

MEDICAL ETHICS

[course prefix]



Instructor:
Office:
Phone:
Email:

Meeting times and room:
Office hours:

Course description

Medical ethics has been a distinct subdiscipline only for about fifty years, but in that short time it has become one of the most exciting areas of philosophical inquiry. Unlike some other fields in philosophy, medical ethics is deeply impacted by technological developments in modern medicine, and philosophers are in conversation with public policymakers to develop appropriate legal guidelines. In this course, we will address the role of the physician and the kinds of obligations he or she has to patients and to society as a whole; we will discuss justice in medicine as it relates to the allocation of health care and scarce medical resources; and we will identify the difficult issues surrounding life and death, including how to define death and moral questions surrounding reproduction.

Learner outcomes

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify connections between theoretical ethical principles and explain their practical implications for a number of issues in medical ethics.

- Analyze how ethics, law, and public policy are related to one another with regard to such issues as abortion, health care allocation, advance directives, and medical aid in dying.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the competing ethical demands in some of the most important issues in medical ethics, such as the clinician-patient relationship, medical decision-making for incompetent patients, and prenatal genetic testing.

Required text

- Altman, Matthew C., and Cynthia D. Coe. 2025. *The Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett. ISBN 978-1-64792-218-4.

NOTE: We [Altman and Coe] post the following required readings on Canvas, but other instructors may wish to supplement the text with primary readings of their own choosing and will make use of whatever LMS or library service their institution provides.

The following required readings are posted on Canvas:

- Baylis, Françoise. 1997. "Errors in Medicine: Nurturing Truthfulness." *Journal of Clinical Ethics* 8, no. 4 (Winter): 336-40. doi:10.1086/JCE199708403.
- Bester, Johan C., and Jeffrey Blustein. 2024. "Childhood Interests: What They Are and Why It Matters." *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 67, no. 2 (Spring): 197-208. doi:10.1353/pbm.2024.a929018.
- Brandt, Allan M. 1978. "Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study." *Hastings Center Report* 8, no. 6 (December): 21-29. doi:10.2307/3561468.
- Cantor, Norman L. 1998. "Making Advance Directives Meaningful." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 4, no. 3 (September): 629-52. doi:10.1037/1076-8971.4.3.629.
- Childress, James F., and Tom L. Beauchamp. 2023. "The Evolution of Principlism." In *Vita brevis, ars longa: Aktuelle Perspektiven zur Geschichte, Theorie und Ethik der Medizin*, edited by Hans-Jörg Ehni, Georg Marckmann, Robert Ranisch, and Henning Tümmers, 145-53. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Daniels, Norman. 2001. "Justice, Health, and Healthcare." *American Journal of Bioethics* 1, no. 2 (Spring): 2-16. doi:10.1162/152651601300168834.
- Dworkin, Ronald, Thomas Nagel, Robert Nozick, John Rawls, Thomas Scanlon, and Judith Jarvis Thomson. 1997. "Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief." *New York Review of Books* 44, no. 5 (March 27): 41-47. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1997/03/27/assisted-suicide-the-philosophers-brief/>.
- French, Peter A. 1982. "Collective Responsibility and the Practice of Medicine." *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (February): 65-86. doi:10.1093/jmp/7.1.65.
- Goldman, Alan H. 1980. "Refutation of Medical Paternalism." In *The Moral Foundations of Professional Ethics*, 173-89. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield.
- National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. 1979. *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html>.
- Parens, Erik, and Adrienne Asch. 2000. "The Disability Rights Critique of Prenatal Genetic Testing: Reflections and Recommendations." In *Prenatal Testing and Disability*

Rights, ed. Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch, 3-43. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

- Stokes, Felicia, and Amitabha Palmer. 2020. “Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in Nursing: Ethics of Caring as a Guide to Dividing Tasks between AI and Humans.” *Nursing Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (October): e12306. doi:10.1111/nup.12306.
- Tallman, Ruth. 2014. “Valuing Lives and Allocating Resources: A Defense of the Modified Youngest First Principle of Scarce Resource Distribution.” *Bioethics* 28, no. 5 (June): 207-13.
- Thomson, Judith Jarvis. 1971. “A Defense of Abortion.” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn): 47-66.

Accountability exercises

[Add graded assignments here.]

[Add note on class participation here.]

Attendance policy

[Add attendance policy here.]

Technology policy

[Add technology policy here.]

Grades

[Add grading scale here.]

Late assignment policy

[Add late assignment policy here.]

Academic dishonesty

[Add university’s academic dishonesty policy here.]

University Writing Center

[Add information about the writing center here.]

Diversity statement

[Add university’s diversity statement here.]

Disability support

[Add information for accessing disability services here.]

Sexual harassment

[Add university’s sexual harassment policy and relevant contact information here.]

If you have questions about any of the policies listed on this syllabus, please talk to me so that I can clarify them.

Course schedule

You are responsible for having done the readings by the time you come to class on the day for which the readings are assigned. All page numbers refer to Altman and Coe's *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*. Supplementary readings are on the course's Canvas page.

[Add specific dates and due dates of assignments.]

Week 1: Introduction

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 1-6

Week 2: Chapter 1 – Moral Reasoning in a Medical Context

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 7-42
Childress and Beauchamp, "Evolution of Principlism" (Canvas)

Week 3: Chapter 2 – Collective Responsibility in Medicine

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 43-60
French, "Collective Responsibility and the Practice of Medicine" (Canvas)

Week 4: Chapter 3 – Paternalism and Patient Autonomy

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 61-88
Goldman, "Refutation of Medical Paternalism" (Canvas)

Week 5: Chapter 4 – Clinicians' Obligations to Patients and Themselves

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 89-114
Baylis, "Errors in Medicine: Nurturing Truthfulness" (Canvas)

Week 6: Chapter 5 – The Ethics and Legality of Abortion

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 115-48
Thomson, "Defense of Abortion" (Canvas)

Week 7: Chapter 6 – Pregnancy and Reproductive Technologies

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 149-96
Parens and Asch, "Disability Rights Critique of Prenatal Genetic Testing" (Canvas)

Week 8: Chapter 7 – Advance Directives and Decision-Making for Incapacitated Patients

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 197-223
Cantor, "Making Advance Directives Meaningful" (Canvas)

Week 9: Chapter 8 – Medical Aid in Dying

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 224-54
Dworkin et al., "Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief" (Canvas)

Week 10: Chapter 9 – Healthcare and Social Justice

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 255-77
Daniels, "Justice, Health, and Healthcare" (Canvas)

Week 11: Chapter 10 – Allocating Scarce Medical Resources

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 278-309

Tallman, “Valuing Lives and Allocating Resources” (Canvas)

Week 12: Chapter 11 – Racial Disparities in Healthcare

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 310-37

Brandt, “Racism and Research” (Canvas)

Week 13: Chapter 12 – Pediatric Ethics

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 338-75

Bester and Blustein, “Childhood Interests” (Canvas)

Week 14: Chapter 13 – Nursing Ethics

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 376-404

Stokes and Palmer, “Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in Nursing” (Canvas)

Week 15: Chapter 14 – Experimentation on Human Subjects, and Conclusion

Altman and Coe, *Hackett Introduction to Medical Ethics*, 405-32, 433-36

National Commission, *Belmont Report* (Canvas)