

Bioethics and the Holocaust

Syllabus 2021

Course Director

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Course Description

This course will focus on the abrogation of biomedical ethics in World War II Germany, demonstrating how the Holocaust is a unique example of medically sanctioned genocide. The biomedical ethical considerations brought to light as a result of the alliance between medicine and the Nazis remain relevant for current medical and scientific practice. Exploring the pivotal role played by science and medicine in the labeling, persecution, and eventual mass murder of those deemed “unfit” is essential to preventing other instances of human rights abuses in modern society.

The course will be divided into three sections. The first will focus on the connection between key aspects of Nazi medicine in historical and contemporary contexts. For example, what was the role of medical ethics, eugenics, and professional associations in transforming medicine from a profession that heals to one that kills? What role, if any, do each of these concepts play in the current context of science, medicine and bioethics? The second portion of the course will use the Holocaust as the historical lens for examining current issue in bioethics, health law/policy and human rights. Topics such as beginning of life care, end of life care, human subject research, and disability studies will be discussed. The final section of the course will connect the past, present and future as we explore what medicine and bioethics can learn from the lessons of the Holocaust.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- a) Describe the ethical implications of the medical transgressions that took place during the Holocaust for modern scientific theory, medical practice, healthcare policy and human rights endeavors.
- b) Understand the importance of utilizing the Holocaust as the historical framework for exploring the ramifications of placing scientific/societal progress over the promotion of individual welfare and human dignity.
- c) Recognize the systemic issues within healthcare and society that continue to create a hierarchy of human life
- d) Begin to explore the role of the individual and the profession in advocating for equality and social justice in healthcare

Assignments:

Weekly Discussion Post/Reflection Assignment (2 per week) 30%

Attendance and Class Participation 30%

8-10 page paper using the Holocaust as the historical

Course Materials:

Course materials will be provided on CANVAS for each of the session events. These materials consist of an introduction to the session, required readings, discussion posts and/or weekly reflections assignments, and a link to the ZOOM meeting.

Attendance

All sessions are mandatory. Having two unexcused absences is grounds for failure of the course. Excused absences will be granted on a case by case basis, and permitted excuses will be in line with NYMC attendance and absence policies.

If a student misses a session, (s)he will have to submit a written assignment for the topic missed, whether or not the topic is excused. The student shall email his/her module facilitator and cc Dr. Stacy Gallin (sgallin@mimeh.org) within one week of his/her absence.

Session Topics

1. Introduction: Why is the Holocaust Relevant for Contemporary Medical Ethics?
2. The History of German Medical Ethics
3. The Physician's Role: Patient vs. Population
4. The Role of Professions in a State
5. The Physician at War
6. The Transformation of Physicians from Healers to Killers
7. Medicalization of Social Policies: Defining Health, Defining Illness
8. Disability, Identity and Diversity
9. Genetics: Race Theory to Genetic Engineering
10. Euthanasia and Physician Aid in Dying
11. The Ethics of Research
12. The Rights and Responsibilities of the Physician to Uphold Bioethical Values in Society
13. The Holocaust, Human Rights, and Human Dignity
14. Conclusion: Lessons of the Holocaust for the Future of Medicine

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION ONE: January 12, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: INTRODUCTION- WHY IS THE HOLOCAUST RELEVANT FOR CONTEMPORARY MEDICAL ETHICS?

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Introduce ourselves to each other in order to create a collegial environment.
2. Understand the expectations and requirements of the course.
3. Articulate our goals for what we want to get out of this course.

READINGS:

1. The course syllabus

PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POSTS:

1. Given the goals of the course as described in the syllabus, why do you think this course will be meaningful to you?
2. What do you hope to learn in this course?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION TWO: January 19, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: HISTORY OF GERMAN MEDICAL ETHICS

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Understand the role of medical ethics in German medical education leading up to and during WW II
2. Compare German medical ethics in the first half of the twentieth century to contemporary medical ethics

READINGS:

1. Bruns, Florian and Tessa Chelouche. 2017. "Lectures on Inhumanity: Teaching Medical Ethics in German Medical Schools Under Nazism." *Annals of Internal Medicine* 166(8): 591-595.
2. Grodin, M.A. (1992). "Historical Origins of the Nuremberg Code." In George J. Annas and Michael Grodin, eds. The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code: Human Rights in Human Experimentation. New York: Oxford University Press, 121-144.
3. Koonz, C. (2003). The Nazi Conscience. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 4-16.

