

BIOETHICS (PHIL 220)

Term: January 5 – January 23, 2026

Format: Online / Accelerated (19 Consecutive Days, One Day Buffer)

Instructor: Joe Gurrola (he/they)

Office hours: M,F: 10-11 am EST (Virtual)

Contact: gurrola@umd.edu

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a rigorous, fast-paced introduction to bioethical reasoning. We begin by establishing a foundational "Moral Toolbox" through study of foundational moral theories like deontology and utilitarianism, then apply these tools to research ethics, the history of medical abuse, the ethics of resource allocation, genetic selection, and end-of-life care. Through readings, film analysis, and virtual consensus-building, students will learn to navigate the tragic "clash of principles" inherent in modern medicine.

Work for this course will be done largely within a group setting. At the beginning of the course, you will be grouped with 2-3 other students. This small group will annotate 5 readings together on Perusall and complete 4 virtual group discussions.

II. EVALUATION & GRADING

Component	Weight	Due Date(s)
Introductory Video	1%	Jan 5
Knowledge Quizzes (5)	15%	Jan 5, 8, 13, 17, 20
Perusall Annotations	25%	Jan 6, 9, 12, 15, 19

Group Discussions (4)	19%	Jan 7, 11, 14, 21
Final Case Paper and Video Reflection	20%	Jan 23
Video Reflections (2)	20%	Jan 16 (<i>Gattaca</i> or <i>The Farewell</i>), Jan 22 (<i>Oregon</i> or <i>The Sea Inside</i>)

III. SCHEDULE

Week 1: Foundations & History

- Jan 5: Normative Ethical Theories. Readings: Selections from *Bioethics* Ch. 1. Assignments: Intro Video; Quiz 1
- Jan 6: Principles of Bioethics. Readings: Beauchamp. Assignment: Perusall 1.
- Jan 7: Research Ethics. Readings: Hawkins. Assignment: Group Discussion 1.
- Jan 8: History of Abuse. Readings: Nuremberg Code; Belmont Report (B). Assignment: Quiz 2.
- Jan 9: Informed Consent. Readings: Belmont Report (C). Assignment: Perusall 2.
- Jan 10: The Tuskegee Study. Readings: Jones.
- Jan 11: Week 1 Synthesis. No new readings. Assignment: Group Discussion 2

Week 2: Scarcity, Metrics, & Selection

- Jan 12: Allocation Criteria. Readings: Alexander; Truog. Assignment: Perusall 3.
- Jan 13: Critiquing QALYs. Readings: Harris; Singer et al. Assignment: Quiz 3.
- Jan 14: Historical Eugenics. Readings: Buchanan (pages 30-45); Watch *Buck v. Bell*. Group Discussion 3.
- Jan 15: Modern Selection. Readings: Savulescu. Perusall 4.
- Jan 16: Film: *Gattaca*. View film. Assignment: Video Reflection 1 (5–7 min).
- Jan 17: The Case Against Perfection. Readings: Sandel. Assignment: Quiz 4.
- Jan 18: Break Day.

Week 3: The Right to Die

- Jan 19: The Case for VAE. Readings: Brock. Assignment: Perusall 5.

- Jan 20: The Kantian Critique. Readings: Velleman. Assignment: Quiz 5.
 - Jan 21: VAE and Mental Health. Readings: Aviv. Assignment: Group Discussion 4.
 - Jan 22: Film: *How to Die in Oregon*. View film. Assignment: Video Reflection 2 (5–7 min).
 - Jan 23: FINAL ASSESSMENT. Assignment: Case Paper Due (11:59 PM).
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IV. DETAILED ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

1. Introductory Video (1%)

Record a 60–90 second video introducing yourself to your group. State your academic background and your initial "moral stance": Do you lean more toward Utilitarianism (the greatest good) or Deontology (fixed moral duties)?

2. Knowledge Quizzes (15%)

Quizzes test comprehension of readings and lectures. Quizzes contain 5 questions and have a time limit of 5 minutes.

