Medical Ethics and the Movies
Elizabeth Reis, Macaulay Honors College
Course Description, Spring 2017
Tuesdays, 5:30p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30 (call x2908 when you get to MHC) and by appt.

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This upper division seminar considers major debates in bioethics in light of recent scholarship in medical humanities, disability studies, and gender studies, drawing on perspectives from philosophy, history, literature, sociology, and film.

From the question of informed consent to the very recent debates about genetic engineering, this course examines some of the most important social questions of our time: Should we experiment on human beings? Is there a difference between biomedical enhancement and eugenics? How can we alleviate health disparities, particularly those exacerbated by the history of medical experimentation and racial injustice? Should parents be able to go to any lengths to try experimental treatments for their sick child? Whose authority should prevail in medical decision making: the patient’s or the physician’s?

In analyzing the legal, moral, and philosophical debates that shape current public discourse, this course invites students to approach complex moral issues through the lens of both popular culture and scholarly analysis. Using selected films as well as readings and discussion, we will explore moral and social concerns from a variety of perspectives. We will approach the weekly films with these questions in mind: How is the issue under consideration being presented to a mass audience? How might the film’s presentation differ from or adhere to more scholarly bioethical considerations?

Watching the films will be part of your homework. Each week you will be expected to view the required film and read the assigned material before our class meeting. All films will be available on Netflix, Amazon, YouTube, etc. Depending on student interest and room availability, we may view the films on Thursday nights in the screening room.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class participation: This class will require active and sustained class participation, with open and honest discussion. We will be covering material that may challenge your beliefs, values, or conventional wisdom more generally. While you may not agree with everything said, you owe it to each other to listen carefully and respectfully to other people’s views.
Attendance: Because this will be a discussion-oriented class, you have to be here to benefit. I cannot recreate the class discussion for you if you have to miss class. Absences (as well as arriving late or leaving early) will negatively affect your final grade.

Rules: No computers, iPads, etc. are allowed in the class unless we are looking at the reading together. Please no texting either.

Academic Integrity
All work completed for this class must be your own. If you cheat (hand in your friend's work or copy directly from the internet or a book, etc.) you will (at the very least) fail the class and your name will be registered with the University. For guidelines and the Macaulay Honors pledge, see: http://macaulay.cuny.edu/community/handbook/policies/honors-integrity/

Students with Disabilities
I will make every effort to accommodate students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me as soon as possible. Please request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send a letter verifying your disability.

Weekly Journals should be uploaded to the “journals” section on Tuesday morning before 12:00 noon. There are 13 weeks of Journal submissions, but you can take one week off (of writing, not reading!) Your journals should discuss how the film deals with the ethical issues presented in the reading.

If you do a beautiful job, incorporate all the reading, and thoroughly contemplate and address the study questions, you will get full credit. If you complete all the journal entries and receive full credit, you will get an A on this part of the course. If you only submit and get credit for 11 you will receive an A- for this part of the course; 10, a B+; 9, a B; 8, a B-; 7 a C+, 6 a C and less than that a D or lower. If you submit fewer than 5, you will not pass the class at all.

The quality of the submission counts too! In other words, this is your opportunity to grapple with the readings, to question, to connect one week to the next, and to raise issues that you’d like to see discussed in class. The journals aren’t formally graded, but I still want complete sentences, though you don’t have to worry about making an argument, having smooth transitions, and the like. If you only write about one of the readings or you write about your opinions with no reference to the readings at all, you won’t get credit that week (though I may award partial credit.) I don’t have a page limit, but I expect you’ll submit roughly 500-750 words. More is fine.

Film Presentation: Each week one student will choose a 4-minute clip from our weekly film to jumpstart our class discussion. You should choose a scene that best illuminates the central ethical dilemma in the film and prepare five questions for group discussion in class.
**Final Paper/Presentation:** I will pass out the assignment for this project toward the end of the term. It will be due Tuesday, May 23.

**Grades:**
Weekly journal responses: 40%
Attendance and Participation: 20%
Film Presentation: 10%
Final Paper: 30%

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**WEEK 1, January 31: The Birth of Medical Ethics**
**Film:** *Frankenstein (1931)*

**February 7: Doctor/Patient Relationships**
**Film:** *The Doctor (1991)* (YouTube)

**February 14: Research, Patient Care, and End of Life**
**Film:** *Wit* (2001)

**February 21: The Social Needs of Disability**
**Film:** *The Fundamentals of Caring* (2016) (Netflix)
- William Peace: *Disability, Sexuality, and the Censorship of Atrium*
February 28: Life-Prolonging Treatment in Minors
Film: Lorenzo’s Oil (1992)
• Glenn Cohen, chapter from Patients with Passports: Medical Tourism, Law, and Ethics (NY: Oxford University Press, 2014)

March 7: Race and Health Care Disparities
Film: John Q (2002) (Amazon video)

March 14: Mental Illness: Consent, Competence, Capacity
Film: A Beautiful Mind (2001)

March 21: Football, Concussions, and NFL Doctors
Film: Concussion (2013)
• Glenn Cohen, Holly Fernandez Lynch, and Christopher Deubert, "A Proposal to Address NFL Club Doctors' Conflicts of Interest and to Promote Players’ Trust," Hastings Center Special Report (November-December 2016)
• Read the main article and all of the responses.

March 28: HIV/AIDS and Sexual Identity in Health Care and Research
Film: Philadelphia (1993)
• Tara Parker-Pope, “How Hospitals Treat Same-Sex Couples,” New York Times (May 12, 2009)
• Lance Wahlert and Autumn Fiester, “Repaving the Road of Good Intentions: LGBT Health Care and the Queer Bioethical Lens,” LGBT Bioethics: Visibility,

April 4: Teenage Sexuality, Ethics, and the Law
Film: *Kids* (1995)
- Rebecca Vesely, “Teens Opt for Unsafe Sex, Not Parents’ Consent,” January 20, 2005
- “When Health Care Providers Refuse: The Impact on Patients of Providers’ Religious and Moral Objections to Give Medical Care, Information or Referrals” National Women’s Law Center

April 11: Spring Break
April 18: Spring Break

May 2: Sex, Gender, Intersex, and Transgender
Film: *XXY* (2001)
- Chapter from Georgiann Davis, *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis* (2015)
- Thea Hillman, *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)*, excerpts
- Matthew McCarthy, Elizabeth Reis, and Joseph Fins, “Transgender HealthCare,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* (forthcoming)

May 9: Designer Babies
Film: *My Sister’s Keeper* (2009) (Amazon)
May 16: Individual Rights v. The Public Interest
Film: Contagion (2011)
