

TOPICS IN ETHICS

What sorts of people should there be?

Class time and room: W, 9 am – 11.30 am, Assiniboia 2-02A
Instructor: Rob Wilson Office: Assiniboia Hall 3-71; tel. x.8994
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Please read the whole of this course outline ASAP. Copies are also posted on my website.

1. COURSE GUIDE DESCRIPTION

This course will be organized around the question "What sorts of people should there be?" and will focus on philosophical issues that arise in several areas at the interface of ethics, science, and technology. Topics that I would imagine covering including most, if not all, of the following: autonomy and personal choice concerning one's appearance, health, and well-being; choices and responsibilities for one's own possible and actual children; social policies and common practices regarding future generations, including genetic testing and screening; philosophical and medical views of disability and disablement; bioenhancement and transhumanism; the moral value of human and non-human lives; the nature of persons and the philosophical focus on questions about persons.

That's quite a lot, and inevitably discussion will take us into related issues (e.g., the morality of abortion, state intervention in individual lives) that are not themselves a focus for the course. We will cover as much material on the history of eugenics as I think we will need to inform our discussion of the focal topics, but the course will centre on contemporary philosophical debates and issues. For assessment, students should expect to have to write several papers, including a substantial term paper. Active participation in the course on a week-to-week basis will also constitute an important basis for your final grade.

2. THEMATIC OVERVIEW AND READINGS

The course will be organized around the five themes described below; the readings and other course materials (including blog posts and films) for each of these themes are included. All numbered course materials are contained in a course packet, available from the campus bookstore. Further materials may be added at the discretion of the instructor, or at the suggestion of students.

A. Moral Dimensions to Bodies and their Modification

Here we discuss forms of natural and unnatural variation in human bodies, the ways in which we modify both our own bodies and the bodies of other members of our species, and several moral dimensions to that variation and modification. Issues: kinds of bodies and

self-modification, cosmetic surgery and self-improvement, mobility and prosthetic bodies, disability and repair, ableism and transhumanism.

Gregor Wolbring, “*Human Kinds and the Ethics of Ableism*”, videocast from April 2009, What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-humanKinds.htm>

1. Carl Elliott, “Resident Aliens”, ch.8 of *Better than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream* (Norton, 2003), pp.186-207.
2. Nick Bostrom, “Transhumanist Values”, *Review of Contemporary Philosophy* 4 (2005). Version from his website, pp.1-11.
3. Gregor Wolbring, “What Next for the Human Species: Human Performance Enhancement, Ableism and Pluralism”, *Development Dialogue* 52 (August 2009), pp.141-161.
4. David Serlin, “The Other Arms Race”, from his *Replaceable You*, reprinted in Lennard Davis (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, 2007, pp.49-65.

B. *Boundaries of the Mind, Self, Organism, and Body*

There are a large number and a diverse range of categories that we think of ourselves under, and here we discuss four of the most general—mind, self, organism, and body—with an eye on the question of where the *physical* boundaries are for each of these. Issues: individualism and the extended mind, organisms, body parts, and species; neuropsychiatry, the brain and the self.

5. Robert A. Wilson, “What is an Organism?” and “Exploring the Tripartite View”, chh.3-4 of *Genes and the Agents of Life: The Individual in the Fragile Sciences: Biology*, 2005, pp.47-95.
6. Andy Clark, “The Negotiable Body”, ch.2 of his *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension*, (Oxford, 2008), pp.30-43.
7. Robert A. Wilson and Andy Clark, “How to Situate Cognition: Letting Nature Take its Course”, in Murat Aydede and Philip Robbins (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (Cambridge, 2009), pp.55-77.
8. Nikolas Rose, “Neurochemical Selves”, ch.7 of his *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, 2007), pp.187-223.
9. Norman Daniels, Susannah Rose, and Ellen Daniels Zide, “Disability, Adaptation, and Inclusion”, in Kimberley Brownless and Adam Cureton (eds.), *Disability and Disadvantage* (Oxford, 2009), pp.54-85.

C. *Bodily Normalcy and Normativity*

Not all the variation found in human bodies is treated equally in even the most tolerant and welcoming of minds: some bodies lack parts, have limited functions, or are regarded as standing in need of repair or augmentation. Here we explore the notion of normalcy in constructing evaluative dimensions to the body. Issues: the social construction of normalcy;

Foulcauldian approaches to normalcy and normativity; bodies that let us down; being a retard, being a freak.

