. Do your own work. Give credit any time you quote, paraphrase, or use anyone else's words or ideas. Give credit wherever it is due. Failure to do so ~ *whether intentional or accidental* ~ is academic dishonesty and is taken seriously, resulting in at least a 0 on the relevant assignment. For further specific information and resources on academic honesty, see the Student Handbook, the professor, or the Academic Dean's Office.

Documentation: You must document your work correctly. Use a style manual (such as M.L.A.) access one through the Internet, or use a library copy. Please see a librarian or me if you need help with documentation. Pay special attention to the documentation of any Internet sources. If you use an Internet source, you must include the web address plus a hard copy of the article used, attaching these as an appendix.

Seeking help: Please see me with any questions you may have. Come to office hours. If those do not work out for you, arrange an appointment outside of office hours. Email me with questions, to find a time to meet, etc. I am available to talk over essay topics and to look at essay drafts as well.

Final note on grading: Please be aware that there is a qualitative component to grading that is up to the professor's judgment. If you do not understand the comments or grade on any assignment (or for the course), please ask me about it. If you wish to challenge a grade and are not satisfied with my response, you may appeal to the department chair.

Course Schedule: Readings are to be done prior to that day's class

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Pages, Chapters and Topics</i>	<i>Presenter:</i>
T 9/1	First day of class	
TH 9/3	Abraham, <i>Mama Might Be Better off Dead</i> , pp. 1 - 43	
T 9/8	Abraham, 44 - 110	
TH 9/10	Abraham, 111 - 166	
T 9/15	Abraham, 167 - 231	
TH 9/17	Abraham, 232 - 262	
T 9/22	Review, Further Discussion	
TH 9/24	Exam 1	
T 9/29	<i>Social Justice</i> , Preface, pp. vii - xiv	
TH 10/1	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 3 - 14	
T 10/6	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 15-29	
TH 10/8	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 29-41	
T 10/13	No Class: Fall Break	
TH 10/15	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 41-49	
T 10/20	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 50-64	
TH 10/22	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 64-79	
T 10/27	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 80-99	
TH 10/29	Review	
T 11/3	Exam 2	
TH 11/5	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 100-117	
T 11/10	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 117-128	
TH 11/12	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 128-141	
T 11/17	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 142-156	
TH 11/19	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 156-167	
T 11/24	<i>Social Justice</i> , pp. 167-177	
TH 11/26	No Class: Thanksgiving Recess	

T 12/1 *Social Justice*, pp. 178-190
TH 12/3 *Social Justice*, pp. 191-195

T 12/8 *Social Justice*, entire book
TH 12/10 Review, Discussion Before Final Exam

THURSDAY 12/17 1:30 p.m. FINAL EXAM

Suggestions for the Study of Ethics in a Secular Context

Bioethics builds upon long traditions of the study of ethics in religious and secular contexts. To put it simply, ethics is about how people ought to live. In a formal, philosophical way ethics has been studied for well over two thousand years. In cultural, religious, and personal ways, it has perhaps been studied longer. Whatever your own ethical beliefs, philosophical ethics is about examining views and the reasons supporting them, in order to come to understand them, to critically evaluate them, and to decide for ourselves what we believe and how we can support those beliefs. In bioethics, many topics arise which challenge our own values, from abortion to reproductive technologies to xenotransplantation (cross-species transplantation) to animal experimentation to cloning and so on. In philosophy, one must critically examine issues (even issues that are controversial and personal) from every angle, examining arguments and positions to which we might initially feel quite hostile. Ultimately, one must engage with a wide variety of positions in order to sort out your own views. As Thoreau says, you must “think your own thoughts.”

In philosophy, we seek to develop and support our views with reasons that transcend any particular cultural, religious, or personal set of beliefs. If you say, “I believe X because the Bible says so,” that reasoning will not be persuasive to a person who does not believe in the Bible for his/her guidance, or who interprets the Bible in other ways. If you can take your Biblically influenced reasons and translate them to broader human concerns (not bound by religious differences) you will have a better chance of having your views respected and understood.

You may be shy about sharing your own ethical views, unsure of what they are, or otherwise made nervous by the idea of writing and talking about ideas that may be very personal and important to you. For this course, you need to understand and critically evaluate the materials in this course. Some people find it easiest to do that against the backdrop of their own views. However, it is no requirement that you do so with your most personal views. For the context of each paper, you will need to take a stand, to take a position. .

Some worry that students’ work in ethics could not possibly be graded fairly, since the issues can seem so subjective, and the professor might well have views of her or his own. Philosophical ethics, however, is what we are learning to do. That involves reading carefully, thinking clearly, evaluating critically, synthesizing ideas, taking positions, giving reasons and arguments for one’s views, writing clearly and well and conveying your argument strongly, and so on. These are philosophical skills and abilities. Your work will be graded for the demonstration of these philosophical skills, not for the content of your stated opinions. Sometimes the content of an essay may indicate to me that they have misread or only superficially grasped an argument. It is the depth of reading and grasping and writing (and so on) that is the basis for evaluation, not the content itself.