

# Ethics in Health Care

Course Listing: SAR HS 422

## Lecturer Information

### Lecturer

Marcus Gatto, B.A., M.A., J.D.

### Email

mgatto@bu.edu

### Office Location & Hours

Boston University—DCU Office  
By Request

**Credits:** 4 BU Credits + 2 Hub Units

**Class Times and Locations:** Refer  
to Main Schedule

## General Information

### Course Overview

This course aims to introduce learners to ethics and common ethical issues arising in the context and provision of healthcare. We will address topics specific to biomedical ethics, including end of life issues, reproductive technologies, and issues in biomedical research. These issues will be used to examine ethical reasoning, ethical theories and ethical principles, and cases and narratives in ethics. Special attention will be paid to developing skills of critical thinking through an examination of philosophical arguments and practical exercises. Learners are given a theoretical grounding in classical and contemporary schools of ethical reasoning. They are, in turn, expected to apply this theoretical knowledge in praxis through the analysis of case studies, participation in debates, and giving hypothetical advice in ethical matters posed for in-class debate and discussion. Learners further consider the subject matter through the prism of dramatic portrayals of ethical issues in media, such as film, news reporting, and art, as a multidisciplinary approach to engaging ethical decision-making capacity. Learners also significantly develop their faculty of critical reasoning and analysis, focusing specifically on the standards of analysis and formal features that are common to a variety of disciplines which incorporate critical thought, as well as the normative language and reasoning deployed in ethics. While the issues presented in the course transcend context, reference will be made throughout the course to the Irish context. Assessment for the course consists of class attendance and participation (10%), a case analysis (20%), an essay (40%), and a comprehensive final examination (30%).

### Hub Learning Outcomes

#### Ethical Reasoning (One Unit):

1. Learners will be able to identify, grapple with, and make a judgment about the ethical questions at stake in **at least** one major contemporary public debate, and engage in a civil discussion about it with those who hold views different from their own.
2. Learners will demonstrate the skills and vocabulary needed to reflect on the ethical responsibilities that face nations and governments as they grapple with issues affecting both the communities to which they belong and those identified as “other.” They should consider their responsibilities to future generations of humankind, and to stewardship of the Earth.

#### Critical Thinking (Intellectual Toolkit/One Unit):

1. Learners will be able to identify key elements of critical thinking, **such as** habits of distinguishing deductive from inductive modes of inference, recognizing common logical fallacies and cognitive biases, translating ordinary language into formal argument, distinguishing empirical claims about matters of fact from normative or evaluative judgments, and recognizing the ways in which emotional responses can affect reasoning processes.
2. Drawing on skills developed in class, learners will be able to evaluate the validity of arguments, including their own.

## Course-Specific Learning Outcomes

- Identify and define the major ethical theories and principles relevant to biomedical practice (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 1; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1)
- Analyze ethical issues, such as resource allocation, end- and beginning-of-life issues, patient autonomy, raised by contemporary healthcare (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcomes 1 & 2; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1)
- Recognize and develop valid arguments for use in ethical reasoning, especially discipline-specific norms of properly-formed ethical positions or advice—for example, discernment between ethical argumentation and, e.g., aesthetic opinion or critique (Critical Thinking; Learning Outcomes 1 & 2)
- Enhance critical faculty to identify and rebut deficiencies in the ethical evaluations of others in a respectful, cogent, and constructive manner, as well as learning to recognize the same deficiencies in their own thinking (Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 2)
- Understand the role of cases and narratives in the perception and resolution of ethical issues (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 2)
- Form reasoned positions via-a-vis ethical dilemmas with reference to the subject matter of the course (Ethical Reasoning, Learning Outcome 1)
- Advocate for their own considered ethical positions with reference to public controversies and debates in the area of healthcare (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 1)
- Cognize the ethical responsibilities of healthcare providers and administrators, as well as those engaged in any aspect of patient care and healthcare policy (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 2)
- Acknowledge and effectively manage common weaknesses (such as unjustified conclusions or improper argumentation (e.g. *ad hominem* attacks or emotional manipulation)) in critical thinking and debate that detract from the force and validity of their responses to ethical questions (Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1)

## Instructional Format

Class time will be used for a combination of lectures, discussions, and group exercises (including peer review and writing workshop activities). Participation is very important in this module, as learners will be asked to explain readings and concepts, to offer analysis of cases and to express their opinion.

## Assignments and Grading

Due	%	Assignment Title	Description
Continuous	10	Attendance and Participation  (Formative/Summative Assessment)	Learners should be present in class to engage with their peers in prepared and extemporaneous debates on the issue presented in class each week. Each absence will result in an automatic 10% deduction in the mark for this area. Absences may only be excused with the approval of the programme director for a valid and compelling reason, in accordance with Boston University policies on the matter. A learner can achieve a high mark by contributing to class discussions on a regular basis in a way that progresses the discussion, seeks clarification, or responds to the viewpoints voiced by their peers. A mid-range participation mark will be given where a learner makes intermittent contributions to class, and where these contributions do not progress the discussion or respond to the substantive contributions made by other learners in a structured or sustained manner. A low mark will be awarded where a learner makes few contributions or no contributions to classroom discussions and fails to engage with her/his peers in a respectful or engaged manner. (Ethical Reasoning and Critical Thinking: All Learning Outcomes)
	20	Case Presentation and Ethical Analysis  (Summative Assessment)	Learners must pick a case that interests them from the Dooley and McCarthy book. Learners will be asked to (1) identify the core ethical issues in the case (2) focus on two ethical issues and justify the reasoning for choosing those issues (3) choose one relevant ethical theory and describe it (4) apply this ethical theory to ethical issue 1

