

## PH 251: Medical Ethics

Tues/Thurs 11:00-12:15

### **Professor**

Dr. Victor Kumar - [victor.c.kumar@gmail.com](mailto:victor.c.kumar@gmail.com)

Office hours: Tues/Thurs 3:30-4:30 (STH 536a)

Course website: [www.victorkumar.org/medical-ethics](http://www.victorkumar.org/medical-ethics)

### **Teaching fellows**

Brian Moen (Mon/Tues sections) - [bmo@bu.edu](mailto:bmo@bu.edu)

Office Hours: Mon 10:00-12:00 (STH 504)

Zara Amdur (Wed/Thurs sections) - [zeamdur@gmail.com](mailto:zeamdur@gmail.com)

Office Hours: Tues 1:00-2:00 (STH 504); Wed 10:00-11:00 (STH 502)

### **Course description**

The topic of this course is emerging ethical problems in modern medicine. We'll cover genetic engineering, human enhancement, health care in America, and social injustice in medicine. Many of these issues have legal and political dimensions, but our focus will be primarily on their ethical dimensions. In general, we'll explore whether different medical practices are morally right or wrong—and why. Because this is a philosophy course, we'll approach these issues through careful reasoning and argumentation.

### **Course book**

Allen Buchanan – *Better than Human* (bookstore or order online)

### **Assessment**

**Shorties (40%):** You will be asked to post **8 short responses** to the material (max 300 words) on blackboard by Fri 8:00pm on selected weeks. Late shorties not accepted.

**Essays (50%):** You will be asked to write **2 essays** (1000-1500 words). Late essays penalized 1 point out of 25 per day.

**Participation (10%):** You will be asked to contribute to thoughtful dialogue in discussion sections.

### **Class format**

I expect students to read all assigned material before class and discussion sections. The format of the class will be a mix of lecture and discussion. The aim of discussion is to analyze an author's view, evaluate his/her arguments, and explore their applications. **To do well in this course you must come to class prepared to critically discuss the material.** Active discussion is crucial for understanding the material and for learning how to do the sort of critical analysis that is part of good philosophical writing.

### **Expected classroom behavior**

Please be respectful. In discussion you may disagree with your classmates, your teaching fellow, or me, but it is important to express your disagreements with civility. Do not talk, sleep, text, or use any electronic equipment. You are not permitted to use a laptop, tablet, phone, etc. during class or sections (unless you have an accommodation). They are useful for taking notes, but too much of a distraction, and studies show they impede learning.

**Accessibility**

Students with diverse learning styles are welcome in this course. If you have a health consideration that requires accommodations, approach me and/or Disability Services.

**Academic integrity**

BU has a zero-tolerance policy regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism on any part of any assignment will result in automatic failure. I may use turnitin.com to analyze your assignments for evidence of plagiarism. Knowing what counts as plagiarism is your responsibility. Your rights and responsibilities as a member of BU's academic community can be found here: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

**Schedule**

Sept. 4 - Introduction to the course

Sept. 6 – Human evolution (no reading)

**1. Genetic Engineering**

Sept. 11 – Julian Savulescu – “As a Species, We Have a Moral Obligation to Enhance Ourselves” (TED interview) (online)

Sept. 13 – Michael Sandel – “The Case Against Perfection” (online)

*Shorty 1 due*

Sept. 18 – Walter Glannon – “Genetic Enhancement” (pdf)

Sept. 20 – Erik Parens & Adrienne Asch – “The Disability Rights Critique” (excerpt) (pdf)

*Shorty 2 due*

**2. Human Enhancement**

Sept. 25 – Ted Chiang – “Understand” (short story) (pdf)

Allen Buchanan – *Better Than Human* Ch. 1

Sept. 27 – Allen Buchanan – *Better Than Human* Ch. 2

*Shorty 3 due*

Oct. 2 – Allen Buchanan – *Better Than Human* Ch. 3

Oct. 4 – Allen Buchanan – *Better Than Human* Ch. 4

*Shorty 4 due*

Oct. 9 – No class: Columbus Day

Oct. 11 – Make up class for Tuesday sections (no class for everyone else)

Oct. 16 – Allen Buchanan – *Better Than Human* Ch. 5

Oct. 18 – Allen Buchanan – *Better Than Human* Ch. 6-7

*Shorty 5 due*

Oct. 23 – Begin watching documentary *Fixed*

Oct. 25 – Finish watching documentary *Fixed*

***Essay 1 due – Friday, Oct. 26: 8:00pm***

### **3. Health Care in America**

Oct. 30 – Begin watching documentary *Escape Fire*

Nov. 1 – Finish watching documentary *Escape Fire*

Nov. 6 – Sarah Kliff – “Everything You Need to Know about Obamacare” (online)

BBC News: “How has Obamacare Fared Under Trump?” (online)

Danielle Kurtzleben – “Here’s What’s in Sanders’ ‘Medicare for All’ Bill” (online)

Nov. 8 – Atul Gawande – “Is Health Care a Right?” (pdf)

*Shorty 6 due*

Nov. 13 – Norman Daniels – “Is There A Right To Health Care?” (pdf)

Nov. 15 – David Goldhill – “How American Health Care Killed My Father” (online)

*Shorty 7 due*

Nov. 20 & 22 – No class or sections: Thanksgiving week

### **4. Social Justice in Medicine**

Nov. 27 – Susan Sherwin – “Gender, Race, and Class in the Delivery of Health Care” (pdf)

Nov. 29 – Nina Martin & Renee Montagne – “Nothing Protects Black Women From

Dying in Pregnancy and Childbirth” (online)

Elizabeth Anderson – “Racial Segregation and Material Inequality in the US” (pdf)

*Shorty 8 due*

Dec. 6 – Abby Norman – “Women’s Troubles” (pdf)

Rebecca Solnit – “Cassandra Among the Creeps” (pdf)

Dec. 8 – Watch TED Talk by Peter Singer – “The Why and How of Effective Altruism”

Gregory Lewis – “Medical Careers” (online)

Amia Srinivasan – “Stop the Robot Apocalypse” (online)

Dec. 11 – TBA

***Essay 2 due – Friday, Dec 14 8:00pm***