

Bioethics Nexus Conference a Resounding Success

For three days in mid-July, conference attendees from a diversity of professions were captivated by plenary speakers, who charted the present course of bioethics and the various opportunities and obstacles that lay ahead. Our 14th Annual Conference was one of our highest rated of all times. Acclaimed plenary speakers challenged attendees on pressing questions of our common humanity in healthcare and science. The range of activities that participants enjoyed was broad, ranging from an evening prescreening of the award-winning film *bella*—facilitated by lead actor Eduardo Verástegui and Vice President of Metanoia Films Corby Pons—to a Friday night luau jointly sponsored to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Trinity Graduate School and followed by the hilarious antics of the improv comedy troupe ComedySportz. In the words of one participant, “There is something very human about sharing times of food and laughter.”



Other efforts to share in and enjoy our common humanity were prevalent in activities such as our first ever celebration of the nexus of the arts and bioethics entitled “The Art of Humanity.” Those who participated in this display were treated to artwork that included sculptures, photography, contemporary graphic designs, and printings of textile art. Each piece in its own way celebrated some unique aspect of our shared humanity, be it from the beginning, middle, or end of life.

Participants in the conference sessions were treated to the high level of clinical, philosophical, theological, and legal expertise that has come to be expected from the world-class speakers invited to CBHD events. Highlights included enlightening plenaries of the history of bioethical developments and law from Nigel M. de S. Cameron, PhD, and O. Carter Snead, JD, as well as thought-provoking lectures on the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne by Christina Bieber Lake and posthuman trends in our culture by Brent Waters. We invite you to visit our website www.cbhd.org and watch

CBHD Director C. Ben Mitchell in his closing remarks offering highlights from the conference activities and presentations, as well as key action points for the future of bioethics.

Much excitement was generated around the various networking and working-group opportunities that allow for specialists to connect with others of like interests in the areas of neuroethics, biotech ethics, clinical ethics, ethics education, healthcare organizations, end of life issues, stem cell research and cloning, alternative medicine, and genetics. If you are interested in connecting with any of these ongoing discussions, please contact us at the Center. A significant goal of the Center is to provide opportunities for professional and topic-specific networking and to offer guidance that motivates collaborative projects. These groups are just one of the ways we achieve this objective.



Over the course of late August through early October the Center has been running select parallel paper presentations as part of our weekly podcasts. These audios are archived and available through our website. For a listing of these presentations, please visit our podcast site at www.cbhd.org/podcast to hear these and other audios that we update on nearly a weekly basis. In the month of October alone, we received nearly 12,000 hits on our podcasts and online audio.



Conferencing is one of the many exciting activities we are involved in here at the Center, but we especially enjoy the opportunity to meet and talk with so many of you who utilize our resources and serve in such vital roles in your practices, hospitals, organizations, offices, classrooms, and congregations. Inside this issue of *Dignitas*, we are pleased to announce some of our other activities that we think you might find engaging.

Genetically Enhancing Athletes?

by C. Ben Mitchell

Readers of both the academic and popular literature in bioethics will be well aware that genetic and other forms of so-called human enhancement are clearly on the drawing board. No one knows how long it will take to develop these technologies, but they are most certainly coming. Already, of course, through the use of preimplantation genetic diagnosis, human embryos are screened for undesirable genetic traits, and embryos with those traits are not transferred to a woman's uterus—they are discarded or used in embryo-destructive research. This is not enhancement but negative eugenics.



Soon, however, we will be able to direct our DNA to make ourselves different. I say "different," because it is unclear to me that having keener than normal eye sight is necessarily a good to be desired. Likewise, I hardly think that being able to choose one's eye color is something worth the cost of genetic intervention. And, while I suppose that ten additional IQ points would be nice, I am quite certain that merely having them will not make people nicer. Finally, physical immortality, it seems to me, is something only some of the well-heeled would want.

The venues for the most rapid development of genetic enhancement will not (and are not) in the medical sector, but in the military and athletics. Competitive advantage means a great deal on both battlefields. For instance, articles in *Scientific American* (July 2004) and the *New York Times Magazine* (January 18, 2004), pointed out that athletes are already trying to access genetic intervention for enhancement purposes. More efficient killing machines (aka soldiers) and a speedier fast pitch seem to be "goods" for many people. But are they?

News junkies could not help but read about Marion Jones's tearful plea for forgiveness as she returned her Olympic medals because of her past steroid use. In response, Olympic javelin bronze-medalist Kate Schmidt maintained that athletes take enhancement drugs because of the expectation of fans and that doping is so pervasive it ought to be made acceptable. Olympic officials are loath to do so not only because most of the drugs have deleterious side-effects, including sudden death, but because doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of competitive sports. Even presumably safe enhancements would give unfair advantage.

