

# Disability and Genetic Enhancement

## COURSE INFORMATION

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**Class Meeting:** Tuesday, Thursday (9:30-11:00); 314 CAS

**Instructor:** Professor Lustila, Department of Philosophy ([glustila@bu.edu](mailto:glustila@bu.edu))

**Office Hours:** 12:00-2:00; 448 Mugar Library

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

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In this course, we examine the intersection of biomedical technology and ethics by exploring one of the most fundamental philosophical questions: “what is human nature?” Our investigation will lead us to consider our concepts of disability and enhancement. A few of the questions we will tackle are: “what is a disability?” “are disabled individuals *necessarily* disadvantaged?” “should we use biomedical technology to ‘select against’ traits associated with disability?” “can we use biomedical technology to make ourselves better, morally or otherwise?” “should we use biomedical technology to reinforce our commitments to our loved ones?” Given the growth and expansion of biomedical technologies over the last 20-30 years, these questions have become increasingly salient for medical professionals, lawyers, philosophers, prospective parents, and everyone alike. Let’s see where the road takes us.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

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The primary objects of the course are to

- Refine your ability to carefully read and analyze texts.
- Develop your skills as a writer – learn to produce clear prose and craft well-structured arguments.
- Develop your skills as a communicator – learn to receive feedback on your ideas and writing from your peers and to give helpful feedback to others.
- Spark your natural curiosity for philosophical ideas and questions.

## TEXTS

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All course material will be available via Blackboard.

## ASSIGNMENTS

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1. 3 essays (see schedule below for due dates). – **60% of your final grade.**

- These essays will be **argumentative**: you will receive a question related to the particular subtopic. Using what you've learned from the readings on this topic, our discussions, and your reflection assignments, you will develop and defend an argument.
- For example, if we are discussing whether we have a duty to end a pregnancy that will likely result in the birth of a disabled child, you might argue that we are not obligated to end the pregnancy, *but only if* we are in a position to financially support this child or can reasonably expect to receive this support from other sources.
- An example of how such an essay may be structured is as follows: introduction – where you make clear the topic of the essay, **your position, the reasons that you think justify your position, an objection that someone might make to your position, how you plan to respond, and the significance of your argument** (i.e., what follows if you're right). The following paragraphs of the essay would then spell out each of these five elements of the essay – from your position to its significance).
- We will discuss essay writing in more detail when the time comes to do so.
- Each of these essays will be **1200 words**.

2. 3 reflections see schedule below for due dates). – **30% of your final grade.**

- These reflections will be **interpretive**: you will receive a question related to a certain part of one reading (e.g. why does Barnes think that the argument from adapted preferences fails for most disabled people? What is her argument? What are the consequences of Barnes' argument, if true? Your aim here is to get the reader to understand **why** Barnes holds the position she does in this instance. The question of whether Barnes is justified holding this position is a different question altogether and belongs in your essays.
- The aim of these reflections is to serve as **scaffolding** for your essays. Before we can construct well-informed arguments, it's important to be acquainted with what others have said about the topic. By writing these reflections, you will develop the necessary skills to write essays that represent your considered thoughts on a topic.
- The structure of your reflections will differ based on the question that you receive. Due to the length of these reflections, most will have a 2-3 paragraph structure, though we will discuss the writing of reflections in more detail when the time comes to do so.
- Each of these reflections will be **500 words**.

3. Participation & Attendance – **10% of your final grade**

- **5%** of your grade will be based purely on attendance.

- You are free to miss one week of class without harm to your grade. If you miss a fourth time, you will lose 1% of your final grade; if you miss a fifth time, you will lose 2% of your grade; if you miss a sixth time, you will lose 3% of your grade, etc. The maximum you can lose on the basis of your attendance is 5%. That said, if you were to miss 8 days of class it would also have an impact on your participation grade.
- **5%** of your grade will be based purely on participation.
- How does one participate? There's the normal way of course – asking questions in class, engage with others productively when in groups, bring to class any requested materials (e.g. if we have a workshop day, you will be expected to bring a complete rough draft of your essay or reflection to class). Philosophy, unlike other disciplines like chemistry or biology, flourish with your participation. The aim is not for me to deliver content to you (though I will certainly assist you in helping to understand the readings) but to engage with you in conversation about the topics of the readings.
- Many of you may not feel comfortable participating. There will be other options for people to gain their participation grade. The chief one of which is sending me questions about the reading. If you feel like were unable to participate well a particular week, you can send me **2 questions & 2 comments** about the reading for that week. I will respond to every question, so you may also wish to use this medium to seek clarification on an issue or delve further into issues that we didn't get to cover in class.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

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What you can expect from me:

- I will upload any course readings **at least a week** prior to when they will be covered in class – you can expect the same when it comes to the reflection and essay topics.
- I will grade any and all assignments **within 10 days** of them being turned in.
- I will respond to any and all emails **within 48 hours**.
- I will shift the class schedule as deemed necessary for *your learning*. If we need extra time on a topic or you're collectively interested in pursuing a topic further, I will make any necessary changes to the schedule. **These changes will be communicated via email.**
- I will begin each class by writing down 2-3 questions on the board to help frame our discussions. **These questions will be circulated in advance** (at the end of the prior class) so that you can keep them in mind when you're completing the reading.
- I will engage with you – in writing and in person – in a **thoughtful manner**. As I see it, this thoughtfulness has two components. I will be **respectful** of your ideas, and also dedicated to **your improvement** as a thinker and writer. At times, this dedication will require me to be critical in my feedback, which is I sign that I take you seriously.

