

Course Materials

**Principles of Bioethics**
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**Required Reading**


**Suggested Further Reading**


1. Principlism as a Theory about Universal Moral Principles
   A. My collaborative work on moral principles with James Childress
   B. Principles are not absolute or categorical imperatives
   C. What is universal morality? The main areas in which it is found are:
      i. Principles of obligation
      ii. Human rights
      iii. Virtues
   D. Universal standards are not mere cultural standards

2. Principlism's Framework of Universal Principles
   Four clusters of basic moral principles serve as the moral framework:
   1. Respect for autonomy (a principle requiring respect for the decisions and decision-making capacities of autonomous persons),
   2. Nonmaleficence (a principle requiring the avoidance of causing harm to others),
   3. Beneficence (a group of principles requiring both lessening of and prevention of harm as well as provision of benefits to others and balancing benefits, burdens, and risks), and
   4. Justice (a group of principles requiring fair distribution of benefits and burdens across all affected parties).

3. Common Morality as the Source of Universal Principles
   A. The Larger Body of Universal Moral Requirements: Common Morality
   B. All impartial and morally committed persons accept these norms.
   C. Principlism Identifies only a slice of the universal common morality
   D. Principlism draws its principles from the common morality to construct a normative framework for biomedical ethics.
   E. By contrast, Bernard Gert and Rebecca Kukla, present truly bold universalist theories for bioethics.
   F. Childress and I defend the Thesis that universal common morality includes our principles, whatever else it may contain.
4. Does European Bioethics Need a Different Framework of Principles?
   A. The Question: Are frameworks of general principles relative to cultures?
   B. Some European critics see a quaintly American point of view at work.
      i) Søren Holm’s theory of cultural moralities in Europe
      ii) Peter Kemp and Jacob Rendtorff’s theory of basic European Principles [a competitor framework of principles for bioethics]:
         1. Respect for Autonomy
         2. Dignity
         3. Integrity
         4. Vulnerability
   C. Conclusion: These proposed European principles are not well-conceived for Europe or for any other cultural context—although Holm’s view that the principles can be applied in different ways in different countries in Europe is correct.

1. Does “Eastern Ethics” Rest on Different Cultural Principles than “Western Ethics”? 
   A. Does Asia have fundamentally different moral traditions of principles?
   B. Amartya Sen’s views on “Human Rights and Asian Values.”
   C. Do any “quintessential [moral] values” differentiate Asians as a group?
   D. Are community and family relationships valued more highly in Asia?

2. The Global Reach of Principles & Rules of Research Ethics 
   A. 40 years ago no universally accepted principles of research ethics existed.
   B. Today we find a sea of similarity in countries on every continent.
   C. Today’s rules are grounded in universal moral principles.
   D. Examples: Requirements to disclose all material information to subjects; requirements to obtain individual, voluntary, informed consent; requirements to protect subjects in research against excessive and unnecessary risk; and requirements that ethics review committees critically assess and approve research protocols.

3. Conclusion
   More than any other part of moral discourse, universal principles and their correlative human rights cross international boundaries and form the basis of a global bioethics.