

Draft Syllabus as of 11/02/11

Freshman Seminar:

Designing Life: The Ethics of Creation and its Control

Spring 2012

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This course examines the following questions:

Is genetic enhancement permissible? Is genetic selection permissible? Is genetic selection of desirable traits permissible? Is genetic selection of disabilities, such as deafness, permissible? Is selection against disability permissible?

Can creating someone harm her? Perhaps creating someone whose life is utterly miserable harms her. But can creating someone whose life is worth living harm her? How could it be that someone *should* create a non-disabled rather than a disabled child, if she has both options?

Is stem-cell research permissible? Do human embryos have moral status? If they do, do they have the same moral status as adult persons? If stem cell research does not require the destruction of the embryo, is it permissible?

Is abortion permissible? If we assume the fetus has the moral status of an adult person, does it follow that abortion is permissible?

Is procreation permissible? Is all human life so bad (worse than we realize) that it is wrong to have children?

Goals of the Course:

This course has three primary goals. One goal is to explore the questions stated above. The second goal is to develop your critical thinking skills. We will work on presenting the arguments we read as valid arguments, coming up with objections to those arguments, and coming up with responses to these objections on behalf of the original arguments. The third goal is to develop your skills at writing clear, well-structured papers.

Grade Distribution:

Class Participation and debates:	10%
Homework:	10%
Two Presentations:	5% each; 10% total
Two Argument Analyses:	10% each; 20% total
First Paper:	20%
Second Paper:	30%

Failure to hand in any assignment will result in an “F” in the course. An “F” on any assignment due to plagiarism will result in an “F” in the course.

Class Participation:

Attendance is required. Because this course meets only once a week, it is particularly important not to miss class.

Because this is a small seminar, every student is expected to participate fully and actively in class discussions, every time we meet. In order to participate fully and helpfully in class discussions, it will be important to have done the reading for the day.

Readings:

The philosophy papers that we will be reading are harder to read than texts for some other courses. The number of pages we read per week will be small compared to other courses, but that does not mean the readings will take less time. To understand these papers it will be necessary to read slowly and carefully, and to read them more than once.

In-Class Debates:

We will have two in-class debates. The debate resolution will be announced one week in advance, and the “pro-“ and “con-“ sides will be assigned. You will then have to plan with your team by developing arguments for your assigned position, as well as by anticipating arguments for your opponents’ position and developing responses.

Homework:

Often, there will be a small homework assignment due in class, requiring you to write between 1 and 2 pages (double-spaced). These are designed to encourage you to read actively and engage critically with what you are reading. Sometimes the homework will simply be to come up with some questions about the reading. Sometimes I will ask you a question for you to discuss in 1-2 pages.

In-Class Presentations:

Each student will give two in-class presentations during the semester. There is more than one acceptable format. You might summarize an argument in one of the readings and raise some questions for discussion. Or you might present your own line of thought about something we have been discussing. Each presentation should include a handout, one side of a page, double-spaced. Each presentation should include some discussion questions and should involve some discussion.

Argument Analyses:

For each argument analysis, I will distribute a short passage. In 2-3 pages (double-spaced), you will present that argument in valid form with premises numbered, and with indications of which premises follow from which other premises. Then you will explain the argument and briefly critique it. We will discuss these assignments more in class, and do some practice argument analyses together.

Papers:

The first paper will be a 5-6 page paper (double-spaced). The second paper will be a 7-8 page paper.

Deadlines:

All written assignments are due at the start of class on the week they are due. Do not be late to class as a result of finishing an assignment; assignments that come in after the start of class are late.

If written work is handed in late, it will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day late (for example, from A to A-, from A- to B+, and so on). Weekend days count. If you finish a late paper during a weekend, email it to me right away, and turn in a hard copy later. A paper is one day late if it is at all late; two days late if it is more than 24 hours late; three days late if it is more than 48 hours late; etc.

Homework:	Due most weeks
First Argument Analysis:	Due in Week Three
First Debate:	Week Five
First Paper:	Due in Week Six
Second Argument Analysis:	Due in Week Eight
First Debate:	Week Ten
Second Paper:	Due in Week Twelve

Extensions will not be granted except under extreme circumstances.

