

Philos 155A: Medical Ethics

Instructor: Akacia Brillon

Class Meetings: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

All class meetings will be held on Zoom

Course Description

How should we assess the fairness of the current distribution of healthcare resources in the U.S.? When the distribution of healthcare resources is unjust, what moral obligations arise on the part of the state? How are citizens' obligations affected? Throughout this course, we'll tackle considerations of justice raised by specific issues, such as distributive justice in healthcare, commercial surrogacy, abortion, genetic screening, and end-of-life decision-making. By engaging in thoughtful consideration of what justice looks like in specific contexts, this course aims to equip you with the resources to think through current challenges to realizing a just healthcare system.

Course Requirements

Grade Components

Your grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Participation: 15%

Weekly discussion posts and replies: 20%

Paper 1 (3–4 pages): 30%

Paper 2 (4–5 pages): 35%

Attendance

You are required to attend every class meeting, arrive on time, and stay for the whole meeting. If you must miss class because you are sick, for religious observance, or due to an emergency, please email me in advance, and I will excuse the absence so that it does not affect your grade. You do not need to send me any documentation to prove your reason for absence, and you do not need to share any details that you are not comfortable sharing. Your final course grade will be lowered by 5% (i.e., half of a letter grade) for each unexcused absence.

Participation (15 points)

I assess participation based on the following three criteria:

1. **Preparation:** Come to class having read and thought about the day's assigned reading. (When a reading is listed in the schedule under a particular day, that means you should read it before that day's lecture.) I suggest printing the readings and having your printed copy of the day's reading with you when we meet on Zoom, so that you can refer to it easily. If that's not possible, then make sure to have the digital version of the day's reading open when we meet. Although I don't require you to annotate or take notes when you read before class, I strongly encourage you to do so. This can deepen your understanding of the reading and help you figure out what you agree with, what you disagree with, and what you have questions about. Taking notes can also improve your in-class contributions and eventually your papers by helping you articulate your thoughts ahead of time. I also encourage you to have a pen and paper with you during class, so that you can take notes by hand while still looking at the other discussion participants on your screen.

2. **Engagement:** Make contributions that meaningfully engage with the readings, lectures, and your classmates' ideas. When you speak, remember that you are contributing to an ongoing conversation; try to respond directly to what others have said. When responding to a classmate, address them by name. Don't worry about making mistakes! Mistakes are a good opportunity for you to improve *everyone's* understanding, and when we engage deeply with difficult philosophical material, we will inevitably make some mistakes along the way.

This is a discussion-intensive course. Discussions on Zoom go better when the participants can see each other. For that reason, you are required to keep your camera on during the entire meeting. If a special circumstance arises that prevents you from keeping your camera on, please let me know via email, so it does not impact your participation grade.

3. **Respect:** In this course, we'll discuss morally high-stakes questions that give rise to reasonable disagreement among people who are smart, thoughtful, and motivated to do the right thing. Show respect for your classmates by welcoming disagreement as an opportunity to deepen your thinking, offering reasons to support your own views rather than presenting your opinions as self-evident, remaining open to changing your mind, and directing criticism at ideas

and arguments rather than at people. Help facilitate others' participation by keeping your own contributions as concise as possible, leaving space for others to speak, and drawing others into the conversation. A good way to draw a classmate into conversation is to refer to something they said in their online discussion post, explain what you found valuable about it, and invite them to say more about it.

If you'd like to speak during class, please use the "Raise Hand" Zoom function (go to the toolbar at the bottom of the Zoom screen, click "React," and then click "Raise Hand"). I will sometimes call on people who do not raise their hands. I do this to make sure you all have a chance to contribute and to learn from each other's contributions. It's always ok to say you'd like to pass when I call on you; this will not hurt your participation grade.

In general, if you have something to say during our class discussions, it's better to say it out loud (once I call on you) rather than writing it in the chat, because we should have one conversation that we're all focusing on together, rather than having two conversations (an out-loud one and a written one) going on at the same time. However, if you have something to say that is brief, not too substantive, and will help the current speaker communicate their point - e.g., "Here's the page number of the passage you're referring to in the Shelby article..."; "The word you're trying to remember is 'reciprocity'" - then go ahead and put it in the chat.

I will email each of you by Monday, 09/14/26, to let you know your likely participation grade. If your projected participation grade is less than 15/15, I will offer suggestions for raising it.

Weekly online discussion posts and replies (2 points each; 20 points total)

Each Friday morning (starting on the Friday of Week 1), I will create a new online discussion thread where I'll post a prompt about the upcoming reading. You will write a post responding to the prompt by 6 pm the following Sunday, and you will write a reply to one of your classmates' posts by 6 pm the following Thursday. There will be five of these discussion threads, one for each of Weeks 2 - 6. So, you will write a total of 5 discussion posts and 5 replies over the course of the term; each post and each reply is worth 2 points. I will draw on your online posts to shape our conversations in class, and I might invite you in class to expand on something you wrote online.

In your reply to a classmate (**due 6 pm Thursday**), you are welcome to draw on anything we discussed in our Monday and Wednesday class meetings, as well as the readings assigned for that week. But it's also nice to submit your reply to a classmate earlier in the week, rather than waiting until Thursday.