SESSION PREPARATION:

In preparation for our session, please e-mail me (sgallin@mimch.org) 1-2 questions regarding the readings and/or the session topic in general. The subject line of the e-mail should be "Questions in Preparation for the Session." We will use your questions as the basis for the lecture and class discussion.

PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

What were the main components of German medical ethics leading up to and during WW II that provided the professional justification for the actions of the medical profession during the Holocaust?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION THREE: January 26, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: THE PHYSICIAN'S ROLE: PATIENT VS. POPULATION

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Examine the transformation of the physician's primary responsibility from caring for the individual to protecting the health of the state under the Third Reich
2. Distinguish between the physician's duty to the patient and responsibility to society in contemporary society

READINGS:

1. Proctor, R.N. (1988). "The Origins of Racial Hygiene." In Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 10-45.
2. Kessler, K. (2007). "Physicians and the Nazi Euthanasia Program." *International Journal of Mental Health* 36(1):4-16.
3. Weindling, P. (2018). "Conceptualising Eugenics and Racial Hygiene as Public Health Theory and Practice." In Conceptualising Public Health: Historical and Contemporary Struggles over Key Concepts, edited by J. Kananen, S. Bergenheim & M. Wessel. Routledge,

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

Describe the significance of shifting the paradigm from caring for the individual patient to caring for the State. Give an example of this paradigm shift in current medical/public health policy.

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION FOUR: February 2, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONS IN A STATE

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Explore the role of professions in National Socialism
2. Discuss the importance of the medical profession to the success of Germany as the “Biological State”

READINGS:

1. Wynia, M.K. (2008). The short history and tenuous future of medical professionalism: The erosion of medicine’s social contract. *Perspect Biol Med.* 51(4): 565-578.
2. Proctor, R.N. (1988). “Political Biology: Doctors in the Nazi Cause.” In Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 62-94.
3. Kater, M.K. (1989). “The Challenge of the Nazi Movement.” In Doctors Under Hitler. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 54-88.

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

What is the politicization of medicine and how does it affect society?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION FIVE: February 9, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: PSYCHIATRY DURING THE HOLOCAUST AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF PHYSICIANS FROM HEALERS TO KILLERS

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Recognize the unique function of psychiatry within the systematic labeling, persecution and mass murder of the “unfit”
2. Explore the transformation of physicians from healers to killers

READINGS:

1. Breggin, P.R. (1993). “Psychiatry’s role in the Holocaust.” *International Journal of Risk & Safety in Medicine* 4: 133-148.
2. Friedlander, H. (2004) “From ‘Euthanasia’ to ‘the Final Solution.’” In Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race. Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 155 – 183.
3. Miller, S.M. & Gallin, S. (2019). “An Analysis of Physician Behaviors during the Holocaust: Modern Day Relevances.” *Conatus* 4(2): 265-285.

SESSION PREPARATION:

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

What are your thoughts/feelings on the transformation of physicians from healers to killers that took place during the Holocaust?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION SIX: February 16, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: THE PHYSICIAN AT WAR

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Understand some examples of justifications given for the participation of physicians and other health care professionals in the Holocaust
2. Examine the ethics of physician participation in current military conflicts

READINGS:

1. Lifton, R.J. (1986). "Doubling: The Faustian Bargain" In The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 418-429.
2. Lifton R.J. (1986). "The Auschwitz Self: Psychological Themes in Doubling." In The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 430 – 465.
3. Grodin, M.A. (2010). "Mad, Bad, or Evil: How Physician Healers Turn to Torture and Murder." In Medicine after the Holocaust: From the Master Race to the Human Genome and Beyond, edited by Sheldon Rubinfeld. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 49-65.
4. McCoy, A. (2007). "Science in Dachau's Shadow: Herb, Beecher, and the Development of CIA Psychological Torture and Modern Medical Ethics." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 43(4): 401-417.

