

SC203 – Bioethics and Biosciences

Seminar Leader: Ian Lawson

Course Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:00–10:30. K24-1-Seminar room 12

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Office Hours: Monday 10:30–12:30. In a shared office under the lecture theatre & down the hall

Course Description

Traditional ethics considers the question of the good life. This course asks what life itself is. And how is its end, death, defined? What about the qualities of life: what are health, disability, gender or addiction? What distinguishes human from animal or plant life? We will concentrate on the practical ethical aspects of these questions raised by technologies such as genetic manipulation and practices such as factory farming, informed by contemporary ideas in the biological sciences. An underlying concern is the ways in which scientific theories and technologies do or should inform our behaviour. Conversely, we will explore the extent to which scientific theories of the nature of morality itself can (or should) do the same. Readings will not focus on traditional ethical theory but rather be drawn from bio- and medical ethics, cognitive psychology, the sociology of science and technology, and posthumanist discourse to create an eclectic syllabus based around four main topics: the moral sense, health, animals, and the law.

Course Books

No textbooks required. There is a reader.

Supplementary readings will also be available on G**gle Drive.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from you in your 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 III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory and your presence in ALL classes is expected. More than two absences in a semester will significantly affect your participation grade for the course.

Please consult the Student Handbook for the regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Following the policy on the submission of essays found in the Student Handbook: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded 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 and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Grade Breakdown

Participation in class discussions: 30%

In class debates: 3x 10%

Final research essay: 40%

Assignments

Your participation in class will be assessed throughout the semester through your contributions: questions, critical reflections, research, anecdotes, opinions, engagement in group activities...

Three classes throughout the semester are dedicated to team debates on a given topic. For each you will prepare and deliver a brief (5 minute) presentation arguing your case. (Further details and topics to arrive later. The organisation will depend a bit on final class numbers).

The course will conclude with a research essay on a topic of your choice related to ethics and science.

Deadlines

Debates: October 14
 November 6
 December 11
Final essay: December 20

Schedule

Topic 1: The science of ethics

2 Sept: introduction <i>please watch the IQ2 debate found here:</i> https://intelligencesquaredus.org/debates/college-students-should-be-allowed-take-smart-drugs (debate is ~30 mins. Q&A afterwards is optional viewing)	4 Sept: what's science got to do with it? Monroe, 'Biology, Psychology, Ethics and Politics: An Innate Moral Sense?'
9 Sept: where does morality come from? Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics' excerpts De Waal, 'Natural Normativity'	11 Sept: ...and how might it work? Schnaal et al., 'Disgust as Embodied Moral Judgement' Greene et al., 'fMRI'
16 Sept: what does this mean for ethics? Appiah, 'The Case Against Intuition' chapter from <i>Experiments in Ethics</i>	18 Sept: what does it mean for us? Persson & Savulescu, 'Unfit for the Future'

Topic 2: Who or what is entitled to ethical treatment?

23 Sept: non-human animals Singer, 'All Animals Are Equal' & 'Speciesism Today' chapters from <i>Animal Liberation</i>	25 Sept: what does animal welfare mean? Hsiao, 'Industrial Farming Is not Cruel to Animals'
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	Dennett, 'Animal Consciousness'
30 Sept: what can 'we' do? Fairlie, 'Default Livestock' chapter from <i>Meat</i> Thompson, 'Livestock Welfare and the Ethics of Producing Meat' chapter from <i>From Field to Fork</i> Johnson, 'Temple Grandin digs in' interview with Temple Grandin	2 Oct: animals in science Galgut, 'Raising the Bar' Greek et al., 'The Nuremberg Code'
7 Oct: Gaia and deep ecology Goldsmith, 'Towards a biospheric ethic' Margulis, 'Gaia' chapter from <i>The Symbiotic Planet</i> Lovelock, 'A Personal View of Environmentalism' chapter from <i>The Revenge of Gaia</i>	9 Oct: re-thinking our-selves Derrida, <i>The Animal That Therefore I Am</i> Haraway, <i>When Species Meet</i> excerpt Descartes, <i>Discourse on Method</i> excerpt

Topic 3: The Good Life

<p style="text-align: center;">Monday 14 October First Debate!</p>	16 Oct: genetic therapy and enhancement Resnik, 'The Moral Significance of the Therapy-Enhancement Distinction' Savulescu, 'Procreative Beneficence'
21 Oct: Trans- / Posthumanism Bostrom, 'Why I Want to be a Posthuman' Bostrom & Roache, 'Ethical Issues in Human Enhancement'	23 Bioconservatism Fukuyama, 'Human Dignity' chapter from <i>Our Posthuman Future</i> (especially up to p. 174) Sandel, 'Designer Children, Designing Parents' & 'Mastery and Gift' chapters from <i>The Case Against Perfection</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Autumn break</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Autumn break</p>
4 Nov: imagining the future Agar, 'Our Postliberal Future?' chapter from <i>Liberal Eugenics</i>	<p style="text-align: center;">Wednesday 6 November Second Debate!</p>
11 Nov: talking about current technology Maben, 'The CRISPR Fantasy' Holdrege & Talbot, chapters 6 & 7	13 Nov: what is health anyway? Nordenfelt, 'Concepts of Health and their Consequences' Overboe, 'Genetics and Disability'
18 Nov: Disability and Designing Babies Chadwick and Levitt, 'Genetic Technology: A Threat to Deafness'	20 Nov: Transablism Elliott, 'Amputees by Choice' Baril, 'How dare you pretend to be disabled?'

Bauman, 'Designing Deaf Babies'	
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Topic 4: Ethics and Rules

<p>25 Nov: testosterone and athletes Davis & Edwards, 'Old Emperor, New Clothes?' Knox et al., 'Transwomen in elite sport' Radiolab episode 'Cut and Run' https://www.mixcloud.com/nypr/shorts-cut-and-run</p>	<p>27 Nov: doping Gardner, 'On Performance-Enhancing Substances' Savulescu et al., 'Why We Should Allow Performance Enhancing Drugs in Sport'</p>
<p>2 Dec: legalisation Greif, 'Drug Laws, Ethics and History' Radcliffe Richards, 'Nepharious Goings On'</p>	<p>4 Dec: predicting crime Jurjako et al., 'Ethical Considerations about the Use of Biomarkers'</p>
<p>9 Dec: biology and responsibility Mobbs et al, 'Laws, Responsibility and the Brain' Burns & Swerdlow, 'Brain tumor'</p>	<p>Wednesday 11 December Third Debate!</p>
<p>16 Dec: Completion week</p>	<p>18 Dec: Completion week Final Essay Due: 20 December</p>