FOUNDATIONS OF BIOETHICS & SOCIETY

Indicative Syllabus

Credits: 30
Module Convenor: Dr Silvia Camporesi
Office: D6, 3rd floor, East Wing, King’s Building
Consultation time: TBD
Semester: First
Lecture time and venue: TBD

MODULE DESCRIPTION

This module offers students a critical introduction to the theoretical frameworks used in contemporary bioethics. In the first part of the module (weeks 1-3) we will critically discuss how the discipline of bioethics developed historically, introduce students to key questions in metaethics, and examine work in bioethics that applies general moral theories to analyze bioethical problems (‘applied ethics’).

The core of the module (weeks 4-9) will engage students in a critical analysis of methods and approaches that have been specifically developed in the context of bioethics, such as principlism, casuistry, narrative approaches, and feminist approaches to addressing bioethical issues. The final session of the module (week 10) will examine issues around agenda-setting and the framing of problems in bioethics.

The course will run over 10 weeks for 3 hours weekly: 1.5 hours of lecture, and 1.5 hour of presentation and discussion of an illustrative case study where appropriate.

This module is the core module for students of the MA in Bioethics & Society.

Assessment methods and deadlines

Written formative essay: one x 2,000 word (only formative)
Written summative essay: one x 4,000-word essay (100 % total grade)

OUTLINE OF CONTENTS AND READINGS

Week 1. The origins of Bioethics.
Where we critically discuss the foundations of the discipline of Bioethics, through a historical, comparative analysis of paradigmatic case studies.

Readings:

Required:

Module approval 2013/14


Recommended:


Weeks 2. The status of moral knowledge
Where we critically analyse moral relativism and other fundamental questions regarding moral truth and justification.

Readings:

Required:


Recommended:


Weeks 3. Deontological and consequentialist approaches in ethics
Where we critically discuss approaches in bioethics that apply general ethical theories, and introduce students to fundamental concepts in bioethics derived from the application of consequentialist and non-consequentialist ethical theories.

Readings:

Required:

Module approval 2013/14


Recommended:


Weeks 4. Principlism and Reflective Equilibrium in Bioethics
Where we critically analyse principlism, the dominant bioethical framework in the Western world, and how its four principles of respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice can be used to reach decisions about a bioethical problem.

Readings:


Weeks 5: A critical reflection on the dominance of principlism in Western Bioethics.
Where we critically discuss the limits and critique of principlism, and we prepare the ground for the discussion of alternative methodological approaches in bioethics.

Readings:

Required:

Module approval 2013/14


**Recommended:**


**Week 6: Casuistry and common morality approaches to bioethics**

Where we critically discuss casuistry and common morality as possible alternatives or complementary approaches to principlism in bioethics.

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Weeks 7: Narrative Approaches to Bioethics**
Module approval 2013/14

Where we analyse, through the aid of a relevant case study, narrative approaches to bioethics, and critically discuss how meaningful storytelling is reshaping fundamental concepts in bioethics, such as respect for autonomy.

Readings:

Required:


Recommended:


**Weeks 8: Feminist approaches to Bioethics**

Where we critically analyse the contribution of feminist approaches to bioethics, in the discussion surrounding human stem cell research, oocyte donation or sale, surrogate pregnancy, and commodification of the female body.

Readings:

Required:


Recommended:

Module approval 2013/14


**Weeks 9: A Virtue Ethics-based approach to bioethics**

Where we critically discuss, through the aid of a significant case study, the virtue ethics based approach to bioethics, in particular with reference to the analysis of the professional roles in medical and nursing ethics.

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Week 10: Bioethics, Deliberation and Policy Making**

Where we critically analyse the relations between bioethics and policy making, and discuss questions of agenda-setting and the framing of problems in bioethics.

**Readings:**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


