

Medical Ethics (PHIL 384)

Christopher Newport University, Fall 2025

Meeting Info	Dr. Chris Tweedt chris.tweedt@cnu.edu	PHIL 384 Sec. 1 McMurrin 210, MW 4:30-5:45 pm
Office Hours	McMurrin 202 Tues., Thurs. 9:30-11 am	By appointment (704) 941-9079
Textbook	<i>Bioethics: Principles, Issues, and Cases</i> , by Lewis Vaughn All other readings will be hyperlinked below. If they're broken, check the Readings tab on Scholar or email me.	
Purpose	The purpose of this class is to help you <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. clearly and informedly think through ethical decisions in a clinical setting,2. gain an understanding of some arguments and viewpoints relevant to central medical ethics debates3. learn to discuss polarizing issues in a charitable and respectful manner, especially in the presence of strong disagreement, and4. develop the ability to charitably and accurately interpret, summarize, and critique philosophical arguments in the context of medical ethics.	
Overview	<p>The focus of this course is on value issues in medicine. The aspects of moral theory relevant to problems in medicine are treated, and recent biomedical technology is examined briefly to discover where value issues arise. The moral problems attending birth and death are treated, abortion and the beginning of human life, severe congenital defects, rights of the dying, the definition and the determination of death. Moral issues in the relation between the health care provider and the patient are treated: confidentiality, informed consent, how much the patient should be told, screening for genetic disease and experimenting with human subjects.</p> <p>The course is divided into three sections.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. First, we consider the goal of medical treatment: health. What is health? What is the difference between therapy and enhancement? Should we promote the health of a patient, and if so, why and when? Should we, as clinical practitioners, try to promote health whenever we can? In the case of patients in a PVS, should we discontinue treatment? Should we kill patients or assist in their death? What is emotional/mental health, and how is it achieved?2. Second, we assess moral principles and their application. We first consider Principlism, the dominant view of medical ethics, and its relationship to deontology, duties, and rights. We then ask: should physicians act against the wishes of a patient when they know better than the patient does about what is good for the patient? How do we know when a patient has acted autonomously? Is it morally permissible for physicians to lie to or deceive patients? Do physicians always need to respect patient privacy? Should the answers to these questions be determined by their consequences?3. Last, we address cases in which non-physicians make decisions for other humans. After presenting the Doctrine of Double Effect as a framework for these difficult cases, we ask whether we should engage in genetic engineering to decide what others' features should be, what genetic testing reveals about patients, whether we should engage in ending the life of humans in utero, whether physicians should engage in the corporate practice of medicine, and whether/how physicians should engage in medical research on human subjects.	

Schedule

Day	Topic, Reading, Cases
Aug 25	Introduction to Philosophy & the Course, Facts & Opinions AI and the Value of Physicians Hippocratic Oath, ancient version Hippocratic Oath, modern version The Nightingale Pledge
Health: The Goal of Treatment	
Aug 27	What is Health? WHO, definition of health Engelhardt's "The Disease of Masturbation: Values and the Concept of Disease" Boorse, "On the distinction between disease and illness" Case 1 , Case 2
Sep 1	Treatment v. Enhancement v. Maleficence U.S. Bioethics Counsel, "Distinguishing Therapy and Enhancement" Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology News, "Therapy and Enhancement: Is there a moral difference?" The Atlantic, "A new way to be mad" (See "Readings" in Scholar if behind paywall) Johnston & Elliott's "Healthy limb amputation: ethical and legal aspects" Washington Post article on age fluidity Case 3 , Case 4
Sep 3	Natural Law Theory: Why and When Should We Treat? Besong's <i>An Introduction to Ethics: A Natural Law Approach</i>, Ch. 3 Aquinas' <i>Summa Theologica</i> I-II.19-21 (McDermott trans.) No cases for today
Sep 8	Life Extension: Should We Always Treat When We Can? Minds, "If you're alive in 30 years, it's likely you will be alive in 1000 years" The Verge, "Elon Musk launches Neuralink, a venture to merge the human brain with AI" Joe Rogan's interview with Elon Musk Case 5 , Case 6
Sep 10	Euthanasia, Discontinuing Treatment, PVS: Should We Stop Treating? Ronald Munson, "Terri Schiavo" Case 7 , Case 8
Sep 15	Euthanasia, Physician-Assisted Suicide: Should We Kill Patients? Vaughn, 551-564 AMA's Statement on PAS James Rachels, "Active and passive euthanasia" (Vaughn, 678-681) Daniel Callahan, "When self-determination runs amok" (Vaughn, 658-662) Ronald Munson, "Jack Kevorkian: Moral Leader or Doctor Death?" Case 9 , Case 10
Sep 17	Virtue Ethics and Emotional Health: Emotional & Intellectual Goods

[Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics Book IV \(Sample each chapter; each is about a virtue\)](#)
[Beauchamp and Childress on virtue](#)
[Epictetus' Enchiridion, Chs. 1-21](#)
[How to be a Stoic, "Seneca on Anger Pt. 1"](#)
[Case 11, Case 12](#)

Sep 22	Review
Sep 24	Test I
Moral Principles & Their Application	
Sep 29	Deontology & Principlism – The Pillars of Medical Ethics Vaughn, 9-13 Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals (Vaughn, 61-67) No cases
Oct 1	Paternalism v. Autonomy: Should Physicians Override Patient Autonomy? Vaughn, 98-104 Terrence Ackerman, "Why doctors should intervene" (Vaughn, 126-131) Robert Schwartz, "Autonomy, Futility, the Limits of Medicine" (Vaughn, 131-135) Case 13, Case 14
Oct 6	Informed Consent: Autonomous Entitlement-Lifting & Permission Vaughn, 200-207 Canterbury v. Spence (Vaughn, 234-237) Case 15, Case 16
Oct 8	Trust: Lying & Deception Vaughn, 170-173 Cullen and Klein, "Respect for Patients, Physicians, and the Truth" Lipkin, "On Telling Patients the Truth" (Vaughn, 181-182) Schwartz, "Is it ever okay to lie to patients?" (Vaughn, 183-186) Case 17, Case 18
Oct 13	No Class: Fall Break
Oct 15	Privacy & Confidentiality: Weighing Common v. Individual Goods Vaughn, 173-177 James Rachels, "Why privacy is important" (Vaughn, 186-191) Daniel Sokol's "Is doctor-patient confidentiality dying a slow death?" Mark Siegler, "Confidentiality in Medicine, a decrepit concept" (Vaughn, 192-195) Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California (Vaughn, 195-199) [HIPAA guide: Federal guide to privacy of patient information] Case 19, Case 20
Oct 20	Focus on Results: Utilitarianism Vaughn, 39-54 Mill's Utilitarianism (Vaughn 60-61) Current Affairs, "Now Singer argues it might be okay to rape disabled people" Case 21, Case 22

Oct 22 **Review**

Oct 27 **Test 2** *First audio case study due by midnight

When Others Make Decisions for The Patient

Oct 29 **Doctrine of Double Effect, Moral Dilemmas: When Choices Have Bad Outcomes**
[Beauchamp and Childress on moral dilemmas](#)
Vaughn, 46-47
[Case 23](#), [Case 24](#)

Nov 3 **Substitute Decision Makers: When Others Make Decisions for the Patient**
"Bouvia v Superior Court" (Vaughn, 104-105 [156-160])
AMA Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs, "Fundamental Elements of the Patient-Physician Relationship" (Vaughn 161)
[Ronald Munson, "Faith and Medicine"](#)
[Washington Post, "The dying child who became an ideological football"](#)
[The Catholic Weekly's "Charlie Gard will die. But is it murder?"](#)
[Case 25](#), [Case 26](#)

