

Department: Philosophy and the Human Rights Institute

Course No.: 2170W [170W]

Course title: Bioethics and Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Number of Credits: 3

Contact Person: Anne Hiskes

Content Area: CA 1 Arts and Humanities

Catalog Copy: -PHIL/HRTS 2170W [170W] Bioethics and Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives. Either semester. Three credits. Open to sophomores. A. Hiskes , S. Parekh. Philosophical examination of the ethical and human rights implications of recent advances in the life and biomedical sciences from multiple religious and cultural perspectives.

Course Information:

-A. COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: The primary goals of the course are to educate students on the ethical and human rights issues posed by advances in basic and applied life sciences and provide them with the analytical and conceptual tools for articulating and assessing positions on these issues. Students will obtain an awareness of how different cultures, religions, and philosophical theories define and deal with these issues. Students will develop the knowledge and skills to achieve these goals through informal and formal writing assignments based on assigned readings and class discussions of cases. At the conclusion of the course students will be able to articulate and evaluate ethical and human rights issues arising from several areas of the life sciences. They will be able to discuss issues using concepts and perspectives of standard ethical theories such as utilitarianism and Kantianism, and will be able to compare and contrast standard Western perspectives on these issues with perspectives based on a variety of religious and cultural standpoints.

B. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

(1) Weekly reading assignments of about 30 pages per week. Assigned readings will include selections from classical foundational writings on Kantian and utilitarian ethics and contract political theory; foundational essays on Buddhist, Muslim, Judaic, Christian, Asian, African, and feminist approaches to ethics and human rights; philosophical essays on specific theoretical or applied areas of the sciences; and concrete cases extracted from the media or recent bioethics newsletters or journals.

(2) Class discussion focussed on the assigned readings or concrete cases.

(3) A number of informal, in-class writing prompts to gain writing experience and facilitate learning and discussion. (10% of the course grade) (3) One final exam. (25% of the course grade)

(4) Formal writing assignments with required revisions following instructor feedback .. Students will not be able to pass the course if they do not pass the writing component of the course. (65% of the course grade)

a. Three two-page editorial-style papers on an assigned bioethical or human rights issues . Peer-review and instructor feedback will provide a basis for revising and editing for the required second draft. (20% of the course grade)

b. One four-page analysis of a given bioethical-human rights issue presented to the students in a case-method format. Students will be asked to characterize the problem(s), identify relevant factors, and defend a position using assigned philosophical, and cultural or religious perspectives. Students will be required to revise and edit the paper. (20% of the course grade)

c. One five- six page paper on a current issue or case identified by the student from the media or popular publication. Students will be asked to present the issue or case in the paper, and then identify the relevant factors and defend a position using assigned philosophical, and cultural or religious perspectives. Students will be required to revise and edit the paper. (25% of the course grade)

C. COURSE TOPICS AND ISSUES The course is organized into three large sections. Section one introduces a variety of theoretical foundations and frameworks in ethics and human rights and also introduces the contested issues of ethical relativism and the universality of human rights. Section two examines the interplay between advances in the life sciences and conceptions of human dignity and worth, individual autonomy, disability, the good life, and collective versus individual decision-making. Section three examines the interplay between advances in the life science and issues of human identity, justice and the distribution of the benefits of science. The creators of the course have selected specific scientific areas and human rights issues in line with their own interests and areas of expertise. Other appropriate areas and issues could be included in later versions of the course, for example, environmental or health care ethics and justice.

Course Topics and Outline:

I. Theoretical Foundations and Cultural Contexts (5 weeks) Case Study – TBD. Example of an Issue of Current Media Interest

A. Introduction – Human Rights, Bioethics, and Multiculturalism Topics and issues addressed: How are bioethics and human rights related? How does, and should, cultural context affect views about ethics and human rights? What is the relation between religion, bioethics and human rights?

B. Foundations of Ethics and Human Rights Topics and issues addressed: What are the basic frameworks and concepts for ethical decision-making in Western philosophical thought? How are Western human rights concepts and theories grounded in ethical and political theory? How are Western human rights concepts challenged or supported by other cultural or religious traditions? To what extent do non-Western cultural and religious traditions diverge or converge? Readings and discussions include the ethical frameworks of Kant, Mill, Locke, Rawls ; the

religious frameworks of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism; and African, Asian, and Native North American perspectives on human rights.

II. Human Value and Human Dignity (5 weeks)

C. Human Dignity, Personhood, and the Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate

Topics and issues addressed: What is the meaning of “Human Dignity”? Does it provide an adequate basis for human rights? What is a person? How do concepts of human dignity and persons vary across cultures and with religious traditions? How do concepts about human dignity and persons play out in the debates about the ethics of human embryonic stem cell research? Readings include essays that explore these issues from a variety of religious perspectives (Jewish, Roman Catholic, Liberal Protestant, Islamic) and from an international perspective.

D. Human Value and New Reproductive Technologies Topics and issues: What reproductive choices are currently available to parents in having, choosing, or designing their children? What is a disability? What is a life not worth living? Does genetic selection for or against specific traits undermine the inherent worth of all human individuals? How do reproductive choices and practices reflect cultural, religious, and gender perspectives? Readings include Jonathan Glover, “Choosing Our Children: The Ethical Dilemmas of Genetic Intervention” (Clarendon Press, 2006); Michael Sandel, “Against Perfection”; and readings on the sex selection of embryos, and the recruitment of egg and sperm donors.

E. Human Enhancement and Autonomy Topics and issues: What is the “Good Life”? What are the norms for human achievement, happiness, and perfection? How do they reflect and vary with cultural, religious, and gender perspectives? What does it mean to make autonomous choices? What are the social justice risks posed by enhancement technologies? Should the future of the human genome be a matter of individual or community choice? Readings include essays about the human capacity to make autonomous choices about enhancement in a context of cultural values and selections from Francis Fukuyama's “Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution”.

III. Justice and the Life Sciences (4 weeks) F. Race, Genes, and Human Identity

Topics and issues: What are the social and personal risks of genetic determinism? How does genetic knowledge affect our sense of personal and group identity? What are some of the ethical, human rights, and social implications of the human genome project? Can theoretical and conceptual advances in the life science be used to promote justice? Materials include the movie “Race: The Illusion of Power”; selections from materials generated by philosophers in response to the Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications of the Human Genome Project; and selections from the race and genomics forum of the Social Sciences Research Council

G. Human Rights and Food

Topics and issues: Is the right to food a genuine human right? Is there a human right to the benefits of science? How do intellectual property rights and patents interact with human rights?

How do differing international attitudes towards genetically modified foods reflect cultural values about nature and the environment? How do these debates reflect power relationships? Readings will include Thomas Pogge's "Two Reflections on the First United Nations Millennium Development Goal"; readings on economic rights, duties to feed the poor, and duties to assist developing nations; readings on issues of informed consent and other ethical issues raised by the use of genetically modified foods.

How Meets Goals of Gen Ed.: -The proposed course serves all seven goals of the general education program. As an interdisciplinary course that examines ethical and human rights implications of advances in the life sciences, it will provide students with intellectual breadth. The course includes content taken from the sciences of basic and applied human genetics, human embryology, and plant and animal science, and analyzes these advances using a variety of philosophical and human rights theories and concepts. One message of the course is that the sciences should not be pursued independently of humanistic reflection and humanistic studies should be informed by advances in the life sciences. Students will develop **intellectual breadth and flexibility** of thinking by examining the ethical and human rights issues from a variety of philosophical, religious, and cultural perspectives.

As a course in bioethics and human rights, the primary focus of the course is developing **moral sensitivity**. Students will be asked to consider ethical and human rights dimensions of issues that might unreflectively be regarded as issues that can be settled by scientific research, and to consider the complexity of scientific developments in their mix of benefits and risks. Students will consider how advances in the sciences interact with foundational concepts of human dignity, the worth of the human individual, and the pursuit of happiness, and with more applied consequences for justice.

