In this course we will examine some of the ethical conflicts involved in certain kinds of medical situations. And in certain specific, single cases, we will analyze the moral dilemma which may be obscured by the situation's medical and social intricacies. This job may be difficult and often frustrating. The advance of medical research and technological practice in the containment of injury and disease puts greater and greater pressure on the moral philosopher, as it is his job to test conventional and classical ethical principles in their applications to ever-changing medical circumstances. The range of our discussions is illustrated by the list of readings below. Please note that many of these readings contain competing academic opinions, and some not necessarily held by the professor. This class will respect serious beliefs already valued by the student.


REQUIREMENTS: Each student will complete a two-part first assignment (40% of the whole course grade) and a two-part second assignment (60% of the whole course grade). The first part of each assignment will be a 1 ½ to 2-page, double-spaced, single-medical-incident, opinion paper weighted as 2/3 of that assignment's grade. Important: The student will conveniently be given 1) the same required logical format to be used in both papers, and 2) a different opening sentence requirement for each paper. (Rough drafts cannot be reviewed as a whole by the instructor, but incident selection and analytic questions can be discussed. The second opinion paper will not be returned to the student, since it is the major portion of the final assignment, and must remain in my file. Please keep a personal copy.) The second part of each assignment will be a Scantron multiple-choice test weighted as 1/3 of that assignment's grade. Course grades are computed by a Microsoft Excell program with these fractions. Papers will be accepted one class meeting early, but late papers will receive a half-letter grade penalty, unless serious circumstances intervene. Make-up exams are not given. Any student who earns A's on both parts of the first assignment may choose (optionally) to submit a one-part second assignment consisting of a 3-5 page opinion paper on a single medical incident. However, this longer paper's incident must be approved by the instructor in advance of its writing. The longer paper must still conform to the given opinion paper's opening requirement and required format. Grammatical errors and poor writing skills will reduce any paper's grade. The tests will deal mostly with issues from the readings and materials presented by the instructor that are discussed in class. Consequently, class attendance is critical and roll will be taken periodically. Failure to attend class or submit required work may result in withdrawal from the class or an F in the course.

Continued below
Philosophy 227  
Reading and Assignments

1st Week: Receive syllabus; double-check registration and class roll. Overview of requirements; shopping for an opinion paper case; orientation to the study of ethics and biomedical ethics; presentation of major moral principles of autonomy, beneficence, justice, and natural law; the Hippocratic Oath.

2nd Week: Ethics for Physicians, Truth-Telling, and Disclosing Bad News: Pellegrino’s theory, presented in class; Thomasma, pp. 128-132; Sigman et al, pp. 133-138; casebook, pp. 19-23, pp. 7-10.


4th Week: Work-Through of Required Opinion Paper Format. Attendance is critical!


7th Week: Introduction to Abortion Literature. Legal Abortion: Roe v. Wade, pp. 308-312; Planned Parenthood v. Casey, pp. 312-318; receive Gregory handout article.

8th Week: Evidence Against Abortion: Marquis, pp. 270-277 (Difficult!) Read Gregory handout.


10th Week: First Scantron Exam. Bring #2 pencil and a small, business-envelope size Scantron card. (You may bring a standard English dictionary.)

11th Week: The Many Kinds of Euthanasia: Background, pp.179-184, Gert et al; Callahan, presented in class; casebook, pp. 135-140.

12th Week: Physician-Assisted Suicide: Two Supreme Court cases, pp. 205-211; Oregon Death with Dignity Act, pp. 201-204; McKay v. Bergstedt; presented in class.

13th Week: 2nd Paper Workshop: Come with a chosen incident and we’ll write YOUR paper!

14th Week: Nutrition/hydration: Videotape Presentation: Cruzan case. 2nd Opinion Paper Due.


16th Week: 2nd Scantron Exam. Bring #2 pencil and Scantron card (the small, business-envelope size). You may also bring a standard English Dictionary.

N.B.: Academic Breaks and Holidays will affect the above chronology for an individual semester.