

*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience,  
but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*

- Martin Luther King Jr., '48



[Bioethics - 43488 - HPHI 475A - 01](#)

Class 10:00 am - 10:50 am MWF Sale Hall 110 Aug 26, 2009 - Dec 12, 2009

*Students are responsible for understanding all the information and policies presented in this syllabus here and online.  
Students will be referred to these documents when their questions are answered on them.*

**TO DO:**

1. Purchase books (McGinn at bookstore; others online if cheaper?).
2. Sign up for email list at Google groups through the blog: <http://groups.google.com/group/morehouse-bioethics>  
Link available through the course blog: <http://morehousebioethics.blogspot.com/>.
3. The syllabus is also available at <http://sites.google.com/site/nobisphilosophy/2009Bioethics.pdf>
4. Begin reading and writing assignments at the end of the back page on this short syllabus (over).

**Instructor:** Dr. Nathan Nobis ([nathan.nobis@gmail.com](mailto:nathan.nobis@gmail.com)) **Office:** Philosophy & Religion Department, Sale Hall 113  
**Office Hours:** 2-3 MWF and by appointment (but please let him know if you want to meet)

**Catalogue Description:** An introduction to bioethics or bio-medical ethics, the attempt to answer ethical questions that arise especially out of practices in the (life) sciences, healthcare and related fields.

**Extended Description:** This course provides students with the *opportunity* to improve their skills at reasoning critically about moral issues. Students will learn some basic logic and critical thinking skills and apply them to theoretical and practical questions about morality. We will practice identifying precise and unambiguous moral conclusions (i.e., exact perspectives taken on moral issues) and the reasons given for and against these conclusions. We will then practice evaluating these reasons to see if they provide rational support for these conclusions or not. We will think about what helps people think more carefully and critically about moral issues and what factors and influences discourage this. We will discuss influential ethical theories and moral principles – answers to the questions ‘What’s the basic difference between a right and wrong action?’ and ‘What *makes* right actions right and wrong actions wrong?’ – and apply our critical thinking skills to moral issues that arise in bioethics; for a list of these issues, see the Tables of Contents for the books below.

**Books:**

The first book, by McGinn, which we will need immediately, is very cheap (>\$10?) and available in the bookstore; the others you might want to get cheaper used on Amazon or another online bookstore:

1. [\*Moral Literacy: Or How to Do the Right Thing\*](#) by [Colin McGinn](#)

This book provides a nice, brief introduction to ethics.

2. [\*Animal Rights, Human Wrongs: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy\*](#) by [Tom Regan](#)

This book provides a nice overview and critical introduction to moral theories, paired with discussion of an important set of issues in bioethics, namely the treatment of animals.

3. [\*The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty\*](#) by [Peter Singer](#)

A discussion of an important set of issues in bioethics, namely those related to absolute poverty and the absence of health care (and basic health) on a global scale.

4. [\*The Elements of Bioethics\*](#) by [Gregory Pence](#)

An overview of a range of bioethical issues.

**Written Requirements / Assignments:**

1. Four formal papers; details forthcoming on all these.
  - a. One on one of the chapters / moral issues in McGinn. 20% of grade
  - b. One on Regan’s critique of an ethical theory and/or his argument in favor of ‘the rights view’. 20% of grade.
  - c. A book review of the Singer book. 20% of grade
  - d. Final paper: find a primary source article(s) discussed in Pence, Singer or Regan and write a critique of it. 20% of grade

***Late papers, drafts, topic selections, and findings of source materials will be severely penalized, affecting your final grade.***

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2. Periodic daily writing assignments, to help encourage you to do the reading more carefully and be prepared for class. Announced in class and via the blog and email list. 20% of grade
  3. Participation, including leading discussion (and being seriously prepared to lead discussion and teach the material. 20% of grade
  4. and present the controversies for the day. 20% of grade
- 4. Extra Credit Opportunities:**
- There will likely be events addressing ethical and/or philosophical issues that I'll encourage you to attend and write up a 3 page *detailed* summary and reaction to for variable bonus points. These are due, in class, within one week of the event. These events will only be announced by the email group.