			<p>and give two reasons how this ethical theory applies to this issue and (5) repeat step 4 in respect of ethical issue 2. (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcomes 1&amp;2; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1)</p> <p>The presentation should last 10-15 minutes and learners should submit a brief, written summary (maximum 1 typed page, Arial, font size 12 or 300 words) of the presentation which will be graded, along with the presentation itself. This assessment the ability of the learning to provide a summative and succinct analysis of the issues presented in their case, including describing factual elements of the scenario presented that are relevant to a critical analysis of that case. See Presentation Guidelines document on the Loop for more details. (Annexed to this Syllabus) (Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1)</p>
40	Essay  (Formative/Summative Assessment)		<p>The topic for the essay will be chosen by each learner. The chosen topic must be one which raises serious ethical issues. The essay should provide the reader with a comprehensive background to the topic and the ethical issues it raises. The essay must include an ethical analysis of the topic using relevant ethical theories and principles. Learners must also observe normative standards of critical analysis and formatting specific to the healthcare field and academic commentary and analysis. Learners must include an Irish element to the topic. Significant emphasis is placed on referencing to ensure the authenticity of work submitted; therefore, learners are encouraged to make a conscious effort to ensure their referencing is of a good standard. See Essay Guidelines document on the Loop for more details. All essays must be submitted electronically on or before TBA. Learners are entitled to submit one draft until 48 hours before the due date upon which they can receive feedback. (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 1; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcomes 1 &amp; 2)</p>
30	Final Examination  (Summative Assessment)		<p>Learners will sit for a two-hour, essay-style examination spanning the entire course. The questions are divided into two sub-groups; learners must answer one question from each sub-group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first sub-group engages with the ethical reasoning outcomes of the course, requiring learners to take positions in relation to ethical questions, and engage in a detailed exposition of the theoretical considerations with regard to a contemporary debate or issue within healthcare. They must also countenance in their responses the ethical responsibilities that nations face and the duty towards those perceived as the “other” in certain cases. (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 2; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1)</li> <li>• In the second of the sub-groups, learners must engage with the critical thinking learning outcomes for the course. Specifically, they must analyse factual scenarios with reference to relevant ethical frameworks and therefrom derive normative and evaluative judgments regarding the ethical theories they would pursue and the anticipated arguments of the other side of the issue; they must raise and dispose of the latter to bolster the soundness and thoroughness of their own judgment. Moreover, using the skills and tools for critical analysis that they have acquired through the course, they must critically analyse multiple perspectives on a contemporary debate. Upon completion of such analysis, the learner should offer their own sound and considered judgment on a matter and explain its virtues vis-à-vis competing viewpoints. (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 1; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 2)</li> </ul>

## Course Materials

### Required Text (Available for Lending at BU/DCU Library):

Dooley, D. and McCarthy, J. 2012. *Nursing ethics: Irish cases and concerns*. 2nd edition. Dublin: Gill and McMillan.

### Complementary Readings:

#### Ethical Resources (Ethical Reasoning, Critical Thinking):

Beauchamps & Childress. 2012. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (7th Ed). Oxford University Press.

Boylan, M. 2014. *Medical Ethics* (2nd Ed). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell

O'Mathúna, D. P. 2009. *Nanoethics: big ethical issues with small technology*. London: Continuum.

### Plagiarism Notice:

It is the responsibility of every learner to read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Learners are advised that the penalty against learners on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be “[...] expulsion from the program of the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Learner Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the Dean.”

N.B: Learners MUST retain an electronic copy of all essays submitted for assessment.

### Course Schedule

For each topic, please read the specified chapter in the required text. Additional reading, from the complementary materials list, such as articles together with links to relevant websites will be made available on Moodle one week in advance of each class. PowerPoint presentations will also be available two days prior to the class and it is recommended that learners print out/access these presentations and have them electronically or physically available in class.

### Detailed Schedule:

Class	Topic/Preliminary Reading	To Complete:
1	Introduction to Ethics and Ethical Argumentation	Choose case study from core text for individual presentation.
2	Ethics in Research; Norms of Critical Analysis of Ethical Proposals	Dooley, pages 24-43, 140-156; Belmont Report Summary
3	Ethical Theory: Narrative Ethics; Coherence as a Critical Mode of Analysis	Dooley, pages 1-23; O'Mathúna, Chapter 3
4	Ethical Decision-Making: Theory and Praxis	Dooley, pages 181-211
5 and 6	Ethical Theory: Autonomy and Paternalism	Ethical Theory: Deontology and Utilitarianism
	Critical approaches to Patient Autonomy and Legitimate Restriction	Dooley, 87-110; Dooley, 111-135
7	Ethical Theory: Virtue Ethics; Framing and Conceiving of the Habit and Aim of Virtuous Action as an Element of Critical Thinking	Dooley, 44-84
8	Case Presentations	N/A
9	Case Presentations	N/A
10	Ethics Through Film; Normativity as a Dramatic and Critical Concept	Dallas Buyers Club/Me Before You (In-Class Film)

<b>Class</b>	<b>Topic/Preliminary Reading</b>	<b>To Complete:</b>
11	Ethical Responsibilities and the Legal Framing of Moot Court In-Class Activity Ethical Issues	
12	Healthcare as Performative Ethics	Case Scenarios for Performance and Review
13	Final Examination	Venue: TBA