

FYS 100-16: Ethics in the Family: From Birth to Death (Spring 2020)

Alger 109, Monday/Wednesday 4:00-5:50

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Office Hours: Mondays 1:00-3:00 (or by appointment)

What this course is about

The theme of this course is “Ethics in the Family: From Birth to Death.” During this semester, we will use philosophical tools to think about how our lives should go: about whether we should have children, about the meaning of our lives, about how those lives should end. We will go chronologically, from before birth to the moment of death, investigating some major moral and political theories along our way. The main topics we will cover are:

- **The ethics of birth:** We start before birth, looking at the questions surrounding reproduction. Is it ever okay to have children? If it is, should you adopt rather than having biological children? If it’s permissible to have biological children, what about abortion or the genetic enhancement of fetuses? In this section, we’ll also discuss some influential moral theories.
- **Justice and the family:** Next, we talk about how the family should be organized. If you have children, can you favor them over strangers? As an adult, what should your relationship with your parents be like? What marriages should the state recognize, and should issues of gender justice affect how we organize those marriages? Considering these questions will take us into work on political theories of justice.
- **The end of life:** Finally, we’ll end the course by considering end-of-life issues. What counts as a “good death”? Should you be allowed to have the choice to end your own life? And when you look back on your life, will it have been meaningful?

By the end of this course, you will be able to

- Explain how philosophers think about common ethical issues related to the family
- Assess the arguments for and against different ethical theories and positions
- Argue, in discussion and in writing, for what you believe to be the correct answers to ethical questions
- Succeed at RIC, using the resources and skills we discuss in class

Course policies

What you’ll need to have

- The readings. Complete all assigned readings before coming to class, and bring the reading for the day with you to class. We will be using one book and one course reader:
 - The book, *Exploring Moral Problems: An Introductory Anthology* (eds. Steven M. Cahn and Andrew Forcehimes, Oxford University Press 2017, ISBN 978-0-19-067029-0), is available at the RIC Bookstore (and elsewhere). There are many textbooks with similar names; **please make sure you have the correct textbook and edition!**
 - The rest of the readings you will need are collected in a course reader, which is only available at the Bookstore.
 - We will be using the book and reader regularly in class, and because of this course’s technology policy (see below), you will need a hard copy of both (not an e-book or online PDF).

- If you are having difficulty getting your own copy of the book or the reader (because of cost or for any other reason), please let me know as soon as possible, so I can make sure you have the resources you need to be successful in this class.
- You will also need access to Blackboard:
 - It's where I will post every piece of paper I hand out in class, including a current version of the syllabus, handouts, and assignment instructions.
 - You are welcome to send me videos, articles, and anything else you come across that's relevant to our course, and I may post them to Blackboard so other students can see them too.
 - You'll use Blackboard too—it's where you'll turn in your written work for this course, and it's where I'll post feedback on that work.

What you'll need to do

Assignments and assessment

There are twelve assignments (and one office-hours visit) due in this course:

- **Eleven weekly assignments:** These assignments will require you to master a variety of skills you need for successful paper-writing: defining terms, summarizing others' views, developing objections to those views, and so on. These assignments are **due by the start of class every Monday**, starting February 3 and ending April 20. Because these assignments are due weekly, it will be hard to stay on top of your work if you turn them in late. It is for this reason that, unless you are in extraordinary circumstances, **I will not accept weekly assignments that are turned in more than one week late.** You must turn in all eleven assignments, but I will drop your lowest grade.
- **Final paper:** In this paper, you will bring together the skills you've practiced in the short writing assignments in order to present your own views about some of the issues we've discussed in this course. This paper is due **by 4 pm on Monday, May 11.**
- **Office-hours visit:** You are required to visit my office hours once during the first four weeks of the course (that is, **by Tuesday, February 18**). This is so I can get to know you, find out your interests, and answer any questions you have about the course.
- All assignments will be graded anonymously; you should put your student ID number, *not* your name, on them. Submit all assignments via Blackboard, where they will be checked using SafeAssign.
- **Extension policy for written work:** In order to receive full credit, assignments normally must be turned in by the date and time they are due; however, I am happy to consider requests for extensions if you ask me before the assignment is due. If you turn in an assignment late, and you have not made prior arrangements with me, I will deduct three percent of your grade on an assignment if that assignment is turned in the day it's due any time after the start of class and three percent for each day after that that the assignment is late (so, for example, an assignment that would have gotten 100% if it were turned in on time on Monday would get 91% if turned in on Wednesday).
- In this course, **your writing is a public act.** I will occasionally use anonymized and (sometimes) edited versions of your work in class and in future courses in order to generate discussion, share viewpoints, ask questions, and so on.

Participation

Philosophy is a collaborative, discussion-based discipline. Your writing and thinking will benefit from hearing others' views, reactions to readings, and experiences. And your classmates and I will benefit from hearing your take.