Happily, and without nearly as much publicity, the U.S. Congress passed legislation at the end of last year banning "gene doping" in the United States. HR 6344 was signed into law on December 29, 2006, defining gene doping as, "the nontherapeutic use of cells, genes, genetic elements, or of the modulation of gene expression, having the capacity to enhance athletic performance."

"At its best, athletics celebrates remarkable human achievements that result from hard work, dedication, not from hypodermics and DNA labs," said Jaydee Hanson, director for Human Genetics Policy for the International Center for Technology Assessment. "This ban represents an important milestone for human dignity in the fight against a new eugenics that ultimately intends to engineer all human life."

Keeping amateur athletics amateur athletics is especially important with the 2008 Olympics in China just around the corner. The bill states that "The United States Anti-Doping Agency shall . . . ensure that athletes participating in amateur athletic activities recognized by the United States Olympic Committee are prevented from using performance-enhancing drugs or performance-enhancing genetic modifications accomplished through gene-doping . . . (and) permanently include 'gene doping' among any list of prohibited substances adopted by the Agency."

This is not only good news for amateur athletics, but good news for our humanity.

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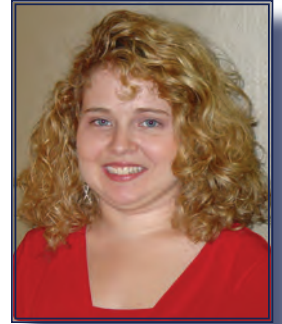
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MEET THE STAFF

Jessica Minor, Research Intern

I was born in Mission Viejo, California, but moved to Rocky Hill, Connecticut, when I was five years old. I attended a Christian High School, and last May, I graduated from Bob Jones University with a Bachelor's degree in Biology. The past two summers I have worked with an Orthopedic Surgeon as a Research Assistant. Now I am attending Trinity International University and working on a Master of Arts in Bioethics degree. I am currently working as a research intern at The Center of Bioethics & Human Dignity. Working at CBHD has already helped me to gain experience and knowledge about the emerging issues and current events in bioethics. My work with the Center has given me the opportunity to represent the Center at a local conference and to be actively involved in fulfilling the numerous information requests that we receive on a regular basis. After completing my degree I would like to get a PhD in some Bioethics-related field, and, eventually, would like to work at a hospital.



CENTER UPDATE

In Search of a New Paradigm: Healthcare and the Common Good

by Michael J. Sleafman, Managing Director & Research Scholar

Director C. Ben Mitchell and I are on the heels of returning from Washington, D.C., for the annual meeting of the American Society of Bioethics and Humanities. Bookending the trip, the Center sponsored two events to kick off one of our major emphases over the coming year—Healthcare and the Common Good.

Hardly a day goes by without some article on the growing problems in U.S. healthcare or another presidential candidate's campaign proposal for its reform. While many of these proposals focus on justice, fairness, and equality, they resort to the language of rights and ignore the identification of key concepts such as health and societal good. It is for this reason that the Center seeks to explore the current healthcare debate in the framework of the common good. By utilizing this framework to understand healthcare in the language of shared humanity (the "common") and human flourishing (the "good"), we hope to foster a new, more encompassing, conversation about both health and care.



To this end the Center held a networking evening in the D.C. area in which several of our constituents, consultants, congressional staffers, and like-minded policy figures gathered to brainstorm the shape and direction of this new initiative. This event was followed by

a full-day consultation convened in the House Rayburn building with leading figures from several major D.C. policy organizations and think tanks, as well as key leaders in the field of bioethics and Christian higher education.

The consultation, a joint initiative of CBHD and the Stead Center (Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary), was an opportunity for these leading figures to interact with the facts and figures of the economic situation, two differing open-minded proposals for reform, and a philosophical critique of Rawlsian notions of fairness and equality starkly contrasted with the virtue of charity. In many ways this consultation was merely setting the stage, identifying the key pressure points in this complex conversation and offering preliminary steps forward for future activities and conversations.

This initiative will culminate with our 2008 15th Annual Summer Conference, where you shouldn't be surprised if it includes something like healthcare and the common good in the title. Given the importance of this debate in our current national climate, the Center is trying to provide leadership in shaping this conversation from a clear commitment to Judeo-Christian Hippocratism in a meaningful manner. This is just one of the many ongoing initiatives of the Center that we invite you to both utilize through our ongoing development of resources, as well as to contribute through your own efforts.

CONFERENCE NEWS

Join us this March in Phoenix, Arizona, for an in-depth study on aging, death, and immortality ethics in a biotech century. This event will commence with our traditional Intensive and Advanced Institutes March 3-8. A special public debate entitled *Do You Want to Live Forever?* between Aubrey de Grey, PhD, Methuