IDS 201WR: Interdisciplinary Problems
Bioethics in an Interdisciplinary Perspective
MWF: 9:35-10:25AM
Bowden Hall 118

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Office Hours: M: 10:25-12:00PM; W: 10:25-12:00PM; & by appointment

Course Description:
This course will give undergraduate students an introduction to “bioethics”: the study of ethical issues involving the biomedical and life sciences. We will begin by examining the history of bioethics, beginning with the field’s origins in the mid-twentieth century, up through its current institutionalization in American hospitals, universities, and government. We will then consider a variety of specific bioethical problems. An extensive study of so-called “end-of-life” issues—including euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide—will provide an introduction to interdisciplinary methodology. Having laid the foundation for our approach, we will then consider a variety of other bioethical topics, including abortion, stem-cell research, healthcare rationing, and the politics of vaccination. Over the course of the semester, we will examine articles that call into question the legitimacy of bioethics itself, and will reflect on field’s present orientation and potential future directions.

Required Texts (Available at Emory Bookstore)


Policies:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a violation of the Honor Code. If I believe that you are plagiarizing, I will report the violation immediately to the college’s Honor Council. More information on the honor system can be found at: http://www.college.emory.edu/current/standards/honor_code.html

Attendance: Students are allowed three unexcused absences. All other absences must be accompanied by a written note or they will be deducted from the student’s participation grade.

Tardiness: Repeated lateness will significantly impact the student’s participation grade.
Late Assignments: Assignments must be turned in on the day and time indicated on this syllabus. Late submissions without a documented excuse from a Dean will be marked down by half a grade per day late. For example, if you have written a B paper, you will receive a B- if you have turned it in one day late, a C+ for two days late, etc.

Accessibility: Emory University complies with the regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and offers accommodations to students with disabilities. If you need a classroom accommodation, please contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible to discuss and request an accommodation and then discuss possible accommodations with us.

A Final Note on Civility: In this course, we will be discussing very controversial topics. I only ask that you express yourself in a civil manner and treat your classmates with respect.

Evaluation:

Writing Assignments (60% of grade, in five parts)

As this is course fulfills the Emory College Writing Requirement, students are obligated to complete at least 20 pages of polished writing. We will accomplish this goal gradually, over the course of the semester, through two series of cumulative assignments. These assignments will breakdown in the following manner:

Midterm Project (25% total)
I. 2-3 page paper on the history of research protocols, due February 8 at 9:35 AM. (10 % total)
II. 5-6 page paper assessing Roger Cooter’s review of David Rothman’s Strangers at the Bedside, due February 26 at 9:35 AM. This paper must integrate and, in accord with my comments, revise sections from the earlier paper on research protocols. (15% total)

Final Project (35% total)
I. A 4-5 page literature review of a subject of that the student will choose, in discussion with the instructor, due April 2 at 9:35AM. Literature review must include sources on both the general discussion of the topic, as well as sources from a specific discipline, to be discussed with the instructor. Review must contain at least EIGHT references. (10%)
II. A 4-5 page literature review of articles and books on previously selected research topic from a different discipline. This section of the assignment is due April 23 at 9:35 AM. Review must contain at least EIGHT references. (10%)
III. Parts I and II of the final must be consolidated into one final paper or 8-10 pages, to be turned in to instructor by 10:00 AM on May 5. (15%)

All writing assignments must be double-spaced, with 12 point font.
Participation (40%):  

Students are expected to participate actively in the discussion throughout the semester. Active participation entails not only voicing one’s opinions in class, but also listening respectfully to those of others. In addition, participation includes reading summaries, blog postings, and in-class exercises, which will be graded according to a scale of check, check plus, and check minus.

Grading Scale:

100%-94% = A  93%-90% = A–  89%- 87% = B+  86%-84% = B
83%-80% = B–  79%-77% = C+  76%-74% = C  73%-70% = C–
69%-67% = D+  66%-60% = D  Less than 60% = F
NOTE: I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO CHANGE THESE READINGS OVER THE COURSE OF THE SEMESTER.

Reading Schedule

SECTION I: The History of Bioethics

Week 1 (January 11-15): Introducing Bioethics

W (1/13): General introduction; overview of syllabus and written assignments


Week 2 (January 18-22): What were Biomedical Ethics before “Bioethics?”

M (1/18): NO CLASS—Martin Luther King Day


Week 3 (January 25-29): Were the Rise of Ethical Protocols in the Lab a Boon for Patients or Pharmaceutical Companies (or both)?


Week 4 (February 1-5): The Institutionalization of Medical Ethics


F (2/5): Rothman, “No One to Trust,” pp. 190-221 (31 pages)
Week 5 (February 8-12): Has Bioethics Protected Patients from Doctors or Doctors from Lawyers?


First Writing Assignment Due


F (2/12): Belkin, G.S. "Moving beyond bioethics: history and the search for medical humanism.”

Section 2: The “End-of-Life”: A Case Study in Interdisciplinary Bioethics

Week 6 (February 15-19): The “Right to Die”: Fundamental Freedom or Social Scapegoating?


Week 7 (February 22-26): Is Euthanasia a Uniquely “Modern” Phenomenon (or, Is there a Fundamental Difference between Martyrdom and Euthanasia?)


W (2/24): Dowbiggin, “This Troublesome Shore” and “Method of Escape” pp. 27-70 (selections TBA)

F (2/26): Dowbiggin, “A Higher Morality?” and “In God We Trust?” (71-110) (selections TBA)

SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE

Week 8 March 1-5: Does the Euthanasia Movement prove that Secularism is the New Religion (and what might this mean for the way we frame “bioethical” issues)?

M (3/1): Dowbiggin, “Collision Course,” pp. 111-140 (29 pages)

MEET WITH INSTRUCTOR TO DISCUSS FINAL PROJECT

F (3/5): NO CLASS

Week 9 (March 8-12): SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS

Section 3: Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Bioethics

Week 11 (March 22-26): Cells of Life? Theology, Biology, Economy and the Stem Cell Debate


F (3/26): GUEST SPEAKER: Arri Eisen, PhD.


Week 12 (March 29-April 2): Women’s Freedom or Population Control? The Challenge of Abortion


Section I of Final Project Due

Week 13 (April 5-9): Is Brain Death a Neurological and/or a Cultural Condition?


**Week 14 (April 12-16): Death Panels! Healthcare Rationing and the Organization of Society**


**Week 15 (April 19-23): Should Bioethics be a Vehicle for Social Justice?**


**Section II of Final Project Due**

F (4/23): Series of Articles on the “Sodexo Debate:” Are Unionization and Employee Subcontracting “bioethical” issues?

**Week 16 (April 26-30): Where We Stand: The “Human” Element in Bioethical Situations**


**FINAL PROJECT DUE:** Date TBA
Midterm Writing Project
The Midterm project consists of two parts.

Part A:
Due: Monday, February 8 (in class.)
Length: 2-3 double-spaced pages, size twelve font, preferably Times New Roman
Description:
In “The Resistible Rise of Medical Ethics,” Roger Cooter criticizes David Rothman’s claim that Henry Beecher’s 1966 exposé was the key event motivating the emergence of protocols regulating laboratory research. Specifically, Cooter makes the following claims:

a) Rothman exaggerates the extent to which the 1940’s and 50’s radically changed the researcher-subject (and doctor-patient) relationship. Even prior to World War II, researcher-subject relations were not necessarily characterized by “trust.”

b) Rothman downplays other attempts, contemporaneous to Beecher’s time, to regulate clinical research. As an example, he mentions the “Helsinki Declaration of 1964” (267).

Susan Lederer’s article “Children as Guinea Pigs: Historical Perspectives” describes various practices of experimentation on children prior to World War II. She also details the history and content of the Helsinki Declaration. Does her representation of these events confirm or contradict Rothman’s account of the rise of research protocols? What elements does it bring to the history of bioethics that Rothman’s narrative either marginalizes or ignores? Please elaborate on how your answers to these questions influence your opinion of the institutionalization of bioethics in US society.

Part B
Due: Friday, February 26 (in class.)
Length: 5-6 double-spaced pages, size twelve font, preferably Times New Roman
Description:
Roger Cooter’s review essay “The Resistible Rise of Medical Ethics” contains an extensive critique of David Rothman’s Strangers in the Bedside. Please summarize Cooter’s critique (contained particularly in pages 267 to 271) and respond to it, drawing on relevant readings from the first half of the semester. Your response must include a revised version of your answer to Part A of the midterm.