Amanda Baggs, "About being considered 'retarded' ", Youtube video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qn70gPukdtY>

10. Ian Hacking, "Making Up People", in Thomas Heller, Morton Sosna, and David Wellbery (eds.), *Reconstructing Individualism* (Stanford, 1986), reprinted in Edward Stein (eds.), *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (Routledge, 1992), pp.69-88.
11. Lennard Davis, "Constructing Normalcy", ch.2 of his *Enforcing Normalcy*, reprinted in his *Disability Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2nd edition, 2007), pp.3-16.
12. Cressida J. Heyes, "Somaesthetics for the Normalized Body", ch.5 of her *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (Oxford, 2007), pp.111-132.
13. Robert A. Wilson, "Where Do Ideas About Human Variation Come From: Disability and Sub-Normalcy in Health and Medicine", unpublished manuscript, 2009.
14. Susan Wendell, "The Flight from the Rejected Body", ch.4 of her *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (Routledge, 1996), pp.85-113.
15. Eli Clare, "Freak Show", from Clare's "Freaks and Queers", in *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (South End Press, 1999), pp.71-81.

D. Between Generations and Species: Parents, Children, Animals, Disability

Parents make decisions about, and on behalf of, the fetuses, infants, and children they typically produce, and these decisions and the attitudes they reflect interact with broader social attitudes about people, cognitive capacities, and animals. Issues: the expressivist objection to prenatal testing; the notion of profound intellectual disability; speciesism and human rights; moral status, inclusion, and consistency; disability, parenting, and the idea of loss.

16. Paul Lombardo, "Taking Eugenics Seriously: Three Generations of ??? Are Enough?", *Florida State University Law Review* 30 (2003), pp. 191-218.
 17. Deborah Kent, "Somewhere a Mockingbird", reprinted in Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch (eds.) *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights* (Georgetown, 2000), pp.57-63.
 18. Adrienne Asch, "Why I Haven't Changed My Mind About Prenatal Diagnosis: Reflections and Reminders", in Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch (eds.) *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights* (Georgetown, 2000), pp.234-258.
- Various, "The Modern Pursuit of Human Perfection", videocasts from October 2008, What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-PursuingPerfection.htm>
- Robert A. Wilson, "Peter Singer on parental choice, disability, and Ashley X", videocast #1 from the Thinking in Action series, What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>

- Dick Sobsey, "Singer on universal human rights", videocast #2 from the Thinking in Action series, What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>
- Dick Sobsey, "Peter Singer and profound intellectual disability", videocast #5 from the Thinking in Action series, What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>
19. Peter Singer, "Speciesism and Moral Status", *Metaphilosophy* 40 (July 2009), pp.567-581.
20. Jeff McMahan, "Cognitive Disability and Cognitive Enhancement", *Metaphilosophy* 40 (July 2009), pp.582-605.
- Robert A. Wilson, "What are the deep facts about our moral status", videocast #3 from the Thinking in Action series, What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>
- Robert A. Wilson, "The ethics of exclusion, the morality of abortion, and animals", videocast #4 from the Thinking in Action series, What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>
- Robert A. Wilson, "The son that Trent can never be, and what to do", What Sorts Network blog, January 26th, 2009. <http://whatsortsofpeople.wordpress.com/2009/01/26/the-son-that-trent-can-never-be-and-what-to-do/>
- Julie Maybee, "Samantha, loss and ableism", post #13 from the Thinking in Action series, What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>

E. Human Kinds Made and Found: Child Sexual Abuse, Trauma, and the Ethics of Innocence

The concept of trauma is relatively recent, and one of its primary applications in the past 20-25 years is to the case of child sexual abuse. Here we examine aspects of the genealogy of trauma in the 20th-century in concert with Hacking's influential approach to understanding human kinds. Issues: what it means to "make up people"; trauma, memory, and the destruction of the self; the role of innocence in charges of child sexual abuse; collective memory and psychiatric practice.

21. Ian Hacking, "The Making and Molding of Child Abuse", *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), pp.253-288.
22. Judith Herman, "A Forgotten History", ch.1 of her *Trauma and Recovery*, 1992, pp.7-32.
23. Judith Herman, "Afterword 2000: Understanding Incest 20 Years Later" from her *Father-Daughter Incest* (Harvard, 2000 [1st edition, 1979]), pp.219-249.
24. Joseph E. Davis, "Interpreting Abuse: From Collective Story to Psychological Trauma Model", ch.4 of his *Accounts of Innocence: Sexual Abuse, Trauma, and the Self* (Chicago, 2005), pp.109-139.
- Capturing the Friedmans*, film, 2003.

