

Feminist Bioethics

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Sample Syllabus

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine various feminist critiques of mainstream bioethics and explore the growth of feminist bioethics as its own distinct sub-field. We will work through feminist conceptions of autonomy and personhood, and discuss how those conceptions affect decision making with respect to medical interventions. We will focus upon ethical questions and cases that highlight feminist concerns about reproductive choice, reproductive technology, dependency and disability, gender and sex, and power imbalances. Lastly, we will explore global responsibility toward the provision of healthcare, especially in underdeveloped countries where access to healthcare is a major barrier to achieving a decent quality of life for women and children.

Class readings will be supplemented with specific cases that draw our attention to relevant ethical dilemmas that involve, among others, autonomy and abortion, gene manipulation, parental decision making over a child's healthcare, care for the disabled (especially those who cannot consent to care), gender construction, power imbalances, and resource allocation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The goals of this course are to provide students with an understanding of historical and contemporary debates in feminist bioethics and, by doing so, engage them in broader philosophical debates about the ethics of medicine, the scope of law, and political and social culture. By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Recognize, explain, and reflect upon the major philosophical arguments covered in this class, and critically compare them.
2. Understand the tenets of bioethics and have the confidence to apply them to current events.
3. Hone critical thinking skills by analyzing philosophical arguments.
4. Refine writing skills through course papers and exams.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 Introduction
Principles of Bioethics:
<https://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/tools/princpl.html>

- “Ethical Theory and Bioethics” in *A Companion to Bioethics* (2nd Ed.)
- Week 2 “Ethics and Feminism” in *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*
 “Feminist Bioethics: Where We’ve Been, Where We’re Going.” Hilde Lindemann, in *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*
- Week 3 “A Care Approach” in *A Companion to Bioethics* (2nd Ed.)
 Childress, J. (1990). “The Place of Autonomy in Bioethics.” *Hastings Center Report*, 20(1): 12-17
- Week 4 “Personhood” in *A Companion to Bioethics* (2nd Ed.)
 Thomson, Judith J. (1971) “A Defense of Abortion,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1(1): 47-66.
- Week 5 Hursthouse, R. (1991) “Virtue Ethics and Abortion,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 20(3): 223-246.
 McLeod, C. and FitzGerald, C. (2015) “Conscientious Refusal and Access to Abortion and Contraception.” in *The Routledge Companion to Bioethics*
- Week 6 “Assisted Reproduction, Prenatal Testing, and Sex Selection.” Laura M. Purdy, in *A Companion to Bioethics* (2nd Ed.)
 Kittay, Eva. “On the Expressivity and Ethics of Selective Abortion for Disability: Conversations with My Son.”
- Week 7 Glover, J. (1984) *What Sort of People Should There Be?* New York: Penguin books. (selection)
 Baylis, F., 2013, “The Ethics of Creating Children with Three Genetic Parents,” *Reproductive Biomedicine Online*, 26: 531-34.
- Week 8 Wendell, S. “The Social Construction of Disability.”
 “Feminism & Disability.” Anita Silvers, in *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*
- Week 9 “Protecting Faith Versus Protecting Futures: Religious Freedom and Parental Rights in Medical Decision Making for Children.” Lynn Pasquerella, in *Having and Raising Children: Unconventional Families, Hard Choices, and the Social Good*.
- Week 10 “Gender and Bioethics,” Jan Crosthwaite; in *A Companion to Bioethics* (2nd Ed.)
 Haslanger, Sally. “Gender and Social Construction” (TF 16-23).

- Week 11 Butler, Judith. "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality." *GLQ* (2001): 621-636.
Powell, T. and Stein, E. (2014). "Legal and Ethical Concerns about Sexual Orientation Change Efforts," *Hastings Center Report*: 44(s4):S32-S39
- Week 12 "Regulating Sexuality: Gender Identity Disorder, Children's Rights, and the State." Ellen K. Feder, in *Having and Raising Children: Unconventional Families, Hard Choices, and the Social Good*.
[Watch in Class](#): "Raising Ryland: Parenting A Transgender Child"
- Week 13 "Race and Bioethics." Alexis Shotwell and Ami Harbin, in *The Routledge Companion to Bioethics*.
"Medicalization, 'Normal Function,' and the Definition of Health." Rebecca Kukla, in *The Routledge Companion to Bioethics*.
- Week 14 "Society's Allocation of Resources for Health." Daniel Wikler & Sarah Marchand, in *A Companion to Bioethics (2nd Ed.)*
"Global Health Responsibilities." Christopher Lowry & Udo Schuklenk, in *A Companion to Bioethics (2nd Ed.)*