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

Some scholars have argued that rather than attempting to explain the psychology of their behavior, Robert Jay Lifton's book "makes excuses" for Nazi doctors' inexcusable behavior. What do you think about this critique? Do you think valid justifications can be made for the actions of Nazi doctors?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION SEVEN: February 23, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: MEDICALIZATION OF SOCIAL POLICIES: DEFINING HEALTH, DEFINING ILLNESS

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Define and understand the concept of medicalization and how it was used in Nazi Germany
2. Analyze the medicalization of social policies that influenced Nazi propaganda and compare them to contemporary debates regarding medicalization in healthcare

READINGS:

1. Geoffrey Cocks. "Sick Heil: Self and Illness in Nazi Germany." *Osiris* 22.1 (2007): 93-115
2. Nikolas Rose. "Normality and Pathology in a Biomedical Age." *The Sociological Review* 57.2 (2009): 66-83

3. Paula M. Lantz, Richard L. Lichtenstein, and Harold A. Pollack. "Health Policy Approaches to Population Health: The Limits of Medicalization." *Health Affairs* 26.5 (Oct. 2007)

NON-REQUIRED RESOURCES:

1. The entire issue of volume 46, issue 3 of *The Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics*, esp. "The Medicalization of Poverty: A Dose of Theory" (David A. Hyman)
2. Peter Conrad. *The Medicalization of Society: On the transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

SESSION PREPARATION:

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

Provide an example of medicalization and how it has been used to shape public policy.

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION EIGHT: March 9, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: DISABILITY, IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Explain the genesis of the Aktion T-4 project
2. Understand the classification of individuals as mentally and physically disabled in Nazi Germany
3. Discuss the contemporary relevance of classification and labeling of the "unfit"

READINGS:

1. Robertson, Michael, Astrid Ley, and Edwina Light. 2019. *The First into the Dark: The Nazi Persecution of the Disabled*. Sydney: University of Technology Sydney EPress.

<https://utsepress.lib.uts.edu.au/site/books/10.5130/aae/>

Chapter 2: “Life unworthy of living” (pages 9-24)

Chapter 3: Aktion T4 – Implementation and resistance (pages 25-38)

Chapter 8: The ethical dimension (pages 165-208)

2. United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disability. 2019. *Rights of persons with disabilities: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (A/HRC/43/41)*. United Nations (Geneva: United Nations).

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/SRDisabilities/Pages/BioethicsDisabilities.aspx>

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

What role did the persecution of the disabled play in the trajectory of medicalized killing during the Holocaust?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION NINE: March 16, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: GENETICS: RACE THEORY TO GENETIC ENGINEERING

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the ways in which race theory and eugenics influenced Nazi policies and propaganda

2. Analyze the implications of eugenics for current debates over the ethics of genetics and genetic engineering

READINGS:

1. Kass, L. R. (2010). "A More Perfect Human: The Promise and the Peril of Modern Science." In Medicine after the Holocaust: From the Master Race to the Human Genome and Beyond, edited by Sheldon Rubenfeld. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 107-122.
2. Cavaliere, G (2018) *Looking into the shadow: the eugenics argument in debates on reproductive technologies and practice*. Monash Bioethics Review 36:1-22.
3. Black, E. (2003). War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 411 - 444
4. Savulescu, J & Kahane, G (2009). *The Moral obligation to create children with the best chance of the best life*. Bioethics 23(5): 274-290.

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

What are your thoughts on the relationship between eugenics and genetic engineering?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION TEN: March 23, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: EUTHANASIA AND PHYSICIAN AID IN DYING

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Examine the ways in which the term “euthanasia” was misappropriated and politicized by the Nazis
2. Analyze the contemporary relevance of these actions for current debates surrounding end of life care

READINGS:

1. Proctor, R. 1988. “The Destruction of ‘Lives Not Worth Living.’” In Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 177-222.
2. Weikart, R. (2016). “Does Science Sanction Euthanasia or Physician-Assisted Suicide?” *The Human Life Review* 30-36.
3. Sulmasy, D., Finlay, I., Fitzgerald, F., Foley, K., Payne, R. & Siegler, M. (2018). *Physician-assisted suicide: why neutrality by organized medicine is neither neutral nor appropriate*. *J Gen Intern Med* 33(8): 1394-1399

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

Should decisions regarding end-of-life care be left to the individual or regulated (e.g., by the government, a medical association, etc.)

SESSION ELEVEN: April 6, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: THE ETHICS OF RESEARCH

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the ways in which the ethics of research were fundamentally altered by the atrocities that were committed in the name of “scientific progress” during the Holocaust
2. Understand the trajectory of research ethics that followed the publication of the Nuremberg Code

READINGS:

1. Kor, E-M. (1994). “The Mengele Twins and Human Experimentation: A Personal Account.” In Annas G, Grodin, M, (eds) *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code*. Oxford University Press Oxford, 53-59.
2. Gallin S., Bedzow I. (2020) “Holocaust as an Inflection Point in the Development of Bioethics and Research Ethics.” In: Iphofen R. (eds) *Handbook of Research Ethics and Scientific Integrity*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16759-2_51
3. Perley S, Fluss S, Bankowski Z, Simon F (1994). “The Nuremberg Code: An International Overview.” In Annas G, Grodin M, (eds) *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code*, Oxford University Press Oxford 149-173

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

How has the Holocaust influenced the development of international research ethics?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION TWELVE: April 13, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PHYSICIAN TO UPHOLD
BIOETHICAL VALUES IN SOCIETY

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Analyze the history of professional hierarchies in medical education and the challenges they present for moral decision making
2. Understand the rights/responsibilities of physicians to conscientiously object to institutional policies that violate basic ethical foundations

READINGS:

1. Pellegrino, E.D. (2001). *The internal morality of clinical medicine: A paradigm for the ethics of the helping and healing professions*. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 26(6): 559-579
2. Colaianni, A. (2012). *A long shadow: Nazi doctors, moral vulnerability and contemporary medical culture*. *J Med Ethics* 38: 435-438
3. Fernandes, A.K. & Ecret, D. (2020). *The effect of hierarchy on moral silence in healthcare: What can the Holocaust teach us?* *Conatus Journal of Philosophy* 4(2): 21-43.
4. Wasserman, J.A. & Yoskowitz, H. (2019). "Resistance, Medicine, and Moral Courage: Lessons on Bioethics from Jewish Physicians during the Holocaust." *Conatus* 4(2): 359-378.

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

Name 3-5 of the bioethical values you deem most important for a physician to uphold.

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION THIRTEEN: April 20, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: HUMAN DIGNITY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE HOLOCAUST

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the concepts of human dignity and human rights as they pertain to the Holocaust
2. Analyze the emergence of human rights endeavors that have resulted from the crimes against humanity perpetrated during the Holocaust and their continued relevance

READINGS:

1. Schulman, A. (2008). Bioethics and the Question of Human Dignity.” In Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President’s Council on Bioethics. Washington, DC, 3-18.
2. Andorno, R. Human Dignity and Human Rights as a Common Ground for a Global Bioethics. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*. 2009; 34: 223-240.
3. Mathuna, Donal P. Human Dignity in the Nazi era: implications for contemporary bioethics. *BMC Ethics*. 2006 Mar 14;7(2).
4. Annas, G. (2010). “The Legacy of the Nuremberg Doctors’ Trial to American Bioethics and Human Rights.” In Medicine after the Holocaust: From the Master Race to the Human Genome and Beyond, edited by Sheldon Rubenfeld. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 93 - 105.

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

What role does human dignity play in science, medical practice and public health policy? What role should it play?

Bioethics and the Holocaust

SESSION FOURTEEN: April 27, 2021

SESSION TOPIC: CONCLUSION: LESSONS OF THE HOLOCAUST FOR THE FUTURE OF
MEDICINE

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this session, students will be able to:

1. Discuss how to implement the lessons of the Holocaust into contemporary medical ethics and practice
2. Understand the importance of social justice and advocacy as a central component of medicine and bioethics

READINGS:

1. Caplan, A. L. (2010). "The Stain of Silence: Nazi Ethics and Bioethics." In Medicine after the Holocaust: From the Master Race to the Human Genome and Beyond, edited by Sheldon Rubenfeld. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 83-92.
2. Seidelman, W. (2010). "Academic Medicine during the Nazi Period." In Medicine after the Holocaust: From the Master Race to the Human Genome and Beyond, edited by Sheldon Rubenfeld. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 29-36.
3. Neuhaus, R.J. (1992). "The Way They Were, The Way We Are." In When Medicine Went Mad: Bioethics and the Holocaust, edited by Arthur L. Caplan. The Humana Press, 211-230.

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PRE-SESSION DISCUSSION POST:

1. Why is it important for those preparing to enter the field of health care, as practitioners or policy makers, to learn about bioethics and the Holocaust?
2. How has this course impacted your education and personal/professional development?