

**PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT  
TRENT UNIVERSITY**

**PHIL 4390H: ADVANCED TOPICS IN BIOMEDICAL ETHICS  
2016 WI  
Peterborough**

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**Course Description:**

Human embryonic stem cell research has become one of the most controversial areas of contemporary biomedicine and has sparked a global ethical controversy over the ontological status of the human embryo and the morality of the creation and use of embryos for research. This course explores key bioethical issues arising from the derivation of stem cells from human embryos and from intersections of stem cell research with other controversial biomedical technologies such as somatic cell nuclear transfer (human cloning), assisted reproductive technologies, genetic engineering and genomics, and hybrid embryo (chimera) research. The course will begin with an overview of basic concepts in stem cell biology, the prospects for stem cell therapeutics, and a more general introduction to the stem cell controversy. We will then continue with a more focused study of philosophical perspectives on the embryo's moral status by examining, in a comparative perspective, the 'equal moral status' view, developmental theories of personhood, and attribution views of personhood. The focus of the course is both theoretical and practical. Therefore, we will further consider political, social and cultural factors that have contributed to bioethical and policy debates. Specifically, we will discuss the historical context of embryo research debates, religious objections to stem cell research, media framing of the stem cell controversy, the role of bioethics advisory bodies in the decision-making process, issues concerning research ethics oversight, and regulatory approaches in different jurisdictions.

**Course Pre-requisites:**

7.0 university credits including PHIL 2390H (239H) or 234, or permission of instructor. Excludes PHIL 439H.

## **Required Texts:**

*The required texts can be purchased as Kindle editions from amazon.ca at a discounted price (overall cost of CAN\$ 34.53).*

- 1) Habermas, J. (2003). *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. William Rehg, Max Pensky, and Hella Beister. *Cambridge: Polity*.
- 2) Sandel, M. J. (2009). *The case against perfection: Ethics in the age of genetic Engineering*. Harvard University Press.
- 3) George, R. P., & Tollefsen, C. (2008). *Embryo: A defense of human life*.

*Additional mandatory readings will be posted as PDFs on the course Blackboard page.*

- 4) Caulfield, T., Kamenova, K., Ogbogu, U., Zarzeczny, A., Baltz, J., Benjaminy, S., ... & Knowles, L. (2015). Research ethics and stem cells. *EMBO reports*, 16(1), 2-6.
- 5) Chan, S., Donovan, P. J., Douglas, T., Gyngell, C., Harris, J., Lovell-Badge, R., ... & On Behalf of the Hinxton Group. (2015). Genome Editing Technologies and Human Germline Genetic Modification: The Hinxton Group Consensus Statement. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 15(12), 42-47.
- 6) Cohen, C. B. (2005). Promises and perils of public deliberation: Contrasting two national bioethics commissions on embryonic stem cell research. *Kennedy Institutes of Ethics Journal*, 15(3), 296-288.
- 7) Daley, G. Q. (2002). Prospects for stem cell therapeutics: myths and medicines. *Current opinion in genetics & development*, 12(5), 607-613.
- 8) Daley, G. Q. (2012). The promise and perils of stem cell therapeutics. *Cell stem cell*, 10(6), 740-749.
- 9) Kamenova, K., & Caulfield, T. (2015). Stem cell hype: Media portrayal of therapy translation. *Science translational medicine*, 7(278), 278ps4-278ps4.
- 10) Kaveny, M. C. (2006). Diversity and deliberation. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 34(2) 311-337.
- 11) Nisbet, M. C., Brossard, D., & Kroepsch, A. (2003). Framing science: The stem cell controversy in an age of press/politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 8(2), 36-70.
- 12) Pompe, S., Bader, M., & Tannert, C. (2005). Stem-cell research: The state of the art. *EMBO reports*, 6(4), 297-300.
- 13) Strong, C. (1997). The moral status of preembryos, embryos, fetuses, and infants. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 22(5), 457-478.

