Description

This course in bioethical conflicts serves as an introduction to Western moral and religious traditions. It specifically targets important and contentious positions about killing, saving lives, prolonging and enhancing lives. Thus the interface between religion and biomedical ethics is not to be avoided, but to be explored with respect for all reasoned perspectives. Issues in health care, as viewed by more general normative concerns, such as justice, love, autonomy and rights, utilitarianism, self-sacrifice, gender, virtue, and community are addressed front and center. The plight of real people, like each of us, living in this world of concrete problems, is informed by many factors. Ethnic concerns, backgrounds, hierarchy, and gender are just a few that influence our moral compass as we each individually see the world around us. Our topics cannot and should not avoid the political threads of our decision-making, but rather interrogate how we arrive at moral decisions. Exploring both sides of bioethical conflicts will become a tool, a new skill, and a growing edge for personal development. Our overarching principles guiding our thoughtful discussions will be respect and kindness for each other, especially when the views are not necessarily shared. Readers will not be selected to reinforce your current thinking, but rather to explore antipodal thinking of those classmates who may see the issue quite differently. The organization of the course is to survey and then to interrogate and compare the positions of religious and secular thinkers. Foremost, you will be encouraged to engage in critical reflection of each of our topics. Such reflection and self-discernment is designed to help each of us to refine convictions about issues as deeply felt as killing and saving. Each of the topics listed below is a “hot-button” issue in the real world. Perhaps the best way to approach each topic is to intentionally select the position on a topic to defend that on face value you do not support. Delving into the beliefs, thinking, and backgrounds of the position contrary to your own will help you to build skills for a life long journey in ethical conflicts for the 21st century.
Class structure and operation

Class will meet once per week. Typically, one of the course directors will provide a brief overview to center and sharpen the discussions. Well-informed, active discussion including all members of the class is the very essence of the course. *Class members will be asked to volunteer to act as a discussion leader for either the position “for” or “against” the topic for that session.* Attendance is a must, as is prior reading in advance of the course. Give yourselves adequate time to read and reflect and then to prepare a thoughtful, respectful position to defend. To assist you, be sure to bring the assigned reading with you to each class. In advance, class members will sign up to manage the face-off between opposing groups for at least two sessions.

Grading of course performance

Grading of the course breaks down as follows:

25%: Attendance/Participation Grade---*you start with an “A+”*

- 1 missed class = B for this section.
- 2 missed classes = C for this section.
- 3 missed classes = D for this section.
- 4 missed classes = F (*i.e.*, this constitutes a failure of the entire course)

*Plus the best three scores (75% as aggregate) of the four utrum papers submitted.*

25%: Utrum paper 1 (on *Abortion*)---*September 24th*

25%: Utrum paper 2 (on *Euthanasia, Right-to-die, or the Death Penalty*)---*October 15th*

25%: Utrum paper 3 (on *Biological Enhancement, Stem Cell Use, or Cloning*)---*November 5th*

25%: Utrum paper 4 (on *Universal Healthcare and/or Personal Responsibility*)---*December 3rd*

Please note: the four papers are 3 or more pages in length, due about a week after the time that a unit has finished.

Academic honesty

In keeping with the best traditions of learning, cheating and/or plagiarism are strictly to be avoided. Ideas that you make use of from other sources require acknowledgement. Use of Internet-only sources is to be avoided and use of simple citations to websites is not acceptable. Even in the event that you are paraphrasing someone else’s views, please be sure to provide the source.
The course text should be ordered in advance. Assigned readings are to be completed before each class time. A few copies of the text will be available on loan from the instructor.

Vaughn, Lewis
*Contemporary Moral Arguments: Readings in Ethical Issues*
2nd edition
(New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)
I. What is Ethics? What is “Religious Ethics”? How do Traditions Inform Ethics? Do Ethics Depend on Religion?

August 27: Chapter 1: Moral Reasoning (Professor Stephen G. Post)

II. Does Morality Need “Religion”? 

September 03: Chapter 2: Moral Theories (Professor Stephen G. Post)

III. Early Termination of Pregnancy 

September 10: Chapter 3: Abortion 


Film: *The Last Abortion Clinic*, FRONTLINE PBS documentary, 2005. 

