

Political Studies Program, Summer 2012
BIOETHICS
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The steady advances in the field of biotechnology have opened a new frontier of ethical and political questions. Without doubt, gratitude is the most appropriate response for the many developments in biotechnology that have done much to alleviate human suffering. At the same time, however, we find ourselves on the threshold of an unprecedented power to shape the character of human life itself—a “brave new world” that brings with it a number of fundamental questions that warrant serious and sustained examination. Indeed, many have argued that the explicit and implicit questions of value raised by the biotechnology revolution constitute the most far-reaching set of challenges for our time, currently at the center of American politics.

In this seminar, students will examine classic texts in the history of political thought that bear on biotechnology and politics. They will also read contemporary authors who address the underlying ethical issues imbedded in the biotechnological revolution. They will grapple with questions about what it means to be human, as well as the relationship among the competing authorities of science, politics and religion in the modern world.

Monday, July 2, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon

Overview of Bioethics and Governance

Reading:

- Selections from Bacon and Descartes
- Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Birthmark”
- Leon R. Kass, “The Problem of Technology in a Liberal Democracy,” in *Life, Liberty and Defense of Dignity* (2002), pp. 29-53
- Carter Snead, *Science, Public Bioethics, and the Problem of Integration*, 43 University of California, Davis Law Review(2010) pgs 1532-59, 79-91

Discussion Questions:

1. The premises and methods of modern science contrast starkly with those that normally animate ethical and political reasoning. What challenges might these tensions pose for the governance of the practice of medicine, scientific research, and the uses of biotechnology? How should citizens and public officials respond to these tensions?

Tuesday, July 3, 2011, 9:00 am to Noon

Abortion

Scientific Dimensions

Reading:

- Maureen Condic, "When Does Human Life Begin? A Scientific Perspective," (http://www.westchesterinstitute.net/images/wi_whitepaper_life_print.pdf pgs 11-19, 23-4

Normative Dimensions

Reading:

- Judith Jarvis Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philos Public Aff*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 47 (1971) (available at <http://philosophy.wisc.edu/shapiro/Phil101/Thomson.pdf>)
- Hadley Arkes: First Things, "The Question of Abortion and the Discipline of Moral Reasoning"

Legal Dimensions

Reading:

- Reva Siegel, "Sex Equality Arguments for Reproductive Rights: Their Critical Basis and Evolving Constitutional Expression," 56 *Emory L.J.* 815 (2007) [first 6 pages]

Discussion Questions:

1. Is it necessary first to identify the boundaries of the moral and legal community (i.e., to designate who is and is not entitled to moral care and legal protection) before one can think about the appropriate law and policy for abortion? If so, who should decide this question of membership, and according to what criteria?

Wednesday, July 4, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon

Stem Cell Research/Cloning for Biomedical Research

Reading:

- *The Stem Cell Debates: Lessons for Science and Politics: A Report of the Witherspoon Council on Ethics and the Integrity of Science, The New Atlantis, Winter 2012*

Discussion Questions:

1. The dominant public question in this debate has been about whether or not federal funding should be provided for research involving the use and destruction of living human embryos. How does this issue differ (if at all) from question of whether embryonic stem cell research should be pursued in the first instance?

Thursday, July 5, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon

Organ Donation and Transplantation

Reading:

- Richard Selzer, "Wither Thou Goest"
- Gilbert Meilaender, "Organ Procurement: What are the Questions?"
http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/pcbe/background/meilaender_organ.html.
- Benjamin Hippen, "The Case for Kidney Markets," *The New Atlantis*, Fall 2006, pp. 47-61
- Alan Rubenstein, "On the Body and Transplantation: Philosophical and Legal Context,"
http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/pcbe/background/onthebody_phil_and_legal.html
- Michael Finkel, "Complications," NYT Magazine, 27 May 2001

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you own your body? What does "ownership" or "property" mean in this context?
2. What do you make of the concern that organ markets would lead to a uniquely pernicious form of exploitation of the poor?

Evening activity: screening and discussion of Gattaca

Friday, July 6, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon

End of Life Decision making (including declining life-sustaining treatment, physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia)

General Reflections:

Reading:

- Gilbert Meilaender, "I Want To Burden My Loved Ones," *First Things*, October 1991
<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/11/003-i-want-to-burden-my-loved-ones-17>

Decisions Regarding Life-Sustaining Measures

Reading:

- Carter Snead, *The (Surprising) Truth about Schiavo: A Defeat for the Cause of Autonomy*, 22 Constitutional Commentary 101 (2005) (available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=886373)
- Angela Fagerlin and Carl E. Schneider, "Enough: The Failure of the Living Will," *Hastings Center Report* 34, no. 2 (2004): 30-42
- The President's Council on Bioethics, *Taking Care: Ethical Caregiving in Our Aging Society* (2005), Chapter 3

Physician-Assisted Suicide

Reading:

- 1996 WL 708956 (Appellate Brief) FOR RONALD DWORKIN, THOMAS NAGEL, ROBERT NOZICK, JOHN RAWLS, THOMAS SCANLON, AND JUDITH JARVIS THOMSON AS AMICI CURIAE IN SUPPORT OF RESPONDENTS (Dec. 10, 1996)
- Leon Kass, "Why Doctors Must Not Kill" (presented as the American College of Surgeons Lecture on Ethics and Philosophy, which was inaugurated on October 23, 1991; <http://www.facs.org/education/ethics/kasslect.html>)

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the interests of incompetent patients differ (if at all) from those who are competent, in the context of end-of-life decisionmaking?
2. Should it matter, morally or legally, why a person declines or withdraws life-sustaining measures?
3. Is it possible to distinguish the administration of a lethal drug (in the context of assisted suicide or euthanasia) and withdrawing life sustaining measures? Is there a moral difference? Should the law treat these differently?