Winter - Term 2, 2018-19
Philosophy 759 (Topics in Applied Ethics)
Ethics of Human Experimentation

Instructor: Ariella Binik
Office: UH/318
Phone: x27529
Email: binika@mcmaster.ca

Course Description

Medical research with human subjects offers one of the best prospects for improving people’s health
and their quality of life, but the conduct of health research with human subjects raises difficult
ethical questions. Perhaps most fundamentally: “Under what conditions, if any, is it permissible to
expose individuals to risk for the benefit of others?” This question is at the root of ethical tensions
arising in different kinds of health research and for different kinds of research subjects.

This course will focus on conceptual problems in the ethics of clinical research with human subjects.
It will also consider the implications of different solutions for practice and for policy. We will
consider a variety of topics, including ethical and methodological questions concerning the use of
placebos, the permissibility of deception in research, whether and why incentives should be
considered coercive, the permissibility of research that aims to genetically modify future generations,
and the ethics of high-risk clinical trials. In our analysis of these topics, we will focus on two related
themes: (1) Ethical tensions arising in balancing benefits to society against risks to individual people
and (2) moral obligations to human subjects in health research.

Method of Assessment

1. Seminar Presentations (30%): Students will prepare presentations on one of our course readings
   for the week, including a summary, critical assessment, and a series of questions to guide the
   class discussion.

2. Weekly responses (10%): Please prepare short (1-2 page) critical response to one or more of the
course readings (8 total over the term).

3. Term paper (60%):
   Prepare an 10,000-12,000 word essay. Suggested topics will be provided, but you are welcome to
develop your own from any of the topic covered in the course.

Texts

Readings for the course will be available through a course-pack and on avenue to learn.