**Biomedical Ethics**  
Proposed Syllabus

**Course Goals**

Overall, the goal of this course is for us to become proficient at evaluating and developing answers to some basic questions about how we should give, receive, and distribute medical care and how we should engage in biomedical research. And this means that, by the end this course, we will be able to …

(1) discern the main arguments of a piece of argumentative and/or philosophical writing and critically evaluate these arguments,  
(2) evaluate these claims and arguments in light of important philosophical accounts of morally good action, character, and community, and  
(3) formulate our own (perhaps tentative) to answers to the main questions taken up in this course and expose them to careful scrutiny.

Together, (1)-(3) make up the primary goal of this course. However, achieving this goal will require being able to critically reflect on real, complex cases involving difficult decisions about medical care, public policy, and biomedical research. So, we will also learn how to …

(4) discern what the most important philosophical questions and assumptions are behind the descriptions of morally fraught biomedical cases,  
(5) utilize some important moral philosophical theories to see what goes into answering these questions and evaluating these assumptions.

**Assignments and Grading**

**Assignments:** You will complete three different kinds of assignments during this course, all of which are important for helping us to achieve the goals listed above.

(1) **Précis Presentations:** Each if you will be responsible for working with a classmate to set the stage for class discussion twice during the term. These presentations will be no longer than 10 minutes, and they will focus on highlighting what is philosophically important or puzzling about some piece of writing and/or posing some challenging questions for a philosophical view. You and your presentation partner will meet with me ahead of time. *This will help us to achieve Goals (1), (2), and (4).*

(2) **Encyclopedia Entries:** You will all write two short (around 1000 words) summaries of important moral philosophical views or debates. (I will highlight options as they come along.) The goal of these summaries is to write something that could serve as a useful reference for someone who wanted to understand what was most important, and most worrying, about some given philosophical account or debate. One of these must be complete by Week 5, and the other must be complete by Week 9. *These assignments will help us to achieve Goals (2) and (5).*

(3) **Final Paper:** You will all write a term paper, which will be the culmination of a series of three writing assignments and a peer-review process that will take place over the last four weeks of the term. This paper will be around six pages in length
and will focus on defending your own answer to a difficult question in biomedical ethics, utilizing the readings discussed throughout this course. This will help us to achieve all five of our course goals.

Grade Calculation: 10% of your grade will come from participation in in-class discussions and activities, 20% will come from your Précis Presentations (10% each), 30% will come from your Encyclopedia Entries (15% each), and 40% will come from your Final Paper (including the assignments and peer-review activities leading up to it).

Course Readings

You are required to obtain a copy of each of the following four texts. (Other required readings will be made available on-line.)

1. Mappes and DeGrazia, eds., Biomedical Ethics, 5th Ed.
   - ISBN: 978-0072303650
2. Darwall, Welfare and Rational Care
   - ISBN: 978-06910923539
3. Mill, Utilitarianism and On Liberty
   - ISBN: 978-0631233527
   - ISBN: 978-0195311594

Course Schedule

Below is a tentative schedule of the readings and activities for each week of class.

Week 1: Stopping and Thinking
   - Readings: Quill, “Death and Dignity”; Darwall – Ch. 1, 2
   - Activities: in-class writing about about when it is important to engage in moral thinking; small group discussion about the tension between care and respect

Week 2: Systematic Thought about Morality I
   - Readings: Mill – Utilitarianism, Ch. 1, 2 (Sections 1-10); Nozick, “Side Constraints”; packet with selections from, and summaries of, Natural Law Theory
   - Activities: small and large group discussion about “hard cases” for utilitarianism and Natural Law Theory; small group discussion about the moral importance of consent

Week 3: What is Informed Consent, and does it Matter?
   - Activities: the class will split into two groups, which are assigned the task of coming up with the best defense of opposing views about when and how doctors can lie to patients

Week 4: The Role of Family and Proxies
   - Activities: small and large group discussion of two cases, with the goal of coming to consensus about whether and why to recommend relying on proxy decision-making
Week 5: Making Better People, Making People Worse
• **Readings**: Glover, “What Sort of People Should There Be?”
• **Activities**: watch and discuss *Gattaca*

Weeks 6-7: When can we be Test Subjects?
• **Activities**: small group micro-projects and discussion about the systematic moral ideas behind prohibitions of certain kinds of research on human subjects

Weeks 7-8: What can We Consent to Do to Ourselves?
• **Activities**: think-pair-share about the differences between refusing life-sustaining treatment and euthanasia, and about whether euthanasia always wrongs someone

Weeks 8-9: What about the (Non-Human) Animals?
• **Readings**: Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals”; Kant, “Of Duties to Animals”; Korsgaard, “Facing the Animal in the Mirror”; Berms, “Dogs are People, Too”
• **Activities**: small and large group discussion of whether we wrong animals and/or ourselves by using animals in certain kinds of biomedical research

Weeks 9-10: Systematic Thought about Morality II
• **Activities**: small and large group discussion of whether Nozick’s entitlement theory is compatible with Mill’s theory, and what they each say about fluoridating public water

Week 11: How to Distribute Healthcare
• **Readings**: Nielsen, “Autonomy, Equality, and a Just Health Care System”; Callahan, “Aging and the Ends of Medicine”; Daniels, “Is the Oregon Rationing Plan Fair?”
• **Activities**: the class will split into two groups, which are each assigned with coming up with the best defense of opposing views about whether to distribute healthcare by “rationing” or by means of a relatively unrestricted market

Week 12: Noxious Markets
• **Readings**: Satz – Ch. 1, 4; Twohey, “The Child Exchange”
• **Activities**: Small group discussion, with the goal of coming to consensus about what is wrong with a “marketplace” for adopted children

Week 13: Organs for Sale?
• **Readings**: Satz – Ch. 9; review Nozick, “The Entitlement Theory”
• **Activities**: In-class peer-review of final papers (instructor visits with each pair)

Week 14: Mothers for Hire?
• **Readings**: Satz – Ch. 5; Steinbock, “Surrogate Motherhood”
• **Activities**: Small and large group discussion of what forms of contract prenatal surrogacy, if any, can be justly used.