

A Freshman Seminar
Bioethics and Public Policy
Spring 2018

Bioethics is a branch of applied ethics focused on the study of ethical issues that arise over time by the on-going advances in the biological and medical sciences and/or by new sensitivities to one's ethical obligations. The seminar will be focused on the relationship between selected issues in bioethics and their implications, if any, for the design of public policies in this arena. Some bioethical issues may be thought of as purely private matters, others may be best dealt with by professional codes of ethics, still others may require a response from public policy, and finally some may be dealt with through the judicial system. This seminar will focus primarily on areas in bioethics that seem to have salience for public policy.

The last two centuries we have witnessed extraordinary and continuing developments in our understanding of human biology and in our capacity to deploy new clinical modalities [biomedicine]. Moreover the pace of change in these arenas seems to be accelerating as we deepen our understanding of human biology and our capacity to fight disease and, some would say, to potentially exert control over the evolution of our species. While great progress has been made in our abilities to treat disease and enhance the human condition many of these developments have raised ethical questions in such arenas as: compulsory vaccination, the use of human subjects in medical research, the ethical treatment of non-human animals, the ethical boundaries of public health initiatives, the ethics of euthanasia and suicide, the appropriate deployment of assisted reproductive technologies, genetic engineering, cloning and stem cell treatments.

This seminar will consider both the ethical issues raised by these on-going developments and the appropriate public policy responses to various contemporary developments on the biomedical frontier and/or our enhanced sensitivity to our obligation to others.

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