

Philosophy 3300: Special Topics in Philosophy: Philosophy of Medicine

Fall 2025

Instructor Info



E-mail: joel.velasco@ttu.edu

My Office: 251C Humanities

Office Hours: Tue, Thu, Fri
11:00-12:00 or by appointment



Course Info

Class meets Tu, Th 9:30-10:50
in Humanities 350

Course website:

[http://joelvelasco.net/
teaching/3300](http://joelvelasco.net/teaching/3300)

Course Description



What is the field of modern medicine and how does it work?

First, we will look at fundamental concepts in medicine: What exactly is the nature of health and disease? How does medical classification work? What is death? Next, we will look at evidence in medicine: How does causal and statistical reasoning work in medicine? What counts as a good explanation? Finally, we will look at medicine in the broader social context: How do values play a role in the practice of medicine? Is race a medically relevant category? What are the appropriate roles of public health and the specialized treatment of individuals?

Expected Learning Outcomes

1) The student will be able to identify key considerations in answering questions such as what it means to provide successful medical treatment.

2) The student will understand the philosophical issues that underlie medical research and practice and be prepared to identify and contextualize philosophical claims when they bear on topics in medicine.

3) The student will be able to analyze and evaluate related philosophical claims and assumptions.

4) The student will be able to develop and defend an original philosophical argument in writing.

Grades

- Class Participation (10%): Effective class participation is based on coming to class prepared to engage in class activities, especially exercises in which you work together in groups with other students to invent an example or solve a puzzle that illustrates central concepts for that day. The best way to prepare for class is to read and think about the material indicated on the syllabus before coming to class.
- Class Debates (20%): Each student will participate in one debate (10 points for debate plus reflection) and write a reflection piece for two other class debates (5 points each).
- Midterm Exams (40%): There will be one midterm examination covering roughly the first six weeks of the course and another the next six weeks.
- Long(er) Essay (20%): There will be one longer essay (roughly five pages each).
- Class Presentation (10%): Each student will present to the class on a topic of their own choosing.

Rough Grading Scale:

| | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 98-100% ⇒ A+ | 92-97% ⇒ A | 90-91% ⇒ A- |
| 88-89% ⇒ B+ | 82-87% ⇒ B | 80-81% ⇒ B- |
| 78-79% ⇒ C+ | 70-77% ⇒ C | 65-70% ⇒ C- |
| 50-64% ⇒ D | 0-49% ⇒ F | |

Late Assignments Policy

In the absence of a documented excuse, late assignments will be docked 20% per day.

Class Participation

Philosophy is a communal enterprise: the ability to make valuable contributions to philosophical discussions can be as important as the ability to write well. Moreover, since the written assignments will force the students to think carefully about very specific topics, participation in class discussion is an important way for students to demonstrate a broader competence with the material than is possible in the papers alone. Students are encouraged to continue class discussions immediately after the class is over, by meeting with me in person some other time, or continuing the discussion over e-mail with me. Of course discussion with each other outside of class is strongly encouraged as well. Students who for any reason have difficulty speaking up in class are especially encouraged to (and must!) pursue these options. It should go without saying that attendance is an absolutely essential component of class participation.

Texas Tech Policies:

[Academic Integrity](#)

[Accommodation for Pregnant Students](#)

[ADA Statement](#)

[Observance of Holy Days](#)

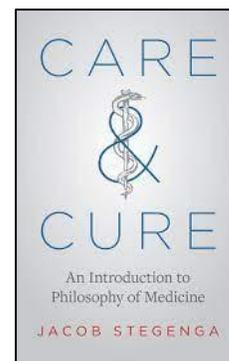
Academic Integrity and AI usage:

Generative AI applications (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, DALL·E, Grammarly, or similar applications) may only be used in this course for specific assignments where the instructor explicitly permits their use. Unless otherwise stated in the syllabus or assignment guidelines, AI assistance is not allowed. Using AI in unauthorized contexts or submitting AI-generated content as your own work may constitute a violation of academic integrity and may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. When using AI in permitted contexts as outlined in the syllabus or explicitly permitted by the instructor, you are responsible for ensuring that AI-generated content is properly cited, accurate, ethical, free of misinformation or intellectual property violations. AI-generated content must never be submitted as your own work. Doing so may constitute a violation of academic integrity and may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Please contact me if you have questions regarding this course policy.

Any generative AI use should be cited AND clearly disclosed according to the instructions in this syllabus. An example of an APA citation (7th ed. format) is seen here: OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (May 2024 version) [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com>

Required books:

Care and Cure: An Introduction to Philosophy of Medicine by Jacob Stegenga. University of Chicago Press, 2018.



An updated course schedule and access to all readings and assignments will be kept on the course website here:

<http://joelvelasco.net/teaching/3300>

Rough Course Schedule

| | Reading | Topic | Assignments due |
|-------------|--|---|-------------------------------|
| Weeks 1-5 | Stegenga Ch1-6 Plus articles | Health and Disease, Death, disability, controversial diseases | Debate 1 |
| Week 6 | | First five weeks | in-class exam |
| Weeks 7-10 | Stegenga Ch 7-11 | Evidence and Inference in Medicine | Debate 2 |
| Weeks 11 | | Weeks 6-10 | In-class exam |
| Weeks 11-16 | Stegenga Ch 12-14 plus additional reading | Ethics and Public Policy in Medicine | Debate 3, final presentations |