Nov 5 **No Class:** Conference

Nov 10 **Genetic Engineering: Choosing What Features a Human Has**
Vaughn, 466-481
[BioSpace's Report: CRISPR is currently being used to modify human fetuses](#)
Glannon, "Genetic Enhancement" (Vaughn, 524-528)
Pontifical Academy's Statement on use of embryonic stem cells (Vaughn, 549-550)
[Case 27](#), [Case 28](#)

Nov 12 **Genetic Testing: What Do Test Results Tell Us?**
McMahan's "The Morality of Screening for Disability" (Vaughn, 494-498)
[Simonstein and Mashiach-Eizenberg, "Attitudes toward Autism spectrum disorders among students of allied health professions"](#)
No Cases

Nov 17 **Abortion 1: Choosing Whether a Human Lives**
Vaughn, 307-316
[Giubilini and Minerva's "After-birth Abortion: Why Should the Baby Live?"](#)
[Calum Miller, "Why be pro-life?"](#)
[Case 29](#), [Case 30](#)

Nov 19 **Abortion 2: The Permissibility of Killing without Consent**
Thompson's "A defense of abortion" (Vaughn, 323-334)
Roe v. Wade (Vaughn, 378-383)
[Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#)
No cases

Nov 24 **Corporate Practice of Medicine: Conflicts of Interest in Medical Practice**
[NPR, "Drug company payments mirror doctors' brand-name prescribing"](#)
[National Institutes of Health, "Conflicts of Interest and Medical Practice," Ch. 6](#)
[Munson, "From Vioxx to the ASR Implant"](#)
[Case 31](#), [Case 32](#)

Nov 26

Medical Research on Humans: Conflicts between Knowledge & Treatment

Vaughn, 238-250

Nuremberg Code, Declaration of Helsinki, Belmont Report (Vaughn, 258-265)

[NYT, "Patients lose sight after stem cells are injected in their eyes"](#) (See "Readings" in Scholar if behind paywall)

[Case 33](#), [Case 34](#) ("Research and Medicine Collide in Haiti," Vaughn, 254-255)

Dec 1

Review

Dec 3

Test 3 *Second audio case study due Dec 9 at 11:59 pm. This case is your final exam.

Assessments: 500 points total

<p>3 Tests 100 points each</p>	<p>Tests focus on content from the most recent part of class. Tests will be taken on paper in class: 10 short answer questions and 2 cases. You do not get points just for trying. You need to show me you know the answer. Test dates are on the schedule above.</p>
<p>10 Case Papers 10 points each</p>	<p>10 case papers are due only during class times for which there are cases. Papers must answer all questions for both cases for the day. Papers should contain no more than 300 words per case (600 total). Papers should be succinct and clearly answer each question, applying readings. Papers will be graded only on clarity, consistency, insight, and thoughtfulness. Papers are due before the start of each class, uploaded to Scholar. You get an automatic 0 in the course if you plagiarize or use AI in any paper.</p>
<p>2 Audio Case Studies 50 points each</p>	<p>Must be in an audio format, maximum 3 minutes, delivered to me electronically. The first part must contain a description of an ethically difficult medical case you've found. The second part must contain an analysis using what we learned in class.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the action you are evaluating? 2. Who is affected by your possible actions, and how? 3. What should you do, and why? 4. How could someone rationalize acting differently? 5. Why is the rationalization incorrect? <p>Your analysis should not cover a topic we haven't covered in class yet. Students will only be graded on class application, accuracy, and depth, not smoothness. Due dates are on the schedule. Students can opt to write a case for the National Bioethics Bowl for the second case only if the student has scored at least a 45 on the first case and has received my approval.</p>

A	500-460	B+	449-440	C+	399- 390	D+	349-340
A-	459-450	B	439-410	C	389-360	D	339-310
F	299-0	B-	409-400	C-	359-350	D-	309-300

University Syllabus Statements:

Honor Code

By being enrolled in this class, each student is expected to read, understand, and abide by the CNU's honor code. CNU reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct at any time is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. This conduct includes plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, the use of AI or LLMs for assignments, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes.