- To participate, you need to attend. You are allowed **two absences**, no explanation needed, over the course of the semester. If you're absent more than twice, it will become more and

more difficult for you to keep up with the work, and we'll lose your voice in our discussions. For that reason, I will deduct one percent from your participation grade for each additional absence, unless you receive prior permission or can provide documentation which I believe justifies excusing an additional absence.

- To show respect for your peers and for me, avoid coming late to class or leaving early. You count as absent if you are not present when I take attendance, even if you show up later in the class period; you also count as absent if you leave early without prior permission. If at any point in the semester, you believe you are in a situation for which I should make an exception to this policy, please talk with me outside of class.
- But participation is more than just attendance! In order to receive full participation points, come ready to make active, serious, charitable contributions to class discussion. To make sure our discussion is productive and includes a wide variety of voices, I may sometimes call on students at random. If you are not comfortable participating in class, I will count active, serious, charitable visits to my office hours toward your participation grade. To help guide your participation, I will give you an assessment at midsemester of how you've done so far. When I grade participation, here's what I'm looking for:
 - *A range:* You attend all (or almost all) class sessions, your comments demonstrate that you've done the reading, you actively and positively participate in all group activities, you ask questions or offer comments at least every other class session, and/or you come to office hours at least a couple of times.
 - *B range:* You attend most class sessions, your comments demonstrate that you've usually done the reading, you participate in most group activities, and you ask questions or offer comments sporadically. You are never a distraction.
 - *C range:* You attend only occasionally, your comments demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the reading, you do not participate very actively in class (or else are a distraction), and you never come to office hours.
 - *D or F range:* You rarely if ever attend class, you either do not participate or are an active distraction in class, and you never come to office hours.
- **Technology policy:** Because philosophy is done best when it's done collaboratively, my goal is to create a space where productive conversations can happen. Research on classrooms and workplaces consistently supports the conclusion that, for most people, technology is a barrier to these productive conversations. (Ask me if you're curious about this research!) For that reason, **electronic devices (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) are generally not allowed in class.** I will ask you to put these devices in your bag at the beginning of class and leave them there until the end of class. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. **If you need an electronic device in order to be successful in this course (because of a disability, a life situation, or some other reason), please speak with me during the first two weeks of the course.** If I give you permission to use technology, it's your responsibility to work to minimize your distractions to other students (a good way to do this is to sit in the back or to the side of the classroom, so that your screen will not be visible to others). If you need to use a RIC computer to print, view documents, or upload your assignments to Blackboard, there are computers available at Adams Library.

Here's how the work in this course contributes to your final grade:

- **Weekly assignments:** 50% (5% per assignment, based on your ten highest scores)
- **Final paper:** 38%
- **Office-hours visit (by Tuesday, February 18):** 2%
- **Participation:** 10%

The grade scale is:

B+: 87-89%	A: 93-100%	A-: 90-92%
C+: 77-79%	B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%
D+: 67-69%	C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%
F: below 60%	D: 60-63%	D-: 60-62%

What I'll need to do

My responsibilities in this course include:

- Working with you to make sure you have what you need to succeed. This may include helping you access the readings (see above), talking with you about extensions (see above), and making sure you have the accommodations you need to succeed (see below). I know you've got other things going on in your life besides this course, but I can't know what those other things are unless you tell me. I strongly encourage you to communicate early and often with me about your situation.
- Making sure our discussions are productive. If at any point you're not feeling that our discussions are respectful and charitable, please come talk to me.
- Grading your work quickly and fairly. I will return each weekly assignment no more than one week after the day you turn it in.
- Communicating with you over email.
 - My responsibility is to email you whenever there are time-sensitive announcements about this course; your responsibility is to check your RIC email (including your spam folder) every day.
 - Please note: I use Blackboard when I need to send announcements to the entire class. Replies to emails I send through Blackboard do not go to me, and I have no way to see them. **If you need to contact me over email, please make sure you're emailing my email address, aberg@ric.edu.**
 - Our emails to each other in this course are professional documents, and it is my and your responsibility to write them professionally. For tips on how to write a professional email, check the email rubric (which I will hand out in class and post to Blackboard soon). I will respond to your email no later than 5 pm on the next business day; in the rare case I do not, please feel free to follow up with me.

Some ways to succeed in this course

- I am committed to making sure that you can succeed in this course, regardless of whether you have a disability (visible or invisible). If you need an accommodation under the ADA and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, RIC'S Disability Services Center (Fogarty 137, 456-2776) is here to work with you. To receive accommodations for this class, visit Disability Services to receive an accommodation form and meet with me during the first two weeks of the course to discuss how we can implement them. (If something comes up over the course of the semester, it's your responsibility to let me know as soon as you can.) If you have questions, or if you need an accommodation of another type (athletic, religious, etc.), please let me know as soon as possible.
- **Academic honesty is critical to your success in this course.** In order to learn in this course, and to show mastery of the subject, the work you turn in must be the product of your own effort. That doesn't mean you can't get help—from me, the Writing Center, OASIS, and other resources—but this help cannot be a replacement for your own careful thinking, writing, and revising. The following behaviors violate RIC policies:
 - **Cheating** includes receiving unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment.
 - **Plagiarism** involves the theft of intellectual property. The college policy against plagiarism bans word-for-word plagiarism, patchwork plagiarism, unacknowledged

paraphrasing, and unacknowledged facts. I also do not allow self-plagiarism (that is, you may not turn in work you have written for a previous class).

