

**PHIL343 Biomedical Ethics**  
Fall 2019, M-T-Th 11:35-12:25  
Arts W-215

Instructor: Professor Iwao Hirose  
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*Course Description*

This course will investigate philosophical issues arising from the practice of health care and health care system. The course is divided into three parts. The first part is focused on the central issues in conventional bioethics. Topics include non-therapeutic abortion, infanticide (after-birth abortion), physician-assisted suicide, prenatal screening, genetic enhancement, etc. The purpose of the first part is to understand the philosophical way of thinking, as distinguished from legal or political thinking, in medical contexts. The second part is focused on the ethics of allocating scarce health care resources. We will focus on three fundamental questions concerning justice in health and health care: (1) What is health and how do we measure health benefit?; (2) When are health inequalities unjust?; (3) How can we meet health needs fairly under resource constraints? The purpose of the second section is to understand how a population's health care system should be evaluated. The third part is group research and presentation. The purpose of group research is to experience "mock ethics committee" in hospital or health policy unit. In the real situation of ethics committee, people with different expertise, cultural/religious background, and goals must agree to a set of recommendations on difficult problems in limited time line. Throughout the third part, I will invite you to put yourself in a position of health policy maker, health care administrator, and hospital director, who encounter difficult, complex, and highly ethical decision problems. By the end of this course, you will learn (a) the theoretical structure of ethical problems in medical practice, (b) how we reason when we allocate health and health care resources fairly and evaluate the quality of health care system, and (c) how we think philosophically.

*Trigger alert*

- This course is a 300-level course in philosophy. It is not a professional training course in medicine (hence, taking this course is not likely to increase the chance that you get admitted to a medical school in the future). We do NOT assume prior knowledge in philosophy. However, we DO assume the basic level of analytical and writing skills in humanities. Therefore, the instructor and teaching assistant will not coach you how to write academic essay. It is advisable that you take one or two 200 level courses in humanities before taking this course. Having said this, through a series of small assignments and a midterm essay, you will have opportunities to improve the analytical and writing skills. In any case, we strongly recommend reading
  - Jim Pryor's *Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper* (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>), and/or
  - Vaughn and McIntosh, *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students* (OUP Canada, 2013), and/or
  - consulting with McGill Writing Centre Tutorial Service (<https://www.mcgill.ca/mwc/tutorial-service>)
- In this course, we will discuss sensitive and emotionally challenging topics (e.g. abortion, miscarriage, infanticide, euthanasia, killing, and so on). Please be prepared to discuss sensitive topics in a serious and respectful manner.

*Format*

There will be two lectures and one conference per week. Lectures meet Monday and Thursday at Arts W-215. The first lecture will be on September 3. Conferences meet Tuesday and start on September 17.

*Textbook:*

- Greg Bognar and Iwao Hirose. *The Ethics of Health Care Rationing: An Introduction*. Routledge (2014). [Available via McGill World Cat or at the course reserve in library]
- Articles on MyCourses

*Supplementary books (highly recommended):*

- John Harris. *The Value of Life*. Routledge (1985). [Published 30 years ago, but simply classic!]
- Tom Beauchamp and James Childress. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics. Seventh Edition*. Oxford University Press (2012). [The most standard and comprehensive textbook for biomedical ethics course in medical school – less philosophical]
- Norman Daniels. *Just Health*. Cambridge University Press (2008). [The most important book on the normative foundations of health care system]
- Leonard Flick. *Just Caring*. Oxford University Press (2009). [A good book on health care rationing in the US context]
- Peter Ubel. *Pricing Life: Why It's Time for Health Care Rationing*. MIT Press (2001). [Introduction to health care rationing]
- Erik Nord. *Cost-Value Analysis in Health Care: Making Sense out of QALYs* Cambridge University Press (1999). [Advanced and seminal work by the most eminent health economist]
- Paul Menzel. *Strong Medicine: Ethical Rationing of Health Care*. Oxford University Press (1990).

*Reading schedule*

Please see the separate file for the *tentative* schedule of required readings. The course instructor reserves the right to alter the schedule during the fall semester (I have not changed it in previous years, but I may need to change it under certain circumstances).

*Requirements and assessments*

In order to pass this course, you must complete (1) midterm take-home exam, (2) group research, and (3) final exam.

- 3 short assignments (5pt x 3): max 15pt
- Midterm take-home exam: max 20pt
- Conference attendance and participation: max 10pt (attendance max 7pt, participation max 3pt; See the absence penalty policy below)
- Group research: max 20pt
- Final exam: max 35pt

*Assignments*

Each response must be maximum 800 words (excluding references and end/footnotes) and submitted through the MyCourses assignment function.

*Midterm take-home exam*

Midterm exam should be maximum 2,000 words (excluding references and end/footnotes) and submitted through the MyCourses assignment function.

*Late submissions*

Late submission of midterm take-home exam and assignments will be downgraded at a rate of 2pt per day on their grade for the course (not 2% on the essay grade), including weekend/holiday days. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) *only when* requested before the exam is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor's note documenting illness. Requests must be submitted to TA, cc-ing Professor Hirose. To avoid a late submission penalty, submit WELL BEFORE the due time.

### Conference attendance and participation

Weekly conference attendance is mandatory. There will be two conference groups. Please sign up for one of them via Minerva before September 17. If your schedule permits, please choose the 10:35 conference [this conference group tends to be much smaller than the 11:35 conference group]. Conference is important part of this course because discussion plays fundamental role in philosophy. In conference, you put forward your own arguments, and your arguments will be cross-examined by your classmates under supervision of TA. The success of conference discussion depends on attendance, preparation and participation of students. Therefore, we take attendance and participation very seriously. There will be *disproportional* penalty on conference absences. [1 absence, 1pt reduction; 2 absences, 3pt reduction; 3 absences, 6pt reduction; and 4 absences, 10pt reduction] This means 4 or more conference absences will result in nil point for attendance and participation, regardless of the level of your participation in conference. The attendance grade (max 3pt) must be earned during conferences. This means that if you attend all conferences but remain passive in conference discussion, you will receive only 7pt.

### Group work

Each group proposes and defends a set of recommendations on a specific topic. We will assess the depth, persuasiveness, coherence and originality of group presentations and the performance in Q&A section (presentation 12 min, Q&A 8 min). Everyone in the same group will receive the same grade. However, when two or more students in your group judge that you did not make fair contribution to the group research, we will deduce 10pt from group research grade (not 10% of group research grade).

### Final exam

Examination will take place on the date that the University sets. The exam will consist in a set of short comprehension questions and two essay questions.

The University requires that the following notices appear on every syllabus:

- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.