- 14) Walters, L. (2004). Human embryonic stem cell research: an intercultural perspective. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 14(1), 3-38.

### **Blackboard:**

This course is supported by a Blackboard page. This resource will provide students with access to course materials such as the syllabus, lecture notes, course readings in electronic format, assignment descriptions, changes in class schedule, and other relevant information. Please check the Blackboard page and your Trent email regularly.

### **Course Format:**

Please check <http://www.trentu.ca/timetable/> to confirm times and locations.

Type	Day	Time	Location
Seminar	Monday	3:00 pm – 4:50 pm	OCA 204

### **Learning Outcomes/Objectives/Goals/Expectations:**

*This course aims to enable students:*

- To learn key philosophical concepts, theories, and perspectives relevant to the study of the ethics of stem cell research and the emerging regenerative medicine;
- To understand novel bioethical concerns arising from the development of embryo technologies such as somatic cell nuclear transfer (human cloning), pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (sex selection and human enhancement), genome editing technologies (human germline modification), and their therapeutic applications;
- To discuss the role of political, social and cultural factors in framing policy and bioethical debates about the therapeutic potential and ethical concerns surrounding stem cell research;
- To identify key challenges involved in the public communication of human embryonic stem cell research and regenerative medicine (e.g., media hype, public opinion, social and political advocacy);
- To understand the role of intercultural and religious perspectives in the evolution of the stem cell controversy and its impact on science policy;
- To reflect on the past, present, and future of stem cell research and regenerative medicine;
- To evaluate ethical arguments and conflicting positions in the stem cell debate;
- To develop independent research projects relevant to the course themes and write well-researched (and potentially publishable) philosophical papers.

### **Course Evaluation:**

Normally **at least 25%** of the grade in an undergraduate half-credit course offered in the Fall/Winter academic session must be determined and made available by the final date for withdrawal. **Winter 2016, final date for withdrawal is March 3, 2016.** No final examination is

worth more than 50% of the final grade. With the exception of laboratory examinations in the sciences, no in-class tests or final examinations which are worth more than 10% of the final grade may be held during the last two weeks of classes in the Fall or Winter term.

Type of Assignment	Weighting	Due Date
Oral Presentation and Summary (4 pages)	15%	By the end of Winter Term
Short Essay (5 pages)	25%	February 8 in class
Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography	20%	February 29 in class
Research Paper (10 pages)	25%	April 4 in class
Attendance and Participation	15%	Throughout the academic year

**Oral Presentation and Summary - 15% (due by the end of Winter Term):**

Each student will give a 20-minute presentation on the weekly readings. The student is expected to highlight facts, points and arguments that s/he considers relevant to the weekly topic, and to raise questions for class discussion. On the day of her/his presentation, the student will also submit a short, 4-page summary of the readings. The student may choose whether to give a PowerPoint presentation, or simply talk informally with the class. Decisions about distribution of readings and presentation dates will be made on the first day of class.

**Short Essay - 25% (due Feb. 8 in class)**

Students will write a short critical essay (5 pages, double-spaced) on concept of “ethics of the species,” which the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has developed in *The Future of Human Nature* (2003) as a normative critique of philosophical defenses of non-medical enhancement through embryo screening (e.g., preimplantation genetic diagnosis) and genetic manipulation (the so-called ‘liberal eugenics’). Liberal eugenics emphasizes individual choice and reproductive autonomy and asserts that genetic interventions to select or improve children are not only permissible but morally desirable. In this essay, the students are expected to reconstruct Habermas’s arguments against liberal eugenics, which also extends to human embryonic stem cell research, and evaluate his position that producing genetically enhanced persons violates the liberal principles of autonomy and equality. In doing this, students will address Michael Sandel’s communitarian critique of Habermas’s notion of the ethical self-understanding of the species developed in his book in *The Case against Perfection* (2009). The essay will conclude with the students’ personal take on this debate. This assignment, as well as all other assignments for the course, should be formatted in accordance with the APA’s 6th edition style guide, e.g., double spaced on standard-sized paper (8.5" x 11") with 1" margins on all sides, left aligned, font 12 pts Times New Roman. Students may use the following electronic resource on the APA formatting and style guide: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

**Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography - 20% (due Feb. 29 in class)**

Students will conduct independent research to develop a proposal for research paper on one of the course topics. Note that the topic must be approved by the Instructor prior to the assignment submission. The proposal will present: 1) an outline of the intended research, including background or context; 2) thesis statement/argument; 3) methodology or philosophical tradition used to analyze the topic; and 4) expected conclusions. It should include an annotated bibliography of five academic sources for the paper (e.g., peer reviewed journal articles, scholarly

books, credible web-based sources). The proposal should not exceed five pages, double-spaced, including bibliography and annotations. APA style should be used for referencing and in-text citations.

**Research Paper - 25% (due Apr. 4 in class)**

Based on the proposal and the feedback on it from the instructor, students will complete a research paper. Papers should be about 3000 words (approximately 8-10 pages), excluding the abstract and the bibliographical references. The papers should be formatted in accordance with the APA’s 6th edition style guide and consist of four major sections: Title Page, Abstract, Main Body, and References.

**Attendance and Participation - 15% (throughout the term)**

Students’ attendance and participation will be evaluated. Consistent attendance is essential for success in this course. Participation in class discussions is a key aspect of students’ learning. Active involvement in class discussions greatly enhances learning outcomes as students have the opportunity of hearing different ways of interpreting and applying course material and can learn from each other. Students also develop ability to articulate critical arguments, clarify errors and misunderstandings, and tend to remember better the material studied. It is expected that students will complete the assigned readings prior to each class and will contribute thoughtful opinions on relevant topics. Students should communicate with the Instructor on their participation and interim feedback will be provided.

**Week-by-week schedule:**

Week	Date	Topic and Readings
1	Jan. 11	<b>Course Overview: The Promise of Stem Cell Research</b> <u>Readings:</u> 1) Syllabus 2) Daley (2002). Prospects for stem cell therapeutics: myths and medicines. <i>Current opinion in genetics &amp; development</i> , 12(5), 607-13. 3) Daley (2012). The promise and perils of stem cell therapeutics. <i>Cell stem cell</i> , 10(6), 740-49.
2	Jan. 18	<b>The Stem Cell Controversy: Religion and Politics</b> <u>Readings:</u> 1) George & Tollefsen (2008). Embryo: A defense of human life. Chapter 1 (pp. 1-26) 2) Walters, (2004). Human embryonic stem cell research: an intercultural perspective. <i>Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal</i> , 14(1), 3-38.
3	Jan. 25	<b>Moral Philosophy and Embryo Experimentation: Utilitarianism, Consequentialism, Deontology</b>

		<p><u>Readings:</u> 1) George &amp; Tollefsen (2008). Embryo: A defense of human life. Chapter 4 (pp. 83-111)</p>
4	Feb. 1	<p><b>The Debate over the Human Embryo’s Moral Status</b> <u>Readings:</u> 1) George &amp; Tollefsen (2008). Embryo: A defense of human life. Chapter 5 (pp. 112-43) 2) Strong (1997). The moral status of preembryos, embryos, fetuses, and infants. <i>Journal of Medicine and Philosophy</i>, 22(5), 457-78.</p>
5	Feb. 8	<p><b>Critiques of the Equal Moral Status View</b> 1) George &amp; Tollefsen (2008). Embryo: A defense of human life. Chapter 6 (pp. 144-173) 2) Sandel (2009). The case against perfection. ‘Epilogue: Embryo Ethics: The Stem Cell Debate (pp. 101-30)</p> <p><b><u>Short essay due</u></b></p>
	Feb. 15-19	<b>Reading week</b>
5	Feb. 22	<p><b>Moral Limits of Liberal Eugenics</b> <u>Readings:</u> Habermas (2003). The Future of Human Nature</p>
6	Feb. 29	<p><b>Towards an “Ethics of Species”?</b> <u>Readings:</u> Habermas (2003). The Future of Human Nature</p> <p><b><u>Research proposal due</u></b></p>
7	Mar. 7	<p><b>The Ethics of Human Cloning and Human Enhancement</b> <u>Readings:</u> Sandel (2009). The case against perfection. Chapters 1, 4 and 5</p>
8	Mar. 14	<p><b>Stem Cell Policy: Ethical Reasoning and Methods of Deliberation</b> <u>Readings:</u> 1) Cohen (2005). Promises and perils of public deliberation. <i>Kennedy Institutes of Ethics Journal</i>, 15(3), 296-288. 2) Kaveny (2006). Diversity and deliberation. <i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>, 34(2), 311-337.</p>
9	Mar. 21	<p><b>Moving Away from the Ethical Debate: Media and the Evolution of the Stem Cell Controversy:</b> <u>Readings:</u> 1) Nisbet et al. (2003). Framing science the stem cell controversy in an age of press/politics. <i>The International Journal of Press/Politics</i>,</p>

