PHIL 101: Conceptual Foundations of Bioethics: Moral Theories

Course Leader: Stavroula Tsinorema

Semester: 1st (7 ECTS)

Course Type: Required

Objectives: The aims of this course unit are (a) to bring students in contact with the theoretical basis of Bioethics, through training in the methodologies and analytical tools of moral reasoning, (b) to provide them with the basic categories which show the conceptual links between the frameworks of moral philosophy and normative bioethical reasoning, (c) to equip them with the appropriate theoretical frameworks in order to be able to investigate critically and, where possible, to resolve specific moral problems deriving in biomedical research, its application in clinical contexts, health care and environmental policy. The overall aim is to enable students to develop core skills for the conduct of normative analysis and reasoning in Bioethics.

Content: The normative resources for moral argument and justification in Bioethics are found in moral philosophy and philosophical theories of ethics. This course unit will survey some of the principle philosophical approaches in addressing a number of bioethical controversies and bring appropriate perspectives from ethical theories to bear on case studies in Bioethics. Topics include:
1) Philosophical ethics and its relation to Bioethics.
2) Classical approaches. Ethics and metaphysics. Ontological approaches to ethics.
3) Modern classical approaches to ethics. Theories of Scottish Enlightenment. Moral sentiments and the ethics of work: David Hume and Adam Smith.
4) Immanuel Kant: The ethics of form.
5) Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Utilitarianism.
6) Contemporary moral theories:
   - Contractarian and constructivist theories. John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, Onora O’Neill
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   - Virtue ethics, ethics of care, feminism, communitarianism
7) Theories of a deflatory kind and moral scepticism. Casuistic ethics, decisionism, emotivism, nihilism.
8) Contemporary moral problems. Relativism and universalism. Locality (of worldviews) and universality (of the values of life and the protection of the environment, the elimination of
poverty and hunger worldwide).

**Suggested Bibliography**
18 «Bioethics»

**Teaching Methods:** A series of lectures (staff-led, interactive), followed by seminars, in which issues raised in the lectures are examined. Seminar activity is based around directed reading, the use of case studies, group discussions and individual (or group) presentations. Students also receive tutorials, which provide them with a framework of autonomous learning in preparation of the end-of-course unit essay.

**Assessment Scheme:** End-of-course unit essay. A 4.000-5.000 word essay on a topic chosen from a list provided by the course leader. Its purpose is to lay out the different ways in which one can look at a particular issue in Bioethics, and not merely to report the views of the author/s a student has read. Previous readings should be viewed as a useful background for active engagement with bioethical issues, not just as mechanical “application” of each ethical theory, as it stands, to the relevant problems.