Course Description:
Sherwin Nuland often referred to medicine as “the Uncertain Art.” In this course, we will address the role of uncertainty in medicine, and the role that narrative plays in capturing that uncertainty. We will focus our efforts on major authors and texts that define the modern medical humanities, with primary readings by Mikhail Bulgakov, Henry Marsh, Atul Gawande, and Lisa Sanders. Other topics will include the philosophy of science (with a focus on Karl Popper), rationalism and romanticism (William James), and epistemology and scientism (Wittgenstein). Events permitting, trips will take us to the Yale Medical Historical Library, and the Yale Center for British Art.

Required Texts:
1. Henry Marsh – *Do No Harm*
2. Leo Tolstoy – *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (trans., Louise and Aylmer Maude)
3. Lisa Sanders – *Every Patient Tells A Story*
4. Jerome Groopman – *How Doctors Think*
5. Mikhail Bulgakov – *A Young Doctor’s Notebook* (trans., Michael Glenny)

Other assigned readings (to be made available online):
2. Philippe Ariès – selection, *Death Denied*
7. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, selection, *The Black Swan*
10. Aristotle, selections, *Nicomachean Ethics*
12. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, selection, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*
15. Carl Von Clausewitz, selection, *On War*
17. Kate Murphy, “Do You Believe in God, or Is That A Software Glitch?” N.Y. Times, 8/27/16
18. Dostoevsky, selections, *Notes From Underground*
19. Kierkegaard, selection, Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments
20. Pascal, selections, *Pensées*
21. Witold Gombrowicz, selections, *Diary*
22. Goethe, selection, *Faust*
23. Robert Pirsig, selections, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

26. Atul Gawande,
   - “The Learning Curve,” The New Yorker, 1/28/02
   - “When Doctors Make Mistakes,” The New Yorker, 2/1/99
   - “Slow Ideas,” The New Yorker, 7/29/13
   - “Letting Go,” The New Yorker, 8/2/10


30. Warburton, selections, Philosophy: Basic Readings – Popper, Kuhn, Sokal, Monk

31. Wittgenstein, selections, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and Philosophical Investigations


34. W.I.B. Beveridge, selections, The Art of Scientific Investigation

35. Stephen Hawking, selection, A Brief History of Time


37. William James – Rationalism vs. Empiricism, Some Problems of Philosophy

38. Tolstoy, selections, War and Peace

**Recommended Reading (optional)**

2. Sherwin Nuland – How We Die
3. Philip Roth – The Anatomy Lesson
5. Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner – Our Cancer Year
6. Roz Chast – Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?
7. Sir Thomas Browne – Religio Medici

**Course Requirements:**
Regular attendance at lectures, as well as informed and active participation in class, is expected.

The grade breakdown will be as follows:
- Presentation: 15%
- Midterm Paper: 25%
- Final Paper: 40%
- Attendance and Participation: 20%

**Presentation:** You will give one brief oral presentation on cognitive bias in clinical medicine. This presentation should demonstrate some background research, encourage thinking about the subject, and close with a few questions — general or specific — which will engage the class in conversation.
**Midterm and Final Papers**: Your midterm essay should run between 4-5 pages, and final essay between 8-10 pages, double spaced. Papers may be research-oriented or more expository, considering a work we’ve read in light of a medical experience of your own, or a family member’s.

**Computer and Mobile Device Policy**: I respectfully ask that notes be taken by pen / pencil and paper in class, rather than by computer, and that texting and phone calls be taken outside of the classroom.

**Academic Integrity**: Any work that you submit must be your own, and any work that is borrowed must be properly cited.

**Weekly Schedule**
(some changes may occur)

**Class 1:**
6/8
- Introduction; Syllabus; Course Guidelines
- Henry Marsh – Do No Harm (Chapters 1-12)

**Class 2:**
6/10
- Henry Marsh – *Do No Harm* (Chapters 13-25)
- Karl Ove Knausgaard
  - “The Terrible Beauty of Brain Surgery,” N.Y. Times Magazine, 1/3/16
  - selections, *My Struggle, Book I*

**Class 3:**
6/15
- Leo Tolstoy – The Death of Ivan Ilyich
- Philippe Ariès – selection, *Death Denied.* In *The hour of our death: The classic history of Western attitudes toward death over the last one thousand years.* (1982).

**Class 4:**
6/17
- Wordsworth, “Tables Turned.”
- Jorge Luis Borges, *On Exactitude In Science.*
- Nassim Nicholas Taleb, selection, *The Black Swan*
- Rivka Galchen, “Every Disease on Earth,” The New Yorker, 5/13/13

### Class 5: Heuristics and Cognitive Errors, Diagnostic and Therapeutic  
6/22

- Presentations: Cognitive Biases
  - Introduction
  - Chapter 6, “The Uncertainty of the Expert.”
- Danielle Ofri, “*Getting The Diagnosis Wrong,*” The New York Times, 10/8/2015

### Class 6:  
6/24

- Mikhail Bulgakov – A Young Doctor’s Notebook

### Midterm Paper Due

### Class 7: Phronesis  
6/29

- Aristotle, selections, *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, selection, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*
- William James, selections, “The Moral Philosopher and The Moral Life.”
- Carl Von Clausewitz, selection, *On War*

### Class 8: Science and the Soul  
7/1

- Oliver Sacks, “*Neurology And The Soul,*” New York Review of Books 11/22/90
- Kate Murphy, “*Do You Believe in God, or Is That A Software Glitch?*” N.Y. Times, 8/27/16
- Dostoevsky, selections, *Notes From Underground*
- Kierkegaard, selections, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*
- Pascal, selections, *Pensées*
- Witold Gombrowicz, selections, *Diary*
- Goethe, selection, *Faust*
- Robert Pirsig, selection, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
  “Classicism vs. Romanticism.”

Optional:


**Class 9: 7/6**

  Introduction; Chapter 1; Chapters 4-6
- Atul Gawande,
  - “The Learning Curve,” The New Yorker, 1/28/02
  - “When Doctors Make Mistakes,” The New Yorker, 2/1/99

Optional:

- Atul Gawande,
  - “Slow Ideas,” The New Yorker, 7/29/13
  - “Letting Go,” The New Yorker, 8/2/10
  - “Final Cut,” The New Yorker, 3/19/01
  - “The Case of The Red Leg,” *Complications*

**Class 10: The Philosophy of Science; Scientism 7/8**

- Warburton, selections, *Philosophy: Basic Readings* – Popper, Kuhn, Sokal, Monk
- Wittgenstein, selections, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*
- Robert Pirsig, selection, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
  “Mu States and Truth Traps.”
- Stephen Hawking, selection, *A Brief History of Time*
- Stephen Jay Gould, “Nonoverlapping Magisteria.” *Natural History*, 3/19
- W.I.B. Beveridge, selections, *The Art of Scientific Investigation*
- Albert Einstein and Rabindranath Tagore, “Note on the Nature of Reality.”
- William James – Rationalism vs. Empiricism, *Some Problems of Philosophy*
- Tolstoy, selections, *War and Peace*

**Final Paper Due**

Potential Guest Speakers:
Lisa Sanders, M.D.
Stephen Bergman, M.D. (a.k.a. Samuel Shem.)