

Liberal Studies Degree Program  
Course Syllabus

**Bioethics: Current Debates in Science and Health Care**

Fall Semester, 2008, Mondays, 6:15-9:15 PM

No Class: Columbus Day, October 13, 2008

Instructor: Gladys B. White, Ph.D.

**Course Description**

Bioethics is a contemporary field of applied philosophy that encompasses health care ethics but also includes serious consideration of the ethical questions raised by new developments in science and technology. The purpose of this course is to help students become perceptive about the values implications of issues such as reproductive technologies, cloning, stem cell use, new developments in neuroscience, end-of-life decision-making and the ethical and social implications of advancements in nanotechnology. This will be accomplished by providing students with some of the basic tools of ethical reasoning and also identifying pertinent policy and human rights issues. The emphasis in the class is on an up-to-date understanding of the issues and the development of points of view based upon reasoned argument. Each class will focus on at least one important controversy and debate will be encouraged.

**Course Outline**

September 8, 2008 Introduction, brief history of bioethics and basic schemes of ethical reasoning

Beauchamp and Walters, pp. 1-35.

September 15, 2008 Ethics, bioethics and human rights

Post, Stephen G. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, Vol. 1 "Bioethics," Macmillan Reference, USA, Third Edition 2003, available in the National Reference Center for Bioethics Literature, Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University.

September 22, 2008 Reprogenetics- How can techniques of assisted reproduction come to the aid of the infertile? What are the risks and benefits?

Beauchamp and Walters, pp. 299-344.  
Greif and Merz, pp. 77-99.

- September 29, 2008 Cloning: From Dolly to Dorothy- Is there a real distinction between therapeutic versus reproductive cloning?
- Beauchamp and Walters, pp. 718-751.  
Greif and Merz, pp. 101-109.
- October 6, 2008 The Stem Cell Debate- Do we need human embryonic stem cells? How is this issue paradigmatic of controversies about tax-supported science versus science supported with private funds?
- Handouts
- October 20, 2008 Ethics, Identity and the Brain Sciences- What ethical opportunities and challenges are raised by new developments in neuroscience?
- Illes, pp. 3-87.
- October 27, 2008 Altering Attention Span, Enhancing Mood: Ethical Aspects of Pharmacological Intervention.
- Illes, pp. 169-241.
- November 3, 2008 Life-Sustaining Technologies and Techniques- Are there clear and reasonable limits about use? What can we learn from the case of Terry Schiavo?
- Beauchamp and Walters, pp. 397-472.  
Greif and Merz, pp. 357-365.  
The Case of Terry Schiavo
- November 10, 2008 Nanotechnology: Ethical, Legal and Social Implications
- Go to [www.bioethics.gov](http://www.bioethics.gov) to read the transcript of the meeting of the current President's Council on Bioethics, September 7, 2007, Session 5: Nanotechnologies and Ethics: European and Global Perspectives.

### **Required Texts**

Beauchamp, Tom L.; Walters, LeRoy *Contemporary Issues in Bioethics*, Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2007 (7<sup>th</sup> edition **only**).

Greif, K, Merz, J. *Current Controversies in the Biological Sciences, Case Studies of Policy Challenges from New Technologies*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007, ISBN 978-0-262-57239-2 (pbk). (This book may also serve as a good source for term paper topics.)

Illes, Judy *Neuroethics: Defining the Issues in Theory, Practice, and Policy*, Oxford University Press, 2006, ISBN: 0-19-8567219 (pbk).

## **Course Requirements**

Class attendance is required. Students will be asked to write a term paper (12-14 pages including bibliography) on a selected bioethical issue. This paper should be both explanatory and analytic so that a lay audience can appreciate the ethical arguments inherent in a current controversy or debate. In addition, students are expected to actively participate in class and take responsibility for contributing to discussions. Graduate students are expected to take an active role in identifying cases related to our core topics and sharing them with the class. Students will be assigned specific topics and may go to [bioethics@georgetown.edu](mailto:bioethics@georgetown.edu) to search for cases. There may be an occasional pop quiz which is not graded but serves as a learning validation tool for the student.

## **Disabilities Statement**

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center ([arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu)) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.