3. ASSESSMENT

For those taking the course as Philosophy 450, you will be assessed by the following components, which will be formally equal in value:

- participation
- short paper
- term paper draft
- term paper final version
- final exam

In Phil 450, provided that you score at least a C- on all of these components, your worst grade will be dropped, making each of these worth 25%; otherwise, each component will be worth 20% of your final grade.

Participation will include class attendance and manifest preparation, and the completion of minor writing tasks given in class. The **short paper** will be 3-4 pages in length on an assigned topic and will be due on Friday, 12th February, by 2pm. For **term papers**, I will circulate topics but you may write on a topic of your choosing *that is cleared with me in writing well in advance*; the first draft for that will be due in class on Wednesday, 17th March, and the final version of that paper on the last day of classes for the term (though it may be handed in without penalty up to 48 hours later than that time). The **final exam** will contain a subset of questions handed out in advance of the examination, and will be 2 hours in length. Those taking Phil 450 can expect to be judged standards appropriate for final year undergraduates.

For those taking the course as Philosophy 550, you will be assessed by the following equally-weighted components:

- participation
- short paper (due on Friday, 12th February, by 2pm)
- term paper draft (due in class on Wednesday, 24th March)
- term paper final version (due before the schedule final exam for Phil 450)

The same descriptions for each of these components given for Phil 450 hold, though note that the term paper due dates are later. In addition, those taking Phil 550 can expect to be judged by standards appropriate to graduate students and *there is no droppable grade*.

Late submission of papers is discouraged, and you should talk to me in advance about a paper that will not be submitted by the due date. Expect a grade reduction for a late paper that does not have an extension in writing from me; I penalize at a grade a day for late papers, and set a date after which the paper will receive a grade of *zero*. To avoid disappointment, please take this general policy seriously.

Finally, what I hope is a reminder for most of you: that **plagiarism** is a seriously academic offense that is grounds for disciplinary action. The first item under “Inappropriate Academic Behaviour” in the University of Alberta’s Code of Student Behaviour reads:

30.3.2(1) Plagiarism

No Student shall submit the words, ideas, images or data of another person as the Student’s own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, project, assignment, presentation or poster in a course or program of study.

This document can be found at:

http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/gfcpolicymanual/content.cfm?ID_page=37633#38363

The University also maintains a more general website on plagiarism:

<http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/>

I would encourage you to consult both early in the course if you are unfamiliar with their contents and, more generally, **not to risk the consequences of plagiarizing** in this course, which could include not only failure in the course but have severe repercussions for your future at the University.

4. STUDENT SERVICES, ACCOMMODATION, SPECIALIZED NEEDS

The University of Alberta offers a range of student services, including the Aboriginal Student Services Centre, the Academic Resource, and Specialized Support and Disability Services. You can find these listed at <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/student-services/>. You are encouraged to consult this page and make use of relevant services provided. If there are ways in which I can improve the accessibility of the course and the materials it uses, please do not hesitate to let me know.

5. ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

I came to Alberta in July 2000 as a professor of philosophy after teaching previously at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where I was a member of the Cognitive Science Group at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology, and at Queen's University. I did my BA in philosophy at the University of Western Australia, and my MA and PhD in philosophy at Cornell University, minoring in Cognitive Studies. I have also had *real* jobs: four years working in bars and liquor stores while I was an undergraduate, a year as a computer programmer, and a few years teaching Philosophy for Children in elementary schools in Perth, Western Australia. I am currently Director of Philosophy for Children Alberta and team organizer of the What Sorts Network, both based in Edmonton.

My chief research and teaching expertise is in the philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and the philosophy of biology. Recently, I have also worked on constitution views in metaphysics, on John Searle's views of social reality, on collective memory and group minds, on kinship in the biological and social sciences, and on incest and incest avoidance in human and nonhuman primates. In general, I am most interested in connections between philosophy and the various sciences, and I often getting my feet muddy in the process of pursuing those connections. I am the author or editor of six books, the two most recent of which are *Boundaries of the Mind* (Cambridge, 2004) and *Genes and the Agents of Life* (Cambridge, 2005). I am a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and, most importantly, a long-standing member of the **Luxuriant Flowing Hair Club for Scientists** (<http://www.improb.com/projects/hair/hair-club-top.html>).