

# SC203 Bioethics and Biosciences

Seminar Leader: Ian Lawson  
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Office Hours: by appointment

## Course Description

This course considers questions and issues at the intersection of ethics and biology. What is life and how might we think about death? What are the qualities that define a life: health, disability or gender? What does biology have to say about moral thoughts and feelings themselves? Is it appropriate to use animals for food or to test drugs for humans? These broad questions arise by looking at specific and practical bioethical cases like genetic manipulation, the search for a corona vaccine, the disability rights movement or factory farming. Readings focus neither on technical biology nor traditional moral thought, but are rather drawn from bio- and medical ethics, the philosophy of biology, cognitive psychology, the sociology of science and technology, and posthumanist discourse. The eclectic syllabus familiarises students with reading a variety of academic texts and enables a broad view of the forces and histories that create ethical conundrums when new technologies, situations, or scientific theories arise.

## Requirements

### Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused.

Please, please get in touch with me if you have a good reason for missing a class; I will make a note of it and consider it at the end of semester. And definitely get in touch with me if you miss several classes

and are worried about your participation grade (see below) suffering.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2021: Some students might need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

## Assessment

### Grade Breakdown

- Participation in class discussions: 30%  
(of which, questions submitted about readings: 10%)
- Video presentations on a contemporary bioethical issue: 30% (2x 15%)
- Final research essay: 40%  
due 18 May at midnight

### Assignments

- Your participation in class will be assessed throughout the semester through your contributions: questions, critical reflections, research, anecdotes, opinions, engagement in group activities, etc.  
You have the option to prepare and submit critical questions for discussion in class on the *Friday* before class the following week. If you submit 5, these will count for up to 10% of your participation grade.
- Twice in the semester you will prepare and submit via video a presentation on a contemporary bioethical topic. You will deliver a 5-7 minute speech on the topic that you research and prepare in advance. Further details will depend on class numbers.
- A research essay on a topic of your choice related to science and ethics is to be handed in by the end of the semester.

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

## Schedule

### Mondays 15:45 – 19:00

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

For each double-class there are two (sets of) readings that cover different aspects of a topic or closely related topics.

There is no course reader and no required textbook. All readings will be distributed online. There is a helpful and relevant Bioethics shelf in the library.

<b>February 1: should you sell your kidney?</b>	
Radcliffe Richards, 'Nephurious Goings On'	
<b>February 8: why would you not?</b>	
Scheper-Hughes, 'Rotten Trade'	Haidt, 'The New Synthesis'
<b>February 15: what is morality?</b>	
Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals</i> chapter 1 Bentham, 'An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation' Mill, 'Utilitarianism' chapter 3	Smetana, 'Domain Theory'
<b>February 22: and to whom does it apply?</b>	
Singer, 'All Animals Are Equal' chapter from <i>Animal Liberation</i> Donaldson, 'Animal Agora'	Naess, 'The Deep Ecology Movement'
<b>March 1: posthumanism and bioconservatism</b>	
Explore <a href="http://2045.com">2045.com</a>	Braidotti, 'What is Human in the Humanities'

Habermas, <i>The Future of Human Nature</i> excerpts <i>Recommended:</i> Bostrom and Roach, 'Ethical Issues in Human Enhancement'	Today?'
<p>March 8: no class</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Federal Holiday</i></p>	
<p>March 15: expertise and science</p>	
Reich, 'Neoliberal Mothering'	Zayner, 'Biohack the world' (speech) <i>recommended:</i> <i>Biohackers</i> Netflix show
<p>March 22: bias in science: the case of clinical trials</p>	
Greek et al., 'The Nuremberg Code'	Lexchin, 'Those with the Gold' <i>recommended:</i> Nik-Khah, 'Neoliberal Pharmaceutical Science'
<p>March 29: are you your genes?</p>	
Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 'Genetic Essentialism' <i>recommended:</i> Sholtis & Weiss, 'Phenogenetics'	Stein, <i>The Mismeasure of Desire</i> precis
<p>April 5: no class</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Spring Break</i></p>	
<p>April 12: no class</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Federal Holiday</i></p>	
<p>April 19: genetic engineering</p>	
<i>Guest speaker</i> TBC	Resnik, 'Therapy / Enhancement Divide'
<p>April 26: genetic therapy, bodies and disability</p>	
Overboe, 'Genetics and Disability'	Chadwick & Levitt, 'Threat to Deafness'

<b>May 3: bodies and identity</b>	
Elliott, 'Amputees by Choice'	Hacking, 'Making up People'
<b>May 10: biology and choice</b>	
Bettcher, 'Trapped in the Wrong Theory'	Tuval, 'In Defense of Transracialism'
<b>May 17</b> <i>Completion Week</i>	