

Philosophy 1150
Introductory Bioethics
Spring 2025

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University of Missouri

Course Description

The central goal of the course is to apply the critical thinking skills used by philosophers to various ethical issues related to medical and biological sciences, from dilemmas in classical situations to problems arising from the latest technological developments. We will do this by examining philosophical arguments along with real-life cases.

We will use philosophical skills and techniques to help us assess and give reasons for different answers to ethical questions. This will often require us to set aside our preconceptions about these issues and, at times, require us to manage difficult feelings. We will develop critical thinking skills in reading, writing, class discussion, and group work. It is very important that you should feel free to talk in class and express your views about the material. Comments and questions are always welcome.

Contact Information

Instructor: Tianqin Ren

Email: trznz@missouri.edu (Typically reply within 24 hours on business days.)

Office: Middlebush 231

Office Hours:

Tuesday 2:00-3:00, Thursday 11:00-12:00, and by appointment.

If you want to talk with me on Zoom, please use the course Zoom link on Canvas Homepage.

Course Resources

All reading materials will be provided on Canvas. I will send out weekly announcements about the plan and required reading for the next week. Please read/watch the required material before class and be prepared to participate actively in the discussion.

All the slides will be uploaded to Canvas after class, so instead of trying to write down everything in your notes, focus more on the big picture, the important concepts, and the points where you have confusion/questions/thoughts. Think actively while taking notes, write down what you think is important, and be ready to move on even if you haven't finished your notes. You can always review the slides and fill in the details after class.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1	Jan.21	Introduction	
	Jan.23	Logic and Philosophical Argumentation	
Week 2	Jan.28		
	Jan.30		
Week 3	Feb.4	Consequentialism	
	Feb.6	The QALY approach of Distributing Medical Resources	
Week 4	Feb.11	Deontology	
	Feb.13	The Moral Obligation to Get Vaccinated	
Week 5	Feb.18	Care Ethics	
	Feb.20	Patient-Doctor Relation and AI in Medicine	
Week 6	Feb.25	Catch up & Review	Exam 1 due by the end of Sunday, Mar.2.
	Feb.27	No class	
Week 7	Mar.4	Disease and Disability	
	Mar.6	Elizabeth Barnes: <i>Valuing Disability, Causing Disability</i>	
Week 8	Mar.11	Prenatal Screening	
	Mar.13	Laura M. Purdy: <i>Genetics and Reproductive Risk</i>	
Week 9	Mar.18	Abortion	Exam 2 due by the end of Sunday, Mar.30.
	Mar.20	Don Marquis: <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i> Judith Jarvis Thomson: <i>A Defense of Abortion</i>	
Week 10	No Class (Spring Break)		
Week 11	Apr.1	Euthanasia	
	Apr.3	Daniel Callahan: <i>When Self-Determination Runs Amok</i> John Lachs: <i>When Abstract Moralizing Runs Amok</i>	
Week 12	Apr.8	Adolescent Autonomy	
	Apr.10	Maura Priest: <i>Transgender Children and the Right to Transition</i>	
Week 13	Apr.15	Genetic Manipulation	
	Apr.17	David B. Resnik: <i>The Moral Significance of the Therapy–Enhancement Distinction in Human Genetics</i>	
Week 14	Apr.22	Animal Experimentation	Exam 3 due by the end of Sunday, Apr.27.
	Apr.24	Reading TBD	
Week 15	Apr.29	Project workshop	
	May.1		
Week 16	May.6	Group presentation	Essay due by the end of Sunday, May 11.
	May.8		

Classroom Policies

All electronic devices should be muted and put away during class. Please let me know if you need electronic device accommodation during class.

Please do not read other materials or work on other courses/projects during class.

Evaluation

Pre-class quizzes (10%)

Except for the last two weeks, a reading quiz will be posted on Canvas and will be due before class each Tuesday. You are expected to read the required material and finish the quiz (usually straightforward or open-ended questions) BEFORE class. This will help you prepare for the class discussion. The lowest two scores will be dropped at the end of the semester.

Class participation (15%)

Class discussion is a crucial part of this course. Participating in class discussions helps you stay focused and understand the course material better. It also fosters communication and collaboration with people from different backgrounds.

Attendance will be taken for every class. At the end of each week, you will complete a self-evaluation of your class participation on Canvas. If your self-report is inconsistent with my record, I will reach out to discuss it; otherwise, your participation will be graded based on your self-report.

There will also be occasional class activities graded under this category.

Discussion board (5%)

A discussion board with thought questions will be posted each week on Canvas. You are expected to post your answers before we move to the next topic (typically by the end of each Monday.) You can get full credits if you finish 9 discussions out of 11 (you can miss 3 without penalty.)

Exams (15% each, 45% in total)

There will be three exams during the semester, each covering 3-4 weeks of material. All exams will be take-home, online, and open-notes, with a one-hour time limit.

Group project (Presentation 10% + Essay 15%)

Each student will pick one topic covered in the semester and form a group of 3-4 people to work on the project. The project should provide or evaluate an argument on the topic. At the end of the semester, each group will give a 10-minute presentation, and each student will turn in an essay of 3-5 pages. More instructions will be given on this project later in the semester, but it is a good idea to start thinking about topics you are interested in working on.

AI Usage

This course aims to train your skills to critically think, discuss, and write about complex moral issues, and relying on generative AI can often be an obstacle to that goal. Using artificial intelligence for classwork is discouraged and should be limited to searching, brainstorming, or proofreading. (Rule of thumb: if you can't legitimately ask your friend to do something for your work, don't ask it from ChatGPT. Also, note that generative AI is not always reliable on facts.)

Any use of AI should be indicated in endnotes. If a piece of work is detected to be AI-generated, you will not receive a grade for it. If you are unsure whether a specific use of AI is allowed, consult me before using it.

Extensions

Extensions can be approved only in exceptional cases. If you need an extension with good reasons, please let me know via email in advance. I reserve the right to not give an extension.

Late work without approved extensions will not be accepted. If you have a longer-term problem that is likely to affect your work throughout the semester, please talk to me as early as you can to see if we can make possible arrangements.

Excused Absence

Absences for religious holidays, athletic participation, or other university-sanctioned events are excused if you let me know by email up until 24 hours in advance of missed class.

Absences for illness, accidents, or personal tragedies are excused if you let me know via email no later than 24 hours after the missed class or provide appropriate documentation from a university official.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult the course instructor or the [Office of Academic Integrity](#).

If a piece of work is not by your own effort (this includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism, ghostwriting, or AI-generated content), the work will not receive any grade, and the incident will be reported to the university.

Feedback for the Instructors

Feedback about this course is always welcome. Feel free to email or talk with me if there are any suggestions/concerns that you would like to bring to my attention. You may also contact André Ariew (AriewA@missouri.edu), the Director of Graduate Studies of Philosophy

Department, to address concerns with the instructor. You will have the opportunity to submit an anonymous evaluation at the end of the course.

Grading Scale

Letter grades will be assigned at the end of the term using the following scale:

A+	98 and above
A	93 to 97
A-	90 to 92
B+	87 to 89
B	83 to 86
B-	80 to 82
C+	77 to 79
C	73 to 76
C-	70 to 72
D	60 to 69
F	59 or below

For statements on Disability Accommodations and Intellectual pluralism, see <https://provost.missouri.edu/faculty-affairs/syllabus-information/>.

I reserve the right to change the syllabus, including grading policies, when necessary. Any changes will be announced via Canvas announcement or email.