**Rules:** Always come to class: after three absences your overall grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter grade for each additional not *officially* excused absence. Students with perfect attendance will have their grade raised by 1/3 of a letter grade. Be on time: if you are late, you might not be admitted to class. Be prepared. Do the reading, carefully: you must read and re-read, take notes, outline, highlight and underline: you should be prepared to answer basic questions about the readings (e.g., what's the author's main conclusion(s) and where does he state them in the reading, what are his premises?). Take the time to do a very good job on everything we do. Bring your materials, always: if not, you may be asked to leave. Do not text message, surf the net or abuse technology: if you do, you maybe be asked to leave class. Contribute positively to class discussion. Ask questions. *Do not plagiarize or cheat in any way: if you do, you will fail the course immediately:* do your own work and do not ever look at any other students' work "as an example" of what to do. Have fun, learn a lot, and grow to become a more ethically and intellectually engaged person!

**Assignments:** Readings should be done in advance for the day assigned. *Exact readings and assignments will be announced in class, sent through the email group and posted on the course blog at <http://morehousebioethics.blogspot.com/>. If you come to class, you should know exactly what the current assignments are.*

### **First reading assignments:**

#### **After reading the Preface and Introduction to McGinn, we will read these:**

- James Rachels, "Some Basic Points About Arguments": <http://sites.google.com/site/nobisphilosophy/rachels-on-arguments.pdf>
- James Rachels, "A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy," available here if you don't yet have the books: <http://aphilosopher.googlepages.com/rachels-intro-to-ethics.pdf> Writing assignment: which of the *three final* ethical theories – social contract theory, utilitarianism and/or Kantianism – are best and why? (Maybe they are all best in combination somehow?) You must describe and explain the theories.

**Further reading and writing assignments will be announced in class, on blog, and email group!**

Note: A syllabus is not a contract, but rather a guide to course procedures. The instructor reserves the right to alter the course requirements and/or assignments based on new materials, class discussions, or other legitimate pedagogical objectives.

### **Main order of readings:**

1. [\*Moral Literacy: Or How to Do the Right Thing\*](#) by [Colin McGinn](#)

This book provides a nice, brief introduction to ethics.

#### **Preface**

1. Introduction
2. Animals
3. Abortion
4. Violence
5. Sex
6. Drugs
7. Censorship
8. Virtue

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2. [\*Animal Rights, Human Wrongs: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy\*](#) by [Tom Regan](#)

This book provides a nice overview and critical introduction to moral theories, paired with discussion of an important set of issues in bioethics, namely the treatment of animals.

- **From Indifference to Advocacy**
- **How Animals Are Treated: Some Examples**
- **The Nature and Importance of Rights**
- **Indirect Duty Views**
- **Direct Duty Views**
- **Human Rights**
- **Animal Rights**
- **Objections and Replies**
- **Moral Philosophy and Change**

3. [\*The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty\*](#) by [Peter Singer](#)

A discussion of an important set of issues in bioethics, namely those related to absolute poverty and the absence of health care (and basic health) on a global scale.

#### THE ARGUMENT

1. Saving a Child
2. Is it Wrong to Not Help?
3. Common Objections to Giving

#### HUMAN NATURE

4. Why Don't We Give More?
5. Creating A Culture of Giving

#### THE FACTS ABOUT AID

6. How Much Does it Cost to Save a Life, and How Can You Tell Which Charities Do It Best?
7. Improving Aid

#### A NEW STANDARD FOR GIVING

8. Your Child and the Children of Others
9. Asking Too Much?
10. A Realistic Approach

5. [\*The Elements of Bioethics\*](#) by [Gregory Pence](#)

An overview of a range of bioethical issues.

This book is designed for the biomedical ethics course as a core introduction to biomedical issues in the context of ethical theory. Each chapter unfolds timely, paradigm case examples--many of which have never before been explored in a bioethics text--and presents these topics amidst discussion of their key ethical issues. This short volume complements Pence's popular *Classic Cases in Medical Ethics: Accounts of the Cases that have Shaped Medical Ethics*, Fourth Edition (ISBN 0-07-282935-4), and *Classic Works in Medical Ethics: Core Philosophical Readings* (ISBN 0-07-038115-1).

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Preface

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- 1.1 Ethical Relativism & Ethical Subjectivism

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## 1.2 Impartiality and Moral Reasoning

### 1.3 Kant On Lying

### 1.4 Utilitarian Ethics

### 1.5 Omitting the Truth vs. Lying

### 1.6 Apologizing for Mistakes & Taking Responsibility for Mistakes

### 1.7 Virtue Ethics: Truthfulness, Complicity, and Responsibility

### 1.8 Conceptual Issues: What is a Mistake?

## 2. KANT ON WHETHER ALCOHOLISM IS A DISEASE

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#### 8.2 Nazi and American Research, and the Tuskegee Study

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