BIOE 680-001 – Bioethical Theory, Fall 2021

Location: Room 101, 3647 Peel St.
Time: Tuesdays, 2:35pm – 5:25pm

Instructor: Dr. Phoebe Friesen
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Office Location: Room 302, 3647 Peel St
Office Hours: Thursdays, 11am – 12pm and by
appointment (just email me to schedule)

Course Description:

This course explores theoretical and methodological questions underlying the discipline of bioethics. It will begin with an examination of moral theories developed within applied philosophy, including principlism, utilitarianism, contract theory, as well as moral theories that foreground rights, virtues, or care, as well as reactionary approaches, such as narrative and feminist ethics. The course will then turn towards critiques of moral theories from the social sciences and from within philosophy and will consider underlying, meta-ethical questions related to the nature and source of morality. Current methodological disputes within the field, stemming from the complicated link between epistemic and ethical questions, will be explored through a closer look at the role of intuitions and thought experiments within bioethics and the ways in which culture may complicate bioethical analysis. In the final weeks, we will consider questions related to whether moral knowledge is shaped by identity and the problem of speaking for others.

Readings:

All required and supplementary readings will be made available on MyCourses.

Grading Breakdown:

Participation	10%
Reading Responses (6 total, 4.5% each)	27%
Moral Theory Presentation	12%
Reading Presentations (2 total, 7.5% each)	15%
Outline	10%
Abstract	6%
Final Paper	20%

Participation:

A portion of your grade will be based on your participation in class. This grade will reflect the quality, not quantity, of your contributions, as well as whether you abide by our community agreement and treat your fellow students with respect. Of course, because this is a small seminar class, the more you engage with the readings before class and the more thoughtful questions and comments you bring to the table, the more interesting our discussions are likely to be.

Reading Responses:

Reading responses are an opportunity to critically engage with the readings before our weekly discussions. They are due at 9pm the day before each class except for the days when you are giving a presentation – on those days, you are not required to submit a reading response. Reading responses should be submitted by email or on MyCourses.

Each response should consist of less than one page of writing (approximately 300 words). The first half should offer a summary of the position or argument you are interested in engaging with (this can be the thesis of a paper, an argument within a paper, or a point of contention between two papers). The second half should offer an original argument or response to the summary already offered. Finally, each should include one open question related to your response that could be used to guide class discussion.

Responses will be graded on the basis of your understanding and engagement with the readings, clarity of response, and originality of argument. While reading responses are assigned each of the 11 weeks that include readings (note that on 3 of these weeks you will present and so will not be required to submit a reading response), only your best 6 scores will count towards your grade. This means you can skip two reading responses without penalty or complete them all and have your two lowest grades deducted.

Some tips:
   • Don't try to include too much – there won't be space to discuss all of the readings, so try to narrow in on one interesting point or connection.
   • Engage critically or expansively. Avoid merely summarizing the readings.

Moral Theory Presentations:

Each student will give one moral theory presentations, either alone or with another student. Half of a class will be devoted to each of these presentations (60 minutes), so we have ample time devoted to exploring each theory. The presentation is largely a pedagogical exercise – you will be teaching your fellow students about a moral theory and engaging them in discussion and exercises that will help them understand it. In order to do this, you ought to engage with more than the required two readings on a theory – feel free to use the readings on MyCourses and/ or look beyond to other resources. If you are looking for bioethical cases to consider in relation to a moral theory, many can be found here, here, and here.

Each presentation should include both an explanatory portion (this can involve a powerpoint, a handout, or anything else that helps explain, but needs to introduce the theory to the class) and an interactive portion (this can involve case studies, small discussion groups, reflective exercises, or anything else, but needs to engage the class in participation that will help their understanding). You are strongly encouraged to incorporate your own bioethical interests into the presentation, considering, for example, how well the theory you are introducing stands up against some of the bioethical issues you are most interested in.

When preparing your presentation, feel free to use these questions (and any others that interest you) as inspiration:

- Where was this moral theory originally developed? By whom? For what purpose?
- What features are essential to it?
- How does one apply it?
- How has it changed over time? Who has changed it?
- Where has it had the most impact/ the least impact?
- What criticisms have been leveled against it? By whom?
- What advantages does this theory offer over others?
- Does this theory solve certain moral problems more than others? Which ones?
- What role has it played / does it currently play in bioethics?

Each moral theory presentation will be graded on the basis of four components related to the content of the presentation (history and uptake of moral theory, features of moral theory, engagement with advantages and disadvantages, application of theory to cases or dilemmas) and four components related to the success of the presentation (clarity, creativity, class participation, use of time).

Reading Presentations:

Each student will give two reading presentations during the term. These presentations should be very short (between 5-10 minutes long) and should include a brief summary of the relevant reading(s) as well as some critical reflections or connections to other readings/ topics, as well as a few discussion questions for the class. A handout should be included that provides a skeleton of the reading(s) you are responsible for summarizing (max. 2 pages – some examples are posted on MyCourses). Please email the handout to me at least one hour before class, so that I can circulate it to the rest of the class and post it on MyCourses.

