

Teaching Philosophy, Draft 2004-05  
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In the philosophy department, I regularly teach courses in bioethics, environmental ethics, research ethics, disability theory, ethical theory, and philosophy of law. These courses all raise controversial issues. But they represent areas of philosophy that feature substantial traditional philosophical content and the need for reasoned argument. In my courses, I am committed to informing contentious contemporary issues—such as stem cell research or species preservation—with the knowledge and skills of philosophical analysis.

In bioethics, I begin with a basic understanding of the provider-patient relationship. This part of the course treats issues such as autonomy and paternalism, confidentiality, and informed consent. I discuss the ethics of research with human subjects and differing (sometimes conflicting) roles of the provider as therapist and as researcher. My course then turns to ethical issues at the beginning and at the end of life. The final section of the course discusses issues of justice in health care, including access to care and discrimination on the basis of age, race, sex, and disability. The discussion of informed consent links us to philosophical understandings of autonomy. The discussion of ethics at the beginning of life links us to questions about the nature of personhood. The discussion of advance directives and decision making at the end of life links us to the nature of personal identity, and the discussion of access raises basic questions of justice such as whether there is a moral right to a decent minimum of health care. The course is offered in both online and live-format versions.

Typical philosophical perspectives considered in environmental ethics include anthropocentrism and biocentrism, consequentialism and cost/benefit analysis, the nature of individual and species identity, ecological feminism and deep ecology. Courses in environmental ethics, like other courses in applied areas, also must be informed by understanding of a wide range of empirical issues. How is the biosphere being affected by greenhouse gas emissions, what are the effects of fire suppression in national forests, and what are the likely economic and ecological consequences of implementation of the Kyoto accord? In my course, I try to bring expertise from various disciplines to ground the discussion empirically. I also believe that in areas of ethics where the possibilities for behavior change are themselves ethical problems, it is important to afford students the testing of real life experience. My environmental ethics course is typically taught as a service learning course, with service opportunities in a wide variety of organizations dealing with environmental issues.

Because I am trained as a lawyer and am a law professor, I also seek to bring knowledge of the law to my courses. In areas such as bioethics or environmental ethics, knowledge of some basic legal principles and texts is essential. The Patient Self-Determination Act, Oregon's Measure 16 (on physician-assisted suicide), and various state advance directive statutes have been highly influential on the field of bioethics. So have court decisions,

from *Schloendorff v. Society of New York Hospital*, 211 N.Y. 125 (1914), endorsing informed consent, to *Vacco v. Quill*, 521 U.S. 793 (1997), holding that constitutional equal protection is not violated by a prohibition on physician-assisted suicide despite the legal permissibility of withholding and withdrawing care. The Wilderness Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Endangered Species Act have been critical to the field of environmental ethics as it has been understood in the United States. Concepts such as standing have played important legal roles and are suggestive for moral theory as well. To be sure, more often than not, the law sets minimum, consensual standards; and legal rules may not be moral. But the interplay between legal rules and moral theory is apparent in applied ethics—including the use of moral theory to criticize law, as well as the transfer of legal insights to complex moral issues.