This is a course in applied ethics, which is the study of how ethical thinking can be used in real-life situations and issues. In this case, we will be exploring the ethics of biomedical issues. Those issues could include euthanasia, abortion, informed consent, allocating medical resources, and treating impaired infants. What is the morally right thing to do in various biomedical contexts? What are good reasons for answers to that question and others like it? What kinds of things should we take into consideration when making difficult moral decisions about these topics? What role should rights play? What about overall happiness? Are there certain rules of moral conduct that should never be broken?

We will spend a good deal of time studying historical and contemporary ethical thinking, in order to use ideas from it to come to some conclusions about biomedical problems. Ethical theorists have given moral theories and discussed answers to questions such as those raised above. We will read philosophical writings on ethics in general and on particular biomedical issues.

This course will be a mix of lecture and discussion, with everyone expected to participate. Students will be tested on their comprehension of the assigned readings and lectures, but will also be expected to make philosophical arguments of their own. This kind of argument is in the form of logically-structured reasons, and the aim is to get closer to the truth on these difficult issues. To write papers defending their own stances on biomedical issues, students will learn philosophical concepts and methods. To engage in discussion of the issues, students will learn to give and take criticisms and suggestions in the spirit of mutual respect and the desire to formulate thoughtful positions.