Through the evaluation of multiple perspectives on ethical problems and their possible solutions, and the requirements to defend their own positions in the context of class discussions and writing assignments, students will develop their capacities and skills for **oral and written communication and critical, analytical thinking**.

Students will study philosophical frameworks developed and accepted in Western ethical and political thought over the past four hundred years, and assess the values that ground these accepted Western frameworks in light of alternative value systems associated with Asian, African, Native American, and feminist traditions. One course theme is how religious, cultural, and economic context affect an individual's perception of the goods offered by scientific advances. Through this type of inquiry **students will deepen their understanding of their own temporal and spatial location in world history and enhance their awareness of the diversity of human culture and experience**.

The premises of the course, that the concepts of ethics and human rights, and indeed of the very idea of being human, interact with advances in the sciences, and that the moral and political issues faced by ordinary people in the future will be affected by scientific advances, provide evidence of the importance of life-long learning. Many of the formal and informal writing assignments will ask students to apply the theoretical tools of the course to issues currently under discussion in the media and or bioethics newsletters. In the final assignment students will be

asked to base their papers on a relevant issue of their own choice. **Thus through oral and written course assignments, students will develop skills that may be used throughout their lives in identifying, assessing, and using information.**

CA1 Criteria: -The course provides a broad vision of humanistic themes in that it is an inquiry into fundamental philosophical issues about the value of human life, the meaning of being human, and the demands of justice. The course explores the constraints and interpretations placed on science by philosophical, cultural and religious concepts of human dignity, human nature, human value, and justice, and also explores the inverse impact of the life sciences on these basic humanistic concepts. Students will be asked to explore and assess their own views on these topics as they reflect on alternative philosophical, religious and cultural perspectives. Thus the course will encourage students to explore their own traditions and values within the context of understanding other traditions and value systems. Assigned readings will be authored by respected philosophers. Students will be tutored on basic philosophical concepts of ethical theory and the critical, analytical techniques of humanistic disciplines.

W Criteria: -1. The writing assignments will be essential to meeting the course objectives. In some class sessions students will be asked to write one page in response to a specific claim or case to stimulate class discussion and thinking about issues. These assignment will be collected, receive comments, and students given credit for participation. The three 2-page editorial style writing assignments will require students to apply one or more of the frameworks under study to a specific issue, clearly explain to a general audience the issue at stake and its relevant components, and to then articulate and briefly defend a position from the perspective of the chosen framework. In the two longer papers students will be asked to engage in an deeper analysis of case or issue, to compare and contrast several approaches to that issue from Section I of the course, and articulate and defend their own position. The writing assignments of the course will count for 75% of the course grade. See the description of the course requirements for more details.

2. Writing instruction will occur both in the classroom and through written commentary. Individual conferences will be required for students who exhibit difficulties with their writing, but all students will be given opportunities for conferences. Feedback from peer review will be provided for the short editorial-style papers as well as instructor feedback. Students will be required to incorporate this feedback in their second drafts and graded accordingly. Writing instruction will focus primarily on clarity, accuracy, thesis development and support, and logical organization.

3. Each paper assignment will require a graded first draft and a graded revised second draft. The grade for an assignment will be composite grade for the first and second drafts. Complete credit for an assignment will be given only if the second draft shows genuine effort at improving the paper. 4. The syllabus will inform students that they must pass the writing portion of the course in order to pass the course.

Role of Grad Students: -No expected role. Only faculty will teach the course.

Supplementary Information: -This course has been and will continue to be developed with support from a General Education Course Development grant to Dr. A. Hiskes and S. Parekh. They plan to team teach the course Spring 2008, with each instructor being responsible for the W-instruction of 19 students. Dr. Hiskes participated in the "teaching by the case method" workshop in preparation for developing and teaching the course.