Course Description:

You’ve heard the joke about how your parents want you to marry “a nice Jewish doctor.” But what else is there to the relationships between Jews, Judaisms, medicine, healing, injury, and illness? How have different streams of Judaism understood health and medicine? How have medical discourses understood and depicted Jews and Judaism? And how have present-day Jewish ethicists dealt with the increasingly fraught and complex moral questions raised in contemporary medical contexts?

Course Goals:

By the end of this course, you should:

* Not have died. We’re in a pandemic; nothing is normal. The primary and most important objective for this course is, in the words of Lin-Manuel Miranda, to “Stay alive...stay alive...”
* Be able to navigate and critically read relevant primary texts, including Biblical and rabbinic texts, in translation.
* Understand some connections between ways bodies and medicine functioned in early and rabbinic Judaism, Jewish experiences throughout modernity, and late modern and contemporary Jewish responses to moral questions raised in medicine.
* Develop the ability to analyze representations of bodies and their meanings in religious text, history, popular media, and bioethical literature through a critical lens.
* Begin to develop the tools needed to engage with and critique scholarship on all of the above.

Requirements:

1. Discussion Postings

Under normal circumstances this course would rely heavily on freeform discussion. Since we’re meeting remotely, our discussions will occur in a few different ways. These are all graded pass/fail: if you did them in a way that is reasonably coherent, you get full credit.

A. Initial Reflections (Due Tuesdays, BEFORE doing the Reading):
   a. Using Brightspace discussions, respond briefly to one or two broad questions about this week’s theme. For these initial reflections, I want your knee-jerk response—so answer these before you do the reading, and don’t try to divine what the “right” answer is!
b. Feel free—and indeed encouraged!—to take an informal tone, and to include images, video clips, and even memes (you can make your own here: https://imgflip.com/memegenerator). If you do use these, remember to include a brief description of the image as alt-text (e.g. “A grey cat is sitting and meowing. The text in the image says ‘I can haz cheezburger?’”) for anyone who might be using a screen reader OR who doesn’t have sufficient bandwidth to load a lot of images!

B. Perusall Annotations (Due Thursdays):
   a. Using the collaborative annotation tool Perusall (linked in Brightspace), react to the week’s readings as you do them. Write at least one comment on each reading, and respond to at least one other student’s comment.

C. Discussion Board Responses (Due Fridays):
   a. After doing the reading, respond using Brightspace discussions to a set of questions that put the readings in dialogue with the week’s theme. Post your own response to each question, and respond to at least one other student’s post.
   b. Again, feel free to be informal and incorporate images, memes, etc; just be sure to include image descriptions!

2. Text Study (Rough Draft Due; Final Draft Due)  
   Choose one of the primary texts we have covered in Unit I. In 400-600 words and with reference to the class discussions and secondary readings, analyze the text’s understanding of one of the following concepts:
   * Health
   * Illness
   * Healing
   * Cure

3. Character Study (Rough Draft Due; Final Draft Due)  
   Choose a canonically Jewish fictional character. In 500-700 words and with reference to the readings, analyze how the tropes regarding Jewish embodiment we’ve discussed in Unit II do and/or do not apply to this character. Does the character reinforce stereotypes? Do they defy them? Do they play with them or subvert them? How so?

4. Case Study Rewrite (Rough Draft Due; Final Draft Due)  
   In Unit III, we will read and analyze several bioethics case studies, drawing attention to some problems with the form as classically constructed. Toward the end of the unit, you will choose one of the case studies we have read and discussed. You will first write a short analysis (+/- 400 words) identifying the key problems with its presentation, and then rewrite each case study with attention to rectifying these problems.
Schedule of Topics:

**Week 1 (8/24-8/28):** Getting Oriented: What’s Medicine? What is Religion?
*Listen:*
*Keeping it 101 Podcast, episode 1 (44:03; transcript available at link)*
*Read:*

**Unit I: Health, Illness, and Medicine in Early Judaism and Rabbinic Text**

**Week 2 (8/31-9/4):** Textual and Historical Background: Sickness and Healing in the Bible
*Primary texts:* Leviticus 13-14; Numbers 12; 2 Kings 5; Luke, excerpts
*Secondary texts:*
*Andrej Grzybowski and Malgorzata Nita, “Leprosy in the Bible,”* *Clincis in Dermatology* 34 (2016), pp. 3-7;

**Week 3 (9/7-9/11):** Textual and Historical Background: Sickness, Healing and Power in Rabbinic Text
*Primary text:* Lamentations Rabbah, excerpts
*Secondary texts:*
*Julia Watts Belser, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction: Gender, Sex, and Disability in the Ruins of Jerusalem*, 77-98

**Week 4 (9/14-9/18):** Textual and Historical Background: Embodiment, Power, and Gender in Rabbinic Text

**Unit II: Jewish Modernity and Jewish Malady**

**Week 5 (9/21-9/25):** The Otherness of Jewish Bodies; or, Space Jews

**Week 6 (9/28-10/2):** The Sick Jew
*Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*
*Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body*, 210-233*
**Week 7 (10/5-10/9): The Healthy Jew**  

**Unit III: Contemporary Jewish Biomedical Ethics**

**Week 8 (10/12-10/16): Foundations of Jewish Bioethics: Textual and Narrative Caveats**
*Beth Berkowitz, *Execution and Invention: Death Penalty Discourse in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures*, 19-20

**Week 9 (10/19-10/23): Foundational Duties**
*Primary text:* B. Sanhedrin 73a; Ruth 1  
*Secondary texts:*  
*Laurie Zoloth, *Healthcare and the Ethics of Encounter*, 144-159, 193-220

**Week 10 (10/26-10/30): Problems in Jewish Bioethics: Contraception and Abortion**
*Elliot N. Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death*, 116-133

**Week 11 (11/2-11/6): Problems in Jewish Bioethics: Reproductive Technologies**
*Zoloth, “Nursing Fathers and Nursing Mothers: Notes Toward a Distinctive Jewish View of Reproductive Ethics” in *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 21 (2001), 325-337

**Week 12 (11/9-11/13): Problems in Jewish Bioethics: Selectivity, Genetics and Medicine**
*Laurie Zoloth, “Go and Tend the Earth: A Jewish View on an Enhanced World” in *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics* (Spring 2008), 10-25


**Week 14: THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS**
Week 15 (11/30-12/4): Wrapping Up