You're welcome to write more than one reply per week; students sometimes reply to multiple classmates' posts or have extended back-and-forth conversations in the replies to one single post, and these online conversations can add a lot to our discussions in class. Writing extra replies will not earn you extra points, but I may take them into account at the end of the term when deciding whether to bump up a borderline course grade.

Posts and replies must be submitted on time to receive any credit, except in extraordinary circumstances (e.g., an emergency arises). You will receive full credit for a post if it fully answers the prompt and reflects a good effort to read and understand the relevant article(s). You will receive full credit for a reply if it is respectful of the classmate to whom you're responding and makes a substantive contribution engaging with your classmate's ideas (rather than just expressing agreement or disagreement). Since one purpose of the online discussion threads is to give you a low-stakes opportunity to engage with the readings and articulate your thoughts, you will not lose points for making mistakes (e.g., making an invalid argument or incorrectly explaining an author's view) in your posts or replies. Indeed, mistakes in discussion posts and replies can help me assess what I should focus on and clarify in class. So don't be inhibited from saying something just because you're not sure it's right.

Two papers (30 points and 35 points, respectively; 65 points total)

Your first paper should be 1200-1800 words long and is worth 30% of your final grade; it is due at 6 pm on [TBD]. Your second paper should be 1600-2400 words long and is worth 35% of your final grade; it is due at 6 pm on [TBD]. I will provide paper prompts and rubrics closer to the deadlines. For both papers, you may (but are not required to) use any of your online discussion posts as a starting point. This can include using some of the same wording in your posts. If you do this, please make a note of it in your paper. Please email me as soon as possible if you need to ask for an extension on a paper; it is easier to grant extensions the sooner they are requested.

If a paper is submitted late without an extension, the paper grade will be lowered 5% for each day it is late.

Email policy:

Having a philosophical discussion via email is much more inefficient and time-consuming than most students realize. So, I don't provide a substantive response to emails asking me to explain something or to evaluate a start on a paper. If you have a substantive question (i.e., about some course content or an idea you have), it's much better to ask me in lecture or office hours. Email is fine for administrative questions that require only a brief answer.

Academic Misconduct:

Students are expected to know and to follow the University's guidelines for academic honesty. Academic misconduct can occur in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. When in doubt about whether some academic practice is acceptable, ask your TA or the instructor for assistance. Always err on the side of avoiding academic misconduct. Any suspected violation of university policy regarding academic conduct will be reported directly to the Office of the Dean of Students. There are no exceptions.

Resources:

- Here is a direct link to The University's Guide to Academic Integrity:
<https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/portals/16/documents/studentguide.pdf>
- Here is a link to the UCLA Writing Programs: <http://www.wp.ucla.edu/>
- Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE): <http://www.cae.ucla.edu/>
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is a great resource for providing helpful overviews of topics related to the course (or philosophy in general). You can find the SEP at plato.stanford.edu
- UCLA Title IX: <https://sexualharassment.ucla.edu/>

****Please note that I am a mandated reporter****

Tentative Schedule

Readings will be made available online

Week 1: Introduction to Principles of Biomedical Ethics

Lecture 1 Readings:

- Beauchamp, T.L. (2003), "Methods and Principles in Biomedical Ethics"

Lecture 2 Readings:

- Cont. reading Beauchamp OR [TBD]

Week 2: Justice in Healthcare

Lecture 1 Readings:

- Daniels, N. (1985), *Just Health Care (Studies in Philosophy and Health Policy)*, "Towards a distributive theory," pp. 36-56 OR "Equity of access to health care," pp. 59-74

Lecture 2 Readings:

- Daniels, Norman (2008), *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly*, "When Are Health Inequalities Unjust? The Social Determinants of Health," pp. 79-102.

Week 3: Commercial Surrogacy

Lecture 1 Readings:

- Anderson, E. (1990), "Is Women's Labor a Commodity?" [will probably change]

Lecture 2 Readings:

- Satz, D. (1992), "Markets in Women's Reproductive Labor"

Week 4: Abortion

Lecture 1 Readings:

- Thomson, J. (1971), "A Defense of Abortion"

Lecture 2 Readings:

- Marquis, D. (1989), "Why Abortion is Immoral"

Week 5: Disability and Genetic Screening

Lecture 1 Readings:

- Stramondo, J. (2020), "Disability and the Damaging Master Narrative of an Open Future"
- Stramondo, J. (2017), "Disabled by Design: Justifying and Limiting Parental Authority to Choose Future Children with Pre-Implantation Genetic Diagnosis"

Lecture 2 Readings:

- Davis, D.S. (1997), "Genetic Dilemmas and the Child's Right to an Open Future"

Week 6: Euthanasia and End-of-Life Decision-Making

Lecture 1 Readings:

- Brock, D. (1992), "Voluntary Active Euthanasia"
- Velleman, D. (1992), "Against the Right to Die"

Lecture 2 Readings:

- Velleman, D. (1999), "A Right of Self-Termination?"