Introduction to Biomedical Ethics

Class schedule: ---
Class Location: ---
Class Instructor: Katherine Valde
Office hours: ---
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Office Location: ---

Course Description:

This course will survey ethical issues that arise in connection with research, medicine, and biotechnologies. It will examine topics such as the right to healthcare, research on human subjects, euthanasia, abortion, cloning, genetic selection, disabilities, and the biomedical enhancement of human capacities. Students can expect to gain not only training in philosophical ethics and argumentation, but also the resources needed for assessing ethically difficult questions that medical professionals routinely face.

Schedule of Readings:

Week 1: Reasoning and Argumentation

Key Concepts (Weeks 2-3):

Week 2: Ethics and Values
T: James Rachels, “What is Morality” ch1 in The Elements of Moral Philosophy

Week 3: Disease
T: Dominic Murphy, “Concepts of Disease and Health”, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Th: Marc Ereshefsky, “Defining ‘Health’ and ‘Disease”, Studies in the History and Philosophy of Biology and Biomedical Sciences

Ethics in Healthcare (Weeks 4-6):

Week 4: Treatment vs. Enhancement
T: Thomas Schramme, “The Significance of the Concept of Disease for Justice in Health Care”, Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics
Th: Buchanan et. al., “Positive and Negative Genetic Interventions’ Ch4 in From Chance to Choice

Week 5: Is Health Care a Right?
T: Normal Daniels, “Is There a Right to Health Care, and If So, What does it Encompass?” ch 31 in A Companion to Bioethics
Tristram Englehardt, “Rights to Health Care, Social Justice, and Fairness in Health Care Allocations”, Foundation of Bioethics
Th: Allen Buchanan, “The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care”, Philosophy & Public Affairs
Nicholas Rescher, “The Allocation of Exotic Medical Lifesaving Therapy”, Ethics

Week 6: The Right to Die?
T: Dan Brock, “Voluntary Active Euthanasia”, The Hastings Center Report

Ethics in Research (weeks 7-9):

Week 7: What is ‘Science’? and The Value-free Ideal
T: Alan Chalmers, “What is This Things called Science?”, Introduction, and Ch. 1 & 2
Th: Heather Douglass, “Values and Science”, Oxford Handbook in the Philosophy of Science
Week 8: Different Types of Values in Science
T: Helen Longino, “Gender and Racial Bias in Scientific Research” The Ethics of Scientific Research
Th: Baruch Brody, “Ethical Issues in Clinical Trials in Developing Countries”, Statistic in Medicine

Week 9: in Specific Scientific Contexts
T: Cigarettes and Cancer – Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, “Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming”, Introduction and ch. 1
Th: Psychology + Nutrition – Christine Aschwanden, “You Can’t Trust What You Read About Nutrition”, FiveThirtyEight
Eric Michael Johnson, “WEIRD Evolution of Human Psychology”, Scientific American

Ethics in Biotechnology (Weeks 10-12)
Week 10: Cloning
Th: Dan Brock, “Cloning Human Beings: An Assessment of the Ethical Issues Pro and Con”

Week 11: Enhancement of Human Capacities
T: Julian Savulescu “Procreative Beneficence”, Bioethics
Michael Sandel “The Case Against Perfection”, The Atlantic

Week 12: survey fulfillment week! (Topics for this week will be chosen based on results of a student survey)
Possible units include: Reliability of Animal Models in Medicine, Informed Consent, Abortion, Eugenics, and Placebo-Controlled Trials