Introduction to the use of the “utrum” analytic essay.

IV. Drug Use & Society 

September 17: Chapter 4: Drugs & Autonomy 


V. Death & Euthanasia

September 24: Chapter 5: Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide 


Film: *Living with Dying* (Films for the Humanities & Science, 2000, 50 min)

Abortion utrum paper #1 is due.
VI. Right-to-Die & Physician-assisted Suicide

October 01: Chapter 5: Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide (continued)


Film: The Suicide-Tourist (FrontLine PBS, 2010, 55 min) selected sections. 
How to Die in Oregon (New Video Group, 2012, 107 min) selected sections.

VII. Corporal Punishment & the Death Penalty

October 08: Chapter 7: The Death Penalty


Film: Inside Death Row (National Geographic, 2010, 50 min) selected sections viewed.

VIII. Human Flourishing & Biological Enhancement

October 15: Chapter 6: Genetic Engineering & Cloning (part 1)

Additional readings (PDFs available and emailed by Dr. Post): Arthur Caplan, “An Unnatural Process: Why it is Not Inherently Wrong to Seek a Cure for Aging,” Post and Binstock, 271-285 

Film: GATTACA (Niccol A. (director), Columbia Pictures, 1997) 107 min and associated Cambridge Wizard Student Guide on genre, style, and ethics.

Utrum paper #2 on either euthanasia, right-to-die, or death penalty is due.
IX. Human Stem Cell Biology & Cloning

October 22: Chapter 6: Genetic Engineering & Cloning (part 2)


Film: Ghost in Your Genes, A NOVA and BBC documentary, 2008.

Film: Clone, National Geographic documentary, 2010.

X. Freedom of Speech: Is There a Right to Censorship?

October 29: Chapter 9: Pornography & Free Speech

Film: The Social Costs of Pornography: A Consultation, The Witherspoon Institute Lectures

XI. Healthcare, Is it a Right?

November 05: Chapter 10: Economic Justice: Health Care

Additional readings: (available on-line; please print, read, and bring to class for discussion)
Atul Gawande, "Testing, Testing":
http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/12/14/091214fa_fact_gawande
Jerry Adler and Jeneen Interlandi: "The Hospital that Could Cure Health Care":
Carla Keirns, ""Dying of a Treatable Disease":
http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/collection (cut and paste link below)
http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/28/6/1807.full.pdf+html?sid=ec5e8ca1-9676-4fcc-86e4-a45fa1ea78dd

Film: Sick Around America (FRONTLINE PBS documentary, 2009, 55 min)

Utrum paper #3 on biological enhancement, or stem cell biology, or cloning is due.

XII. Is One’s Personal Health a Responsibility to Society?

November 12: Chapter 12: Economic Justice and Global Obligations

Additional readings:
http://www.factcheck.org/UploadedFiles/emanuel_lancet.pdf
The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Nobel Prize acceptance speech:  

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Beyond Vietnam speech:  (cut and paste link below)  
http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_beyond_vietnam/

Film:  The Weight of the Nation: Confronting America’s Obesity Epidemic (HBO/NIH/IOM documentary) selected sections will be shown.

XIII. Military Ethics, Drone-based Killing, and Hunger Strikes

November 19: Chapter 8: War, Terrorism, and Torture

Additional topics and readings:  Readings: War  (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)  
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/

Drone-based killing:


Battlefield trauma and clinical trials

https://www.sciencemag.org/content/331/6022/1261.full

Force-feeding hunger-striking prisoners


Ethics of military command

Use of private contractors


Film:  *Nova: Rise of the Drones* (2013, ~55 min) selected segments.

Film:  *Doctors of the Dark Side* (2011) “Compelling drama about America’s worst human rights scandal...”

**XIV. No Class**

**November 26:**  No Class, Thanksgiving *(suggest starting work on your final utrum paper, due December 5th)*

**XV. Dinner Discussion: Sanctity of Life & the Environment**

**December 03:**  Chapter 11: Animal Rights and Environmental Duty

Venue:  1 Huyler Court, Setauket, NY 11733, please come to dine and to discuss the final topic.


*December 03: Utrum paper #4 on universal health care and/or responsibility or military ethical topics is due.*