

**PHILOSOPHY 333 (99A, 99 B) Bio-Medical Ethics (Sept-Dec. 2024)**  
(abbreviated syllabus)

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Welcome to PHIL 333. This version of PHIL 333 is taught as an *Online Learning Course*. This means there are no set lecture times, and all learning is done remotely. The course is broken up into weekly lessons. The schedule for the course, assigned weekly readings, lesson summaries, and access to weekly discussions are available through Canvas. All written work is to be submitted through Canvas. Although the course content is largely text-based, you are welcome to meet with me in virtual office hours or by appointment over Zoom to discuss the course material or any of the assignments. Just join in on my scheduled office hours (no appointment necessary) or email me to set up an appointment. I look forward to meeting you.

**Office Hours:** Thursdays: 8-10 am on Zoom. See the Canvas course homepage for the meeting link.

**Course Description**

Is euthanasia morally permissible? Under what conditions, if any, should euthanasia or Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) be legal? What is the relationship between patient autonomy, competence, and informed consent? When, if ever, is paternalism morally justified? Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion morally wrong? Is it morally permissible for pregnant people to obtain and for doctors to provide medically unnecessary Caesarean sections? Should doctors provide alternative, unproven therapies to their patients who request them? Under what conditions, if any, is two-tier health care morally just? And are those conditions met in Canada today? What, *in general*, makes actions morally right or wrong, people virtuous or vicious, policies just or unjust?

In Philosophy 333, we will explore answers to these questions from a variety of perspectives. We will, in short, critically examine some leading normative ethical theories, and some important, and difficult, ethical issues in health care.

**Objectives for this course include:**

- Acquiring a critical grasp of leading normative ethical theories
- Gaining a critical understanding of some important philosophical literature on some moral problems in health care
- Developing your critical reasoning skills when it comes to identifying arguments in a text, stating those arguments in a precise and clear manner, and raising targeted objections to those arguments
- Encouraging you to consider your own views on selected moral problems in health care, to consider your reasons for your views, to examine your views and reasons critically, and to rethink your views in light of criticism.
- Improving your skills in writing in an organized, clear, fair-minded, and thoughtful

manner.

More generally, the aim of this course is not to tell you what to think, but to give you the skills to think for yourself, while enhancing your philosophical literacy. By successfully completing this course, you will gain a better understanding of moral theory generally; a greater familiarity with specific arguments on specific ethical issues in health care; a deeper understanding of your own views on these issues, and an enhanced ability to identify, articulate, develop, and critically analyze arguments.

Success in this course will require hard work; consistent participation and engagement with the course materials; writing clearly and carefully; being fair but critical of others' arguments, and of your own arguments; and a willingness to keep an open mind.

### Required Readings:

1. **Textbook: Debating Health Care Ethics: Canadian Contexts, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition**, Patrick Findler, Doran Smolkin, Warren Bourgeois. Canadian Scholars, 2019.

The textbook is available for purchase in print or electronic form through the publisher, <https://www.canadianscholars.ca/books/debating-health-care-ethics>

An e-copy is available through the UBC library at no charge:

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ubc/detail.action?docID=6282011>

Note that only 2 people can check the library e-book out at the same time, though you can download and save portions of the book in advance

2. **Selected Articles:** A selection of influential and important philosophical articles in health care ethics. Copies of these articles are available free of charge through the “Library Online Course Reserve” tab on the Canvas course home page.

### Explanation of the Textbook:

Debating Health Care Ethics: Canadian Contexts begins with a brief discussion of philosophical arguments and methodology (Chapter 1), and then turns to an in-depth examination of leading ethical theories (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, each co-author presents their favored ethical theory. The remaining chapters of the book focus on moral problems in health care and are written in **debate** format. More specifically, each chapter begins with a **drama** – a fictional case designed to introduce a particular moral problem – or a **case study**. The drama (or case study) is then followed by a **debate** between the three authors of the text. In the debate, you will witness (hopefully) a lively exchange of ideas, as different perspectives are considered, attacked, occasionally abandoned, sometimes refined, and at other times defended. You will see philosophers sometimes coming to agreement, and sometimes agreeing to disagree. You can then decide for yourself whether

you agree with any of the authors, why you reject some of the arguments presented, and you can develop your own thoughts on the issues raised in the drama and debate. The format is designed to show you how to develop an argument for a particular position, how to criticize an argument, and how to defend or revise an argument in light of criticism.

### Explanation of the Articles

The articles used in this course include some of the leading contributions to the field of medical ethics, on issues like abortion, autonomy, euthanasia, and access to health care. The articles are primary sources – typically, journal articles, and sometimes book chapters -- which are intended to supplement the debates in the textbook, and to provide students with good examples of professional, philosophical writing.

### Grades

Grades will be based on the following components: Participation in online Discussions

	10%
Completion of 2 Essays	60% (30% each)
Final Exam	30%

### Explanation of Graded Components of the Course

#### *Online Discussions:*

At the end of each lesson and throughout the textbook, discussion questions are given. You can go to the Discussion Board through Canvas and answer one of these questions; also, you can use the discussions to ask your own questions and make your own comments on the readings; or, you can comment on your classmates' postings. Discussions should work in a manner similar to classroom discussions. That is, **no one should answer all the questions asked**, discussions should be made in a timely manner, and you should not merely repeat answers to questions that were already given. To keep things manageable, **please limit yourself to a maximum of 2 comments per week** (not per lesson). Also, to keep discussions timely, Discussion Boards will lock two weeks after the material is assigned. At that point, you won't be able to post new discussions (*threads*) on that topic.

Note that these discussions are primarily for student interaction, although I do read all posts. **Please feel free to email me directly if you would like me to answer specific questions about the material.**

#### *Essay Questions:*

The essay questions focus on the moral problems raised in the textbook's Drama or Case-Studies and addressed in the textbook's Debates. Essays are designed to move us toward realizing the course objectives. To that end, each essay requires you to state your view on a specific ethical issue in health care; to present your reasons for your view; to consider objections to your argument; to defend your argument against these objections; to consider rival arguments; and to explain their weaknesses. It is expected that the papers draw, at least in part, on the assigned readings as a source of the relevant arguments that are discussed in your essays.

Essay questions will be given on three topics: Euthanasia; Abortion; and Two-Tier Health Care, each with its own due date. **You are required to complete 2 essays.** (You do not have the option of submitting more than 2 essays.) If you want feedback relatively early in the course, then you should submit a paper on euthanasia, for the other two papers are not due until nearer to the end of term. Papers will be graded and returned to you within 2 weeks of their due dates.

You are welcome to meet with me or one of the TA's on Zoom to discuss drafts or outlines of your paper. Just email me or one of the TA's to set-up a Zoom meeting.

### *Final Exam:*

The final exam is scheduled during the university's final exam period. It will be accessed through Canvas and written remotely on your personal computer. The final exam will be open note, and 3 hours long. The Final Exam will be based on the material covered in:

- Textbook, Chapter 1: Arguments and Philosophical Methodology
- Textbook, Chapter 2: Ethical Theory
- Textbook, Chapter 4: Autonomy and the Right to Refuse Care
- Textbook, Chapter 7: Caesarean-section by Choice
- Textbook, Chapter 10: Alternative Medications
- The Primary Source Readings (i.e., the philosophical articles on problems in healthcare)

The Final Exam will be a combination of medium-length and long-answer/essay questions. **A comprehensive study guide is included in the full version of this syllabus.**