Course Description

In this course, we will take a philosophical approach to health care ethics. Recently, there has been a growing recognition within various traditions and movements in the humanities that the biological approach alone cannot address the complex phenomena of human experience that physicians encounter in their everyday practice. Various perspectives from within the emerging field of medical humanities have argued that disease, mental disorders, illness, injury, disability, and ageing are not reducible to purely biological, mechanistic explanations because they are more than just physical expressions of the body and its systems. Upon closer inspection, these complex human phenomena reveal an experiential dimensionality, whether it be sensible, pathological, emotional, or even social-political. A philosophically informed approach to the body can perhaps offer alternative responses to ethical questions in health care that could supplement the strictly biological model currently used in medicine. Topics that may be addressed in this course include: concepts of the body, health, illness, and disease; incorporating narrative into diagnoses; hormone treatment therapy; social factors of anorexia nervosa; human suffering and empathy in the clinical encounter; medical technologies like psychopharmacology.

Required Texts


*Other readings will be accessible as PDFs on Blackboard.

Course Requirements

Grades will be composed of structured written reading responses, one paper, and two exams.

*This course satisfies the University Core Requirement for Ethics*