Ethical Issues in Biology and Medicine, BioSci 296 (Fall 1999)

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Office hours: Mon. 10-12, Thurs. 2-4 and by appointment


In the introductory session we will identify basic concepts in, and approaches to, ethical issues in biology and medicine. Each subsequent week will be devoted to a specific topic for which readings are assigned from either or both of the above texts. To facilitate our consideration of each topic, I have identified an open-ended question to which you will be expected to prepare a brief response - one that reflects your own thought as well as your knowledge of the assigned readings, lectures, and class discussions. The questions are included below in italics in the course schedule. The readings should be done prior to our discussion of each topic. Each short essay (e.g., 3-4 typed pages) is due on the class day following the lecture and discussion on the topic, i.e., the day a new topic is begun.

Sept. 28 Intro: Overview on ethical approaches & key concepts

30 Abortion & preimplantation genetic diagnosis
*Under what conditions if any is abortion morally justified?*
WCHC 59-73 + EIMM 330-375

Oct. 5 Discussion

7 Decisions for neonates and other noncompetent patients (+ video)
*Under what conditions if any may life preserving treatment of infants or other noncompetent patients be denied?*
WCHC 167-182 + EIMM 207-250

12 Discussion

14 Maternal-fetal conflict (+ video)
*Under what conditions if any may a pregnant woman’s refusal of recommended treatment be overridden?*
WCHC 131-145 + EIMM 378-401

19 Discussion

Oct. 21 Reproductive technologies & multiple gestation
*Under what conditions if any is medical assistance for reproduction (IVF-ET, gamete donation, “surrogacy,”) morally permissible?*
WCHC 93-128 + EIMM 375-377, 425-459

26 Discussion
Oct.  28  Euthanasia & assisted suicide (+ video)
      Under what conditions is euthanasia and/or physician-assisted suicide
      morally justified?
      EIMM 250-301
Nov.  2 Discussion

4  Research with human subjects
      Under what conditions is research with human subjects morally
      justified?
      EIMM 547-556, 565-601
9  Discussion

11 Truth-telling, confidentiality, and children’s decision making
      Under what conditions is violation of confidentiality or nondisclosure to
      patients morally justified?
      EIMM 51-76 + WCHC 186-200
15 Discussion

18 Allocation of scarce medical resources
      Under what conditions is denial of scarce medical resources to a
      patient morally justified?
      EIMM 652-698
23 Discussion

25 Happy Thanksgiving!

29 Cloning
      Under what conditions is human cloning morally justifiable?
      EIMM 481-510

Dec.  2 Discussion

3-4  Reading period

6  Last (9th) short essay due

Grading for the course will be based on the quality of your written work (80%) and oral
participation (20%). Unless you choose to do 8 rather than 9 of the short essay
assignments, the lowest grade of these will be discounted. If you wish to reformulate the
question you address, e.g., by narrowing it to a subtopic within the more general topic,
feel free to do so but be sure that your reformulation still falls within the general topic
and that it permits arguments for different positions on the issue. Remember that both
oral and written work should demonstrate familiarity with class content and assigned
readings, critically utilized in support of your answer to the question identified.