- I will be **understanding and empathetic** regarding any challenges that you face, either in this class or in your personal lives (to the extent that they bear on your ability to turn work in on time, keep focus, maintain motivation, etc.).

What I can expect from you:

- You will **attend** each class, or notify me of your absence prior to class
- You will attend class having **read** and being prepared to **discuss** the material for that day. My advice is that you a) complete the reading twice and b) make a note of 2-3 questions and 2-3 comments you have. This exercise will cement your understanding of the material and give you a sense of which points you found interesting and/or confusing. Points of interest and/or confusion are the perfect material for discussion.
- You will **complete your work** on time or notify me of your inability to do so.
- You will engage with me and your classmates in a **thoughtful** manner. Show the same dedication to others (and to yourself) that I do to you. For this semester, for three hours a week, you and your classmates are on a bit of a journey. The journey will not always be easy, and we will all meet obstacles along the way. Lift each other up.
- You will **not give up on yourself**. At times, the readings and the assignments will be difficult. If you feel like you are slipping or things have stopped making sense, *reach out*. There is nothing honorable about suffering in silence. I am here to help with anything you may require along your journey, but you must always keep pushing.
- You will **stay curious** and **work to improve**. We have a lot to learn from each other and from the material that we will be discussing throughout the class. If you work to maintain your sense of curiosity and desire to improve throughout the course, you will come out of this experience as a better writer and a clearer thinker.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

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### Part 1: Disability: The Limits of Human Nature?

Week 1	What is a Disability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction (No readings)</li> </ul>
	Case Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invisibilia, Batman: <a href="http://www.npr.org/podcasts/510307/invisibilia">http://www.npr.org/podcasts/510307/invisibilia</a></li> <li>• Eva Kittay, “The Personal is Political”</li> </ul>
Week 2	Theories of Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boorse, “Disability and Medical Theory”</li> <li>• Verbrugge &amp; Jette “The Disablement Process”</li> </ul>

	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kahane and Savulescu, “The Welfarist Account of Disability”</li> </ul>
Week 3	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anastasiou, “The Social Model of Disability”</li> <li>• Terzi, “The Social Model of Disability: A Philosophical Critique”</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beaudry, “Beyond (Models of) Disability?”</li> </ul>
Week 4	Rethinking Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnes, “Constructing Disability”</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (cont.)</li> </ul>
Week 5	Is Disability Bad?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnes, “Bad Difference and Mere Difference”</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnes, “Value Neutral Model”</li> </ul>
Week 6	Who Decides?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fricker, “Testimonial Injustice”</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fricker, “Prejudice in the Credibility Economy”</li> </ul>
Week 7	Valuing Disability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnes, “Taking Their Words for It”</li> <li>• Stubblefield, “Living a Good Life...in Adult Sized Diapers”</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnes, “Causing Disability”</li> <li>• Kittay and Kittay, “On the Expressivity and Ethics of Selective Abortion for Disability”</li> <li>• S.E. Smith, “Lives Worth Living: Disability, Abortion and Slipshod Ethics</li> </ul>
Week 8	Wrapping up Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnes, “Disability Pride”</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Reading</li> </ul>

## Part 2: Genetic Enhancement: The Scope of Human Nature?

Week 9	What is Enhancement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No Reading</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Giubilini &amp; Sanyal, “Ethics of Human Enhancement”</li> </ul>
Week 10	Views on Enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bostrom, “Human Genetic Enhancements: A Transhumanist Perspective”</li> <li>Parens, “The Goodness of Fragility”</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kamm, “Is There a Problem With Enhancement?”</li> </ul>
Week 11	Enhancement and Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Levy, “The Presumption Against Direct Manipulation”</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harris, “The God Machine, the God Delusion, and the Death of Liberty”</li> </ul>
Week 12	Enhancement and Morality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Savulescu, Ingmar, Persson, “The Perils of Cognitive Enhancement”</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harris, “Ethics is for the Bad Guys”</li> <li>Harris, “Molecules and Morality”</li> </ul>
Week 13	Enhancement and the Future of Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Earp and Savulescu, <i>Love Drugs</i></li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(cont.)</li> </ul>
Week 15	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(cont.)</li> </ul>
	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(cont.)</li> </ul>