

Assemblies of God Theological Seminary  
Valley Forge Christian College Branch Campus  
Phoenixville, Pennsylvania

**THEB 639/PTH 640 Pastoral Responses to Bio-Ethical Dilemmas (3 credits)**

May 12-17, 2003  
9 am – 6:30 pm

**NB:** Please note that there will be small changes in schedule to accommodate special guest speakers. As much as possible, students should be prepared to gather on Monday through Friday evenings. Video tapes will be made available to those for whom this is not possible.

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Course Description

This course will consider ethical implications and pastoral responses to contemporary scientific advancements. The course examines multiple perspectives on issues such as in-vitro fertilization, stem cell research, human genetic engineering and cloning, genetic screening and abortion, life extension and definitions of death, biological determinism, and related issues. By examining the scientific and biblical principles involved, the course will explore the challenges of these issues for ethical decision-making on a personal and pastoral level.

Course Objectives: The learner will:

- Demonstrate a basic understanding of the scientific principles and methods involved in the technologies and advancements that affect bioethical issues such as in-vitro fertilization, stem cell research, cryopreservation, and genetic engineering.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the biological and theological issues that are part of understanding the beginning and ending points of human life and their relevance to topics such as abortion, life sustaining or death delaying technology, and euthanasia.
- Compare and contrast various approaches to bioethical decision-making including perspectives from secular, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish ethicists.
- Apply biblical principles involved in bioethical issues and show an ability to defend these decisions in ways relevant to pastoral ministry.

Course Texts:

Cox, Paul M. and Scott Rae, Ed. *Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age (Critical Issues in Bioethics)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999 (ISBN: 0802845959).

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Course Topics

We will consider a number of bio-ethical issues. A broad spectrum is listed below. After a discussion of ethics in general and bioethical theory in particular we will discuss a number of significant issues. Some are current challenges of great note in our society. Others are more speculative and interesting. We will not spend equal time on all of these and we will design the specifics of our schedule during the first session to address those issues that are most crucial to our students. If you wish to add an item to the following list, kindly contact one of your professors as soon as possible.

- Abortion: What is human? When does humanness begin? What about “special cases”?
- Birth control: An abortion equivalent?
- Decision Making in Bioethics: Autonomy? Beneficence? Justice? On what basis?
- Embryo Adoption/Donation: What now?
- Euthanasia: Is intentionally (passively or actively) killing ever merciful or justified?
- End of Life: Life support or death prolonging treatments? When does death happen?
- Genetic modification: Alleviation? Amplification? Augmentation? What is the significance of manipulating genes in repairing illness and injury, increasing existing abilities, and adding new options for the human condition?
- Genetic testing: Do we ask and how do we answer?
- Human cloning: Is it ethical to make identical twins?
- Stem cell research: Should we harvest parts of babies for a better life? Are there alternatives?
- Surrogate Mothers: Helping or hurting?
- Transsexuality, hermaphroditism, sex assignment surgery: What do we do with indefinite genders?
- Unintended consequences: What do you do when we don’t know enough?

Course Resources:

Roche Genetics Education Program CD ROM. Version 4.0.0P (provided upon enrollment in the class).

Course Requirements:

- Pre-Session (25 percent)

Read Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age (Critical Issues in Bioethics) prior to the first class.

Read at least 5 sections from the books or web sites listed in the bibliography. Prepare a written assessment (1-2 pages) of each with annotated bibliography.

- Classroom Session (15 percent)

Class participation, case studies, and class assignments will be utilized in the course.

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Be prepared to give a short oral report on two bioethical issues.

- Post-Session (60 percent)

Write three papers (20 percent each) that demonstrate your ability to apply biblical principles to three, separate bioethical dilemmas from the topics list approved by the professors.

Each paper should be 6-8 pages and follow the decision-making process outlined in the course text by Cox and Rae.

Final papers are due June 30.

### Brief Bibliography

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- <http://www.crosscurrents.org/Gaia.htm> The Gaia hypothesis, a Christian perspective
- <http://www.genethics.ca/journals.html> Links to journals.
- <http://www.georgetown.edu/research/kie/> Kennedy Institute of Ethics
- <http://www.georgetown.edu/research/nrcbl/ir/BT99toc.htm> *Bioethics Thesaurus*
- [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/kennedy\\_institute\\_of\\_ethics\\_journal/](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/kennedy_institute_of_ethics_journal/) Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal with online accessibility.
- <http://www.magna.com.au/~prfbrown/gaia.html> A summary of the Gaia hypothesis
- <http://www.onlineethics.org/> A good general overview.
- <http://www.petersingerlinks.com/> Links to controversial philosopher Peter Singer.
- <http://www.science-spirit.org/scireliglinks.html> A fine site.
- <http://www.seanparnell.com/Hyperion%20Cantos/Web%20Pages/Teilhard%20de%20Chardin%20and%20The%20Omega%20Point.htm> A summary of de Chardin's Omega Point hypothesis.
- <http://www.cbhd.org/> Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, an excellent site.