Some tips:
- Use the handout to summarize key points made by the author(s).
- Some of the readings will be quite long and detailed and so you will be unable to cover everything that the author does – be thoughtful about what you include.
- Try to start with a broad overview (e.g., "this author is arguing that...(insert primary thesis)"), then offer some more detail (e.g., "they do so by providing evidence that...(insert skeleton of argument)"), and then comment on one or two things you think are worth discussing further (e.g., "I found it interesting / problematic that...(insert your thoughts)").

Grades will be based on both your presentation and handout, including your understanding of the reading, the clarity with which you present it, the connections or critical points you make, and the discussion questions you include.

Outline:

An outline of your final paper is due at 9pm on November 15th (the day before class). Note: this is the same week as the abstract workshop, and it will be much easier to write your abstract after you've developed an outline. Developing this outline will help you to create the shape of your final paper and to identify resources that you will engage with while writing it. The outline should be 1-2 pages and written in bullet point format, not paragraphs. Aim to include: a clear thesis, the shape of your argument/ discussion, the problem you're solving and how you will go about solving it, the resources you will rely on within the manuscript (e.g. an argument, empirical data, a theoretical

position), a discussion of objections one might make in response to your view (if this makes sense based on the topic), and a conclusion or discussion of next steps/ implications.

The outline should include at least 7 (although you'll likely want to read more than this) references to relevant readings that you will engage with in your paper and should make clear how you will engage with them (e.g. "Mackenzie and Scully (2007) raise doubts about our ability to use our moral imaginations to understand the lived experience of others. I will counteract this view by..." or "Hare argues that the role of the moral philosopher is to provide clarity with regards to morally laden words. I will aim to provide such clarity with regards to the word..."). Readings can be drawn from this class or elsewhere (although it depends on your topic, it's very likely you'll to draw on readings beyond those included on the syllabus).

Abstract Draft and Review:
Our class on Nov 16th will be devoted to peer review of abstract drafts. Each student will be required to submit a draft of an abstract (250 words) the day before this class (due at 9pm) and each student will be responsible for offering feedback on another's abstract during class. An abstract is a very condensed version of a paper, and should convey to the reader: your thesis, the problem you are solving, the method you will employ, the contributions that your paper makes, and the implications of your position/ argument. An abstract should convey the broad outline of a paper and give a reader a sense of what to expect within it – this means that, while the product is very short, a lot of thinking occurs before it is written. This can be a great opportunity to prepare an abstract to submit to a conference (the deadline for submissions to the Canadian Bioethics Society annual meeting is usually just a few weeks after this). Abstract writing resources and examples are posted on MyCourses.

Final Paper:
The final paper should be 3000-4000 words (double-spaced) and should be submitted by email by Dec 7th at midnight. The paper can be on any topic you like, provided that is somewhat connected to the topics discussed in class. It should make an argument for a position related to bioethics and should be substantiated by reference to published work within the field. It is wise to, and you are encouraged to, write on a topic related to your thesis project.

Some possible questions you could consider in your paper include:
- Is moral theory X better than moral theory Y in responding to issue Z?
- What role should moral theories play in bioethics?
- What moral theory does policy document X implicitly rely on? Is it successful in doing so?
- What bioethical methodologies are most appropriate (for question X) and why?
- What role should intuitions play in bioethics?
- Is morality universal or relative and how should bioethics respond?
- What are the most significant bioethical issues related to issue Z?

If you haven't written this type of paper before, a few resources with advice for writing are included on MyCourses. Any reference style, as long as it is consistent, is permitted (the standard style from your field is recommended).

Land Acknowledgement:

McGill University is located on unceded traditional territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation, as well as land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. I am grateful to live and work on this land. I acknowledge the immense harms Indigenous communities have faced, and continue to face, as a result of settler colonialism, but I also acknowledge their resistance and resilience. As a scholar of Bioethics, I think it is important to continuously consider how systems of health care and education contribute to these harms and how they might be improved.

Accommodations:

If, at any point in the term, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, or experience of this course, you are welcome (and not required) to get in touch with me to discuss the best ways to meet your needs. You are also encouraged to reach out to the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) (Suite 410, 1010 Sherbrooke Ouest / 514-398-6009). OSD can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. They can also help ensure that you receive appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors.

Language of Assessment:

In accord with the McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or French any written work that is to be graded.

Academic Integrity:

All students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. According to the Code, any work that is suspected of being dishonest must be turned over to the disciplinary officer within your faculty. If you are unsure how to properly cite sources, please see me before submitting your work. See McGill's guide to academic honesty for more information.

Course Evaluations:

Informal feedback and suggestions are welcome at any point during or after the course. You will receive an email notice and invitation to a formal course evaluations at the end of term. I appreciate your honest evaluation and will use the results to improve the course. My department will use the results to assess my teaching performance. A minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

Assessment Policy:

The University Student Assessment Policy exists to ensure fair and equitable academic assessment for all students and to protect students from excessive workloads. All students and instructors are encouraged to review this Policy, which addresses multiple aspects and methods of student assessment, e.g. the timing of evaluation due dates and weighting of final examinations.

