

Philos 759 (Topics in Applied Ethics)
Ethics of Human Experimentation

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 (40%): Students will prepare presentations on course readings for the week, including a summary, critical assessment, and a series of questions to guide the class discussion.

4. Term paper (60%): Students will prepare a 7000-9000 word essay. Essays may address any of the topics covered in the course.

Texts

Readings for the course will be posted on avenue to learn.