3. Group "Ethics Board" Discussions (19%)

Groups of 3–4 students will be assigned to analyze a case study using the "Four Principles" framework.

- Synchronous Option: Groups meet via recorded video call. You must work as a team to reach a consensus recommendation for the case. Submit a 250-word summary of your decision, noting which principles were prioritized.
- Asynchronous Option: One designated student uploads a 4–5 minute video with an initial recommendation. Remaining group members must each upload a 4-5 minute video response discussing alternative courses of action or challenging the initial stance using a different bioethical principle. **If your group chooses this option, you must let me know at the beginning of the semester so that I can assign discussion leaders (i.e., first poster) for each group discussion.**

4. Perusall Annotations (25%)

Students must register as users for Perusall. The cost for Perusall is \$10 USD. This cost is in lieu of purchasing a textbook, as all readings will be provided to you virtually via ELMS and Perusall.

You are required to post a minimum of 5 substantive annotations per module. "High

quality" means asking probing questions, linking to previous authors, or critiquing an argument's logic. Since you will be completing these annotations with your group, you should aim to engage with their annotations.

5. Final Case Paper and Video Reflection (20%)

- An 800-1,000-word analysis of a case. You must use and cite the specific authors whose work is relevant to the case (10%).
- An 8-10 minute video that includes:
 - A 5-minute discussion of the case
 - A 3-5 minute discussion of how your views have changed or stayed the same over the course (e.g., are you still a deontologist or utilitarian) and what specific arguments and topics you found most compelling in constructing your position.

6. Video Reflections (20%)

Two 5–7 minute video recordings analyzing *Gattaca* or *The Farewell* and *The Sea Inside* or *How to Die in Oregon*.

- Analysis: You must identify the "clash of principles" and verbally cite at least two authors (e.g., Brock vs. Velleman).
- Rubric: Exceptional scores (90%+) require a clear thesis, direct application of theory to specific film scenes, and precise timing within the 5–7 minute window.

IV. GRADING POLICIES

For determining final grades, the following conversion will be used.

A+: 98% A: 94% A-: 90%

B+: 88% B: 84% B-: 80%

C+: 77% C: 73% C-: 70%

D+: 67% D: 63% D-: 60%

F: below 60%

Percentages of total points will be rounded up. For example, 83.5% will result in a "B". There will be no extra credit opportunities. If earning a particular grade is important to you, please speak with me at the beginning of the semester so that I can offer some helpful suggestions for achieving your goal.

Late work for Perusall assignments and individual video reflections are accepted, with a 10% per day penalty. Quizzes and the individual components of group discussions have strict deadlines.

V. COMMUNICATION

I use ELMS to send out important announcements (e.g., changes in assignments and/or due dates). Please consult ELMS regularly and make sure your settings enable you to receive announcements in a prompt manner. Email is OK as a medium for administrative questions, about assignments, meetings, and so on. But intellectual questions are better discussed during office hours. Please do not hesitate to send me an email to talk things through with me outside of office hours by sending an email to set up a time to meet.

VI. POLICIES

It is our shared responsibility to understand and abide by the University policies relevant to undergraduate courses (e.g., academic integrity, student and instructor conduct, accessibility and accommodations, attendance and excused absences). Please visit [https:// go.umd.edu/ug-policy](https://go.umd.edu/ug-policy) for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list policies, read them carefully, and follow up with me if you have any questions.

- Prohibition of the use of AI

The use of AI tools (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Claude, Grammarly, etc.) is prohibited for outlining, producing, or editing any written or oral assignment. You may not consult any of these tools while taking quizzes. While there might be a place for these tools in your future work, this policy aims to foster your ability to develop your critical thinking skills. Moreover, course assistance websites, such as CourseHero, or AI-generated content are not permitted sources. Material taken or copied from these sites can be deemed unauthorized material and a violation of academic integrity. These sites offer information that may be inaccurate or biased and that shortcut the learning process, particularly the critical thinking steps necessary for college-level assignments. If you have any questions about this policy or are not sure if a resource you have found will violate it, please ask.