Class Policy: You'll receive an automatic F in the course if you display any of the conduct in the above paragraph. The purpose of these assessments is to test your knowledge. If you provide other students with the questions or answers, it undermines the testing process. If you have someone or something else do your work, it does not show me what you know. If you discover someone sharing questions and report it to me, I will buy you ice cream or a dairy-free equivalent. Also, I'll report all seeming-plagiarism to CHECS and give the seeming-plagiarizer a 0 for the course. I won't argue with you whether you did it intentionally. We all know how that will go. You'll argue that you didn't mean to do it, just like people who do it intentionally argue. So I'm not even going to ask. Please be intentional about not doing it.

University Statement on Diversity and Inclusion:

The Christopher Newport University community engages and respects different viewpoints, understands the cultural and structural context in which those viewpoints emerge, and questions the development of our own perspectives and values, as these are among the fundamental tenets of a liberal arts education.

Accordingly, we affirm our commitment to a campus culture that embraces the full spectrum of human attributes, perspectives, and disciplines, and offers every member of the University the opportunity to become their best self.

Understanding and respecting differences can best develop in a community where members learn, live, work, and serve among individuals with diverse worldviews, identities, and values. We are dedicated to upholding the dignity and worth of all members of this academic community such that all may engage effectively and compassionately in a pluralistic society.

If you have specific questions, suggestions or concerns regarding diversity on campus please contact Diversity.Inclusion@CNU.edu

Disabilities/Accessibility:

In order for a student to receive an accommodation due to a disability, that disability must be on record in the Office of Student Affairs, 3rd Floor, David Student Union (DSU). If you have a diagnosed disability, please contact Jacquelyn Barnes, Director of Accessibility & Care Team Support in Student Affairs (594-7160) to discuss your needs.

In order to provide access to educational programs in the best manner possible, students with documented disabilities should notify the instructor at least seven days prior to the point at which they require an accommodation (the first day of class is recommended), in private, if accommodation is needed. The instructor will provide students with disabilities with the reasonable accommodations approved and directed by the Office of Student Affairs. Work completed before the student notifies the instructor of his/her disability may be counted toward the final grade at the sole discretion of the instructor.

Success:

I want you to succeed in this course and at Christopher Newport. I encourage you to contact me during office hours or to schedule an appointment to discuss course content or to answer questions. If I become concerned about your course performance, attendance, engagement, or well-being, I will contact you first. I also may

submit a referral through our Captains Care Program. The referral will be received by the Center for Student Success as well as other departments when appropriate. If you are an athlete, the Assistant Director of Student-Athlete Success Services will be notified. Someone from the Center for Student Success will contact you to set up a plan for success and connect you with the appropriate resources. Please remember that this is a means for me to support you and help foster your success at Christopher Newport.

Academic Support:

The Center for Student Success (CSS) provides numerous free resources to help students succeed in their courses. These resources include individual peer tutoring and group/test review sessions. The Center also houses the Alice F. Randall Writing Center. Writing consultants can help you at any stage of the writing process, from invention to development of ideas, to polishing a final draft.

You may contact the Center for Student Success to request a tutor, meet with a writing consultant, or make an appointment to talk with a staff member about study skills and strategies. The Center is located in Christopher Newport Hall, first floor, room 124. You may email studentsuccess@cnu.edu, call (757) 594-7684, or visit <https://my.cnu.edu/academicsuccess/>.

Public Health

The university will provide guidance on public health issues and students will be expected to comply with university protocols.

Course Materials:

All content created and assembled by the faculty member and used in this course is to be considered intellectual property owned by the faculty member and Christopher Newport University. It is provided solely for the private use of the students currently enrolled in this course. To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not make available any of the original course content, including but not limited to lectures, discussions, videos, handouts, and/or activities, to anyone not currently enrolled in the course without the advance written permission of the instructor. This means that students may not record, download, screenshot, or in any way copy original course material for the purpose of distribution beyond this course. A violation may be considered theft. It is the student's responsibility to protect course material when accessing it outside of the physical classroom space.