Plagiarism is very serious. If I suspect plagiarism, I will refer the case to the University Committee on Discipline. If plagiarism is found to have occurred, this will result in an “F” on that assignment, and as a result, an “F” in the course. For an introduction to what constitutes plagiarism, please read the guide “Academic Integrity at Princeton,” which is linked to from this page: <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/08/intro/index.shtm>. Consult us if you have any further questions.

Films:

If you absolutely cannot attend one of the scheduled film viewings, then please watch the film at least one day in advance of the scheduled viewing day at the Language Resource Center. See <http://www.princeton.edu/lrc> for hours.

Schedule of the Course:

This calendar is approximate. This list of readings is tentative. Readings may be removed, and readings may be added.

All readings will be available on the course Blackboard site, or can be found at the websites listed with the readings.

For some readings, only part of the document is assigned. In these cases, the syllabus lists which selection should be read.

I. Is genetic enhancement permissible? Is genetic selection permissible? Is genetic selection of desirable traits permissible? Is genetic selection of disabilities, such as deafness, permissible? Is selection against disability permissible?

Week One:

- Spriggs, M. “Lesbian couple create a child who is deaf like them.” *J Med Ethics* 2002 28: 283.
- Anstey, K.W. “Are attempts to have impaired children justifiable?”
- Pryor, James “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” and “Philosophical Terms and Methods” available at: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html> and <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html> (Read all six sections.)

Week Two:

- Levy, N. “Deafness, culture, and choice.”
- Savulescu, Julian. “Deaf lesbians, 'designer disability,' and the future of medicine.” *BMJ* 2002;325:771-773 (5 October)
- The film “Sound and Fury”

Week Three:

- Kass, Leon “Perfect Babies: Prenatal Diagnosis and the Equal Right to Life”
- Sandel, Michael, “Mastery and Gift,” Chapter 5 of *The Case Against Perfection*
- Silver, Lee. "The Virtual Child" and "The Designer Child". Chapters 17-18 (pp. 199-239) of *Remaking Eden*. Avon; (October 1998).
- First Argument Analysis Due

Week Four:

- Bostrom, Nick and Toby Ord. “The Reversal Test: Eliminating Status Quo Bias in Applied Ethics” Sections 1-4 (pp. 656-674).
- The film “Gattaca”

II. The non-identity problem: Can creating someone harm her? Perhaps creating someone whose life is utterly miserable harms her. But can creating someone whose life is worth living harm her? How could it be that someone *should* create a non-disabled rather than a disabled child, if she has both options?

Week Five:

- Parfit, Derek. Chapter 16: “The non-identity problem.” From *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press, 1984.
- First Debate

Week Six:

- Woodward, James. “The Non-Identity Problem.” *Ethics*. Vol. 96, No. 4
- Hanser, Matthew. “Harming Future People.” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 19, No. 1
- First Paper Due

III. Is stem-cell research permissible? Do human embryos have moral status? If they do, do they have the same moral status as adult persons? If stem cell research does not require the destruction of the embryo, is it permissible?

Week Seven:

- George, Robert P. “Embryo Ethics”

Week Eight:

- McMahan, Jeff. “Killing Embryos for Stem Cell Research.” *Metaphilosophy*.
- Second Argument Analysis Due

Week Nine:

- Singer, Peter, and Agata Sagan. “The Moral Status of Stem Cells.”
- Silver, Lee. “The Embryonic Soul.” Chapter 7 of *Challenging Nature*. Read pp. 98-116.

IV. Is abortion permissible? If we assume the fetus has the moral status of an adult person, does it follow that abortion is permissible?

Week Ten:

- Thomson, Judith Jarvis, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*
- Marquis, Don, "Why Abortion is Immoral" *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 86, No. 4
- Second Debate

Week Eleven:

- Tooley, Michael, "Abortion and Infanticide," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*.
- R.M. Hare, "Abortion and the Golden Rule"

V. Is procreation permissible? Is all human life so bad (worse than we realize) that it is wrong to have children?

Week Twelve:

- David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming Into Existence*
- Second Paper Due