

FROM WOMB TO TOMB: TOPICS IN BIOETHICS

INSTRUCTOR	Angela Sun angsun@umich.edu
DESCRIPTION	In this class, we will consider a series of questions about the course of a human life. We begin with questions concerning ancestry and birth (e.g., is there value in being biologically related to one's parents? Do fetuses have moral status?). Next, we look to childhood and later stages of life (e.g., in what morally important sense are children different from adults? Why do so many people experience midlife crises?). We conclude by looking at moral issues surrounding aging and death (e.g., do we have a right to die? Would it be good for us if we could live forever?). No background in philosophy is assumed.
GOALS	By the end of this course, students will have developed the following knowledge and skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An understanding of bioethical questions that arise over the course of human life.• The ability to summarize an author's argument, give an objection to the argument, and respond to the argument on the author's behalf.• The ability to defend a position with clear, rigorous argumentation.• The ability engage in philosophical discussion respectfully and productively.
PHILOSOPHY	Philosophical discussion, reading, and writing might be a little unlike what you have done in other humanities courses. Philosophical reasoning is all about clarity and rigorous argumentation. One of the goals of this course is to learn to talk, read, and write philosophy. Throughout the course, we'll talk about how to do this. But here are a few resources to get you started. I recommend reading these during the first week of the course. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Olivia Bailey, "But How Do I Participate?"• Helena de Bres, "The Pink Guide to Philosophy"• Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"• Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"

REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for this course are as follows:

- *Paper 1: argument reconstruction and analysis* (20%): In 1000 words, you will (1) reconstruct Sally Haslanger's argument in "Family Ancestry and Self," Tina Rulli's argument in "Preferring a Genetically-Related Child," or Judith Jarvis Thomson's argument in "A Defense of Abortion"; (2) offer an objection to the argument; and (3) respond to the argument on behalf of the author. This exercise is meant to give you some experience carefully and charitably interpreting an author's argument and inserting yourself within a debate.
- *Legal case study and comments* (20%): From [this list](#) of bioethically important legal cases, you will choose one to comment on. Drawing on readings from the course, write a short (500 word) response to the decision. You will then read two of your classmates' responses and provide short (300 word) written feedback for them.
- *Paper 2* (30%): At the end of the course, you will submit a 2000-word final paper on your choice of three topics.
- *Discussion questions* (15%): At least once a week (i.e., at least every other class), you must submit a discussion question based on that day's reading to me at least 12 hours before class.
- *Participation* (15%): Come to class having completed the reading and prepared to discuss it!

ACCOMMODATION

I will work with every student interested in taking this course to ensure it's possible to. If you have a disability, are struggling with mental or physical health, or if there is anything else that might prevent you from fully participating in this course, let me know as soon as you can, and we will figure something out.

SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: BIRTH

Day 1: The value of biological ties, part 1
David Velleman, "[Family History](#)"

Day 2: The value of biological ties, part 2
Sally Haslanger, "[Family, Ancestry and Self: What is the Moral Significance of Biological Ties?](#)"

Day 3: Adoption
Tina Rulli, "[Preferring a Genetically-Related Child](#)"

Day 4: Abortion and moral status, part 1
Don Marquis, "[Why Abortion is Immoral](#)"

Day 5: Abortion and moral status, part 2
Judith Jarvis Thomson, "[A Defense of Abortion](#)"

Day 6: Abortion and moral status, part 3

Elizabeth Harman, "Creation Ethics: The Moral Status of Early Fetuses and the Ethics of Abortion"

Day 7: Human enhancement

Michael J. Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection"

Day 8: Moral enhancement

Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu, "The Perils of Cognitive Enhancement and the Urgent Imperative to Enhance the Moral Character of Humanity"

UNIT 2: LIFE'S STAGES

Day 9: Childhood, part 1

Tamar Schapiro, "What is a Child?"

Day 10: Childhood, part 2

Sarah Hannan, "Why Childhood is Bad for Children"

Day 11: Paternalism toward children

Amy Mullin, "Children, Paternalism and the Development of Autonomy"

Day 12: Life's stages

Andrew Franklin-Hall, "On Becoming an Adult: Autonomy and the Moral Relevance of Life's Stages"

Day 13: Midlife crisis

Kieran Setiya, "The Midlife Crisis"

UNIT 3: END OF LIFE

Day 14: Dementia

Ronald Dworkin, "Autonomy and the Demented Self"

Day 15: Consent

Heidi Hurd, "The Moral Magic of Consent"

Day 16: Advance directives

Sungwoo Um, "Vices in Autonomous Paternalism: The Case of Advance Directives and Persons Living With Dementia"

Day 17: Allocating scarce resources, part 1

Daniel Brudney, "Are Alcoholics Less Deserving of Liver Transplants?"

Day 18: Allocating scarce resources, part 2

Emily Bazelon, "People Are Dying. Whom Do We Save First With the Vaccine?"

Ezekiel J. Emanuel et al., "Fair Allocation of Scarce Resources in the Time of Covid-19"

UNIT 4: DEATH AND DYING

Day 19: Euthanasia, part 1

James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"

Day 20: Euthanasia, part 2

Joel Feinberg, "Overlooking the Merits of the Individual Case: An Unpromising Approach to the Right to Die"

Day 21: Is death bad?

Thomas Nagel, "Death"

Day 22: The possibility of immortality

Larry Temkin, "Is Living Longer Living Better?"

Day 23: Is immortality desirable?

Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality"

Day 24: Mourning the death of loved ones

Dan Moller, "Love and Death"