THE BIRTH OF BIOETHICS

Department of Philosophy
Georgetown University
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Target audience: Graduate and upperclass undergraduate philosophy students

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this course is to explore the historical roots of the contemporary field of bioethics. In this effort we will focus most of our attention on developments during the twentieth century, and especially on those that occurred between the years 1900 and 1975.

The course is divided into two main parts. The first part is thematic. From the wide variety of possible topics discussed by commentators during this period, we will choose four for special attention: (1) research involving human subjects; (2) reproduction and genetics; (3) death and the prolongation of life; and (4) the health-care system. With each topic we will attempt to achieve a clear picture of the evolution of any technologies involved, as well as of major developments in ethical discussion and public policymaking.

The second major part of the course will focus on two major contributors to the birth of bioethics: Paul Ramsey and Richard McCormick. We will read important articles and book chapters published by these authors between 1954 and 1974.

In our historical and critical journey we will be assisted by three secondary sources. Two of these sources survey the social and intellectual developments that led to the birth of bioethics. The third is a casebook that provides detailed descriptions of critical events in this history.

TEXTBOOKS


SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Class 1: Introduction to the Course


Video: Radio Bikini

Class 2: Theme 1: Research Involving Human Subjects (Part 1)


Pence, CCME, Chapter 11, entire chapter. The primary focus of the chapter is on the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.


Class 3: Theme 1: Research Involving Human Subjects (Part 2)

Excerpts from United States v. Karl Brandt (the Nuremberg Medical Trial) (1947).


Video: The Deadly Deception

**Class 4: Theme 2: Reproduction and Genetics**


Pence, CCME, Chapter 5.

**Class 5: Theme 3: Death and the Prolongation of Life**


Pence, CCME, Chapters 2, 12, and 13.


Video: Who Should Survive?

**Class 6: Theme 4: The Health Care System**

Starr, Social Transformation, pp. 236-378

Pence, CCME, Chapter 18.

**Class 7: Interlude: Walter and Klein, eds., The Story of Bioethics (Part 1)**

Please read the Preface and Chapters 1-5, pp. ix-109.

**Class 8: Interlude: Walter and Klein, eds., The Story of Bioethics (Part 2)**

Please read Chapters 6-12 and the Afterword, pp. 111-231.

**Class 9: Paul Ramsey: Life and Work (Part 1)**


Biosketch of Paul Ramsey


Correpondence by Ramsey with H. J. Muller (1964): from the Muller Archive at Indiana University.


Video or audio, if available: Paul Ramsey speaking

**Class 10: Paul Ramsey: Life and Work (Part 2)**


Graduate students will read additional chapters.
Class 11: Paul Ramsey: Life and Work (Part 3)


Graduate students will read additional chapters.

Class 12: Richard McCormick: Life and Work

Biosketch of Richard McCormick


Video: Richard McCormick speaking


Please read Chapters 1-5, pp. 1-165.


Please read Chapters 6-9, pp. 166-321.

Graduate students: Please read the entire book.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The first and most important requirement for participation in this seminar is your completion of all assigned readings in advance of the class session at which they will be discussed. The success of our seminar discussions will depend on your thorough
knowledge and critical evaluation of these readings.

The second requirement is a short philosophical paper, no more than 10 pages in length, in which you adopt and defend a point of view on a reading, a topic, or an author encountered in this course. This short paper will be due midway through the course.

A third and final requirement will be a final philosophical term paper on a topic, a reading, or an author covered in the course. The paper should reflect your critical and analytical skills. It should adopt a position and defend it with good arguments. For undergraduates the term paper should be 12-15 pages in length; for graduate students the paper should be 20-25 pages long.

Please try to submit papers on time, in the interest of both fairness and efficiency. If you are facing a medical or personal emergency, please contact the instructor by phone or e-mail before the due date for the assignment.

The final grade will be based on the following factors:

Completion of readings and class participation 30%
Final term paper 40%
Midterm paper 30%