How do we understand human character? Do we still think of individuals as representative of a “type”? What are our explanations for mental illness? How do our answers to these questions affect our human relationships and professional practice?

This ethics discussion will coincide with a National Library of Medicine exhibit at the Eccles Health Sciences Library called “And There’s the Humor of It: Shakespeare and the Four Humors.” It’s curated by Joan Gregory, and it will be available for us to visit. Shakespeare and his Renaissance contemporaries inherited humoral psychology from the classical period, and it served as an explanatory system for human character and conduct. The residues of this system remain in our language today, as when we speak of a certain person as “melancholy,” “sanguine,” or “phlegmatic.” Shakespeare also had other means of understanding individual character and mental illness, and we’ll discuss some of these at our gathering. Mark Matheson, D. Phil, writes, “I look forward to hearing your evaluations of humoral psychology from the perspective of modern medicine—and your thoughts on whether some of the assumptions underlying this system (though not the system itself) remain active today.”

(There is no background reading for this session.)