		8(2), 36-70. 2) Kamenova & Caulfield (2015). Stem cell hype: Media portrayal of therapy translation. <i>Science translational medicine</i> , 7(278), 278ps4-278ps4.
10	Mar. 28	<b>Stem Cells and Research Ethics: Past and Current Policy Challenges</b> <u>Readings:</u> 1) Caulfield et al. (2015). Research ethics and stem cells. <i>EMBO reports</i> , 16(1), 2-6. 2) Pompe et. al (2005). Stem-cell research: the state of the art. <i>EMBO reports</i> , 6(4), 297-300. 3) <i>Additional readings on Blackboard</i>
11	Apr. 4	<b>Current Concerns: The Ethics of Embryo Editing</b> <u>Readings:</u> 1) Chan et al. (2015). Genome Editing Technologies and Human Germline Genetic Modification: The Hinxtton Group Consensus Statement. <i>The American Journal of Bioethics</i> , 15(12), 42-47. 2) <i>Additional readings on Blackboard</i>  <b><u>Research paper due</u></b>

### **Course Policies:**

#### **Late Assignments**

The deadlines for assignment submission in this course are firm. All assignments are to be turned in at the beginning of the class on the day it is listed as due on this syllabus. A penalty of 5% per day will be levied upon any late assignments. The Instructor may grant extensions for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc. but will require supporting documentation (e.g., a valid certificate from a physician). In all cases, requests should be submitted prior to the assignment due date.

#### **Assignment Submission and Safe-Assign**

All assignments must be submitted both electronically to the SafeAssign drop box in Blackboard and in hard copy at the beginning of the class on the due date. SafeAssign utilizes plagiarism-checking software. Further information about SafeAssign will be provided on the class Blackboard site.

## **University Policies**

### **Academic Integrity:**

Academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism and cheating, is an extremely serious academic offence and carries penalties varying from failure on an assignment to expulsion from the University. Definitions, penalties, and procedures for dealing with plagiarism and cheating are set out in Trent University's *Academic Integrity Policy*. You have a responsibility to educate yourself – unfamiliarity with the policy is not an excuse. You are strongly encouraged to visit Trent's Academic Integrity website to learn more: [www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity).

### **Access to Instruction:**

It is Trent University's intent to create an inclusive learning environment. If a student has a disability and documentation from a regulated health care practitioner and feels that he/she may need accommodations to succeed in a course, the student should contact the Student Accessibility Services Office (SAS) at the respective campus as soon as possible, (Peterborough, Blackburn Hall, Suite 132, 705-748-1281 or email [sas@trentu.ca](mailto:sas@trentu.ca)

For Trent University – Durham, Thornton Road, Room 111 contact 905-435-5102 ext. 5024 or email [corinnphillips@trentu.ca](mailto:corinnphillips@trentu.ca) . Complete text can be found under Access to Instruction in the Academic Calendar.