Library Liaison:

Genevieve Gore is the bioethics subject area librarian. She can assist with searching/locating bioethics resources for your research. To make an appointment contact Genevieve.Gore@mcgill.ca or 514-398-3472.

Schedule of Readings:

Date	Readings	Due
Sep 7	**Introduction**	
Sep 14	**Moral Theory in Bioethics: Principles and Consequences** ▪ At least 2 readings on Principlism ▪ At least 2 readings on Consequentialism	Reading Response
Sep 21	**Moral Theory in Bioethics: Rights and Contracts** ▪ At least 2 readings on Deontology ▪ At least 2 readings on Social Contract Theory	Reading Response
Sep 28	**Moral Theory in Bioethics: "Feminine" and Feminist Approaches** ▪ At least 2 readings on Ethics of Care ▪ At least 2 readings on Feminist Ethics	Reading Response
Oct 5	**Moral Theory in Bioethics: Virtues and Narratives** ▪ At least 2 readings on Virtue Ethics ▪ At least 2 readings on Narrative Ethics	Reading Response
Oct 15	**Intuitions and Thought Experiments** ▪ James Rachels – Active and Passive Euthanasia (3 pages) ▪ Judith Jarvis Thomson – A Defense of Abortion (20 pages) ▪ Adrian Walsh – The Use of Thought Experiments in Health Care Ethics (7 pages) ▪ Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham - When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals may not Recognize (19 pages) ▪ Joshua Greene – From neural 'is' to moral 'ought': what are the implications of neuroscientific moral psychology? (4 pages)	Reading Response
Oct 19	**Meta-ethics and Culture** ▪ David Enoch – Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too) (14 pages) ▪ J. L. Mackie – The Subjectivity of Values (6 pages)	Reading Response

	▪ This American Life – Act 1: What You Don't Know (from Episode 585: Defense of Ignorance) (27 minutes) ▪ Laura Specker Sullivan – Uncovering Metaethical Assumptions in Bioethical Discourse across Cultures (33 pages)	
Oct 26	**Bioethical Imperialism?** ▪ Catherine Myser – Differences from Somewhere: The Normativity of Whiteness in Bioethics in the United States (11 pages) ▪ Derek Ayeh – Bioethical Silence and Black Lives (4 pages) ▪ Rebecca Bamford – Decolonizing bioethics via African philosophy: Moral neocolonialism as a bioethical problem (15 pages) ▪ Willie Ermine – The Ethical Space of Engagement (11 pages)	Reading Response
Nov 2	**Speaking for Others** ▪ Linda Alcoff – The Problem of Speaking for Others (28 pages) ▪ Catriona Mackenzie and Jackie Leach Scully – Moral Imagination, Disability, and Embodiment (17 pages) ▪ Kim Tallbear – An Indigenous, Feminist Approach to DNA Politics (Introductory Chapter of *Native American DNA*) (29 pages) ▪ Lime Jello – Why You Shouldn't Study Sex Workers (8 pages)	Reading Response
Nov 9	**(Which) Voices in Bioethics** ▪ Katie Saulnier – Telling, Hearing, and Believing: A Critical Analysis of Narrative Bioethics (12 pages) ▪ Subrata Chattopadhyay et al. – A Question of Social Justice: How Policies of Profit Negate Engagement of Developing World Bioethicists and Undermine Global Bioethics (12 pages) ▪ Carl Elliot – The Ethicists (Excerpt from *White Coat, Black Hat: Adventures on the Dark Side of Medicine*) (18 pages) ▪ Adam Hedgecoe – Bioethics and the Reinforcement of Socio-technical Expectations (24 pages)	Reading Response

Nov 16	Abstract Workshop – No Readings	Outline + Abstract
Nov 23	**Participatory Bioethics** ▪ Julie Bull – A Two-Eyed Seeing Approach to Research Ethics Review: An Indigenous Perspective (20 pages) ▪ Scott Neufield et al. – Research 101: A process for developing local guidelines for ethical research in heavily researched communities (11 pages) ▪ Research 101: A Manifesto for Ethical Research in the Downtown Eastside (15 pages – but mostly infographics) ▪ Michael Burgess et al. – Biobanking in British Columbia: discussions of the future of personalized medicine through deliberative public engagement (12 pages) ▪ Stephanie Solomon and Julia Abelson – Why and When Should we Use Public Deliberation? (4 pages)	Reading Response
Nov 30	**Bioethics in the Media** ▪ Catherine Porter – At His Own Wake, Celebrating Life and the Gift of Death (The New York Times) ▪ Sarah Zhang – The Last Children of Down Syndrome (The Atlantic) ▪ Arjun Byju – Excited Delirium: How Cops Invented a Disease (Current Affairs) ▪ Gary Greenberg – What if the Placebo Effect isn't a Trick? (The New York Times)	Reading Response
Dec 7		Final Paper