- **Other dishonest behaviors** include anything else that provides an unfair advantage over other students or that sabotages another student's efforts.
- I am happy to talk to you if you have any questions about academic integrity, or you can consult the Academic Standards section of the RIC Student Handbook (<http://www.ric.edu/studentlife/documents/RICStudentHandbook.pdf>). If you have questions as you're completing your work for this class, ask! Before you've turned your work in, I can help you to make sure that your work meets RIC's and my academic-honesty standards. Once you've turned your work in, you will not be allowed to redo it if it turns out that you haven't met those standards.
- If I find that you have violated academic-integrity standards, the minimal consequences will be a zero for the assignment, and you will not be allowed to redo it; I will also report you to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Additional consequences for further academic-integrity violations may include your failing the class and/or being brought before the Academic Integrity Board.
- There are lots of resources at RIC to support you during your time here. OASIS (Adams Library, lower level; <http://www.ric.edu/oasis/>) is here to help you succeed academically. Learning For Life (Adams Library, level 1; <http://www.ric.edu/learningforlife/>) can connect you to resources on- and off-campus to support you with non-academic needs you may have while you're at RIC. Project ExCEL (Roberts 303; <http://www.ric.edu/esl/>) has a variety of programs and classes for multilingual students. If you'd like information on how to access and use these resources, please don't hesitate to talk with me.
- You are welcome and encouraged to come to my office hours or make an appointment with me whenever you want to talk about the course material, your assignments, or anything else.

Schedule of readings and assignments

[Readings with *around their titles*** are in the course reader]**

***Note:** This schedule of readings is provisional. I have scheduled two catch-up days in case we fall behind or we have a snow day. If the schedule of readings changes, I will post a new syllabus to Blackboard.*

Wednesday, January 22: Course introduction

Reading: None

Monday, January 27: Should you have children?

Reading: Purdy, "Can Having Children Be Immoral?"

Wednesday, January 29: Should you have children?

Reading: Vehmas, "Parents and Genetic Information"

Monday, February 3: Should you have biological children?

Reading: ***Rulli, "Preferring a Genetically-Related Child"***

Wednesday, February 5: Should you have biological children?

Reading: ***LaFollette, "Licensing Parents Revisited"***

Monday, February 10: Introduction to utilitarianism

Reading: Mill, "Utilitarianism"

Wednesday, February 12: Should anyone ever have an abortion?

Reading: Marquis, "An Argument that Abortion Is Wrong"

Monday, February 17: Should anyone ever have an abortion?

Reading: Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"

Wednesday, February 19: Introduction to deontology
Reading: Kant, "Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals"

Monday, February 24: Should you genetically modify your children?
Reading: Savulescu, "Procreative Beneficence"

Wednesday, February 26: Should you genetically modify your children?
Reading: Sandel, "The Case against Perfection"

Monday, March 2: Introduction to virtue ethics
Reading: Driver, "Virtue Ethics"

Wednesday, March 4: Catch-up day
Reading: None

Monday, March 9: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
Wednesday, March 11: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Monday, March 16: Should you favor your children over strangers?
Reading: ***MacFarquhar, "The Children of Strangers"***

Wednesday, March 18: Should you favor your children over strangers?
Reading: ***Rachels, "Morality, Parents, and Children"***

Monday, March 23: Do adult children owe their parents anything?
Reading: English, "What Do Grown Children Owe Their Parents?"

Wednesday, March 25: Do adult children owe their parents anything?
Reading: Keller, "Four Theories of Filial Duty"

Monday, March 30: What marriages should the state recognize?
Reading: Brake, "Minimal Marriage"

Wednesday, April 1: What marriages should the state recognize?
Reading: Wedgwood, "Is Civil Marriage Illiberal?"

Monday, April 6: Should your marriage be gender-just?
Reading: ***Okin, "Justice and Gender"***

Wednesday, April 8: Should your marriage be gender-just?
Reading: ***Payette, "The Feminist Wife: Notes on a Political 'Engagement'"***

Monday, April 13: What kind of death should you have?
Reading: ***Gawande, "Letting Go"***

Wednesday, April 15: What kind of death should you have?
Reading: ***Singer, "Justifying Voluntary Euthanasia"***

Monday, April 20: What kind of death should you have?
Reading: ***Callahan, "A Case against Euthanasia"***
Final paper assigned on Monday

Wednesday, April 22: What is the meaning of life?
Reading: Taylor, "The Meaning of Life"

Monday, April 27: What is the meaning of life?
Reading: Wolf, "Meaning of Life"

Wednesday, April 29: What is the meaning of life?
Reading: Vitrano, "Meaningful Lives"

Monday, May 4: Catch-up day
Reading: None

Finals week

Final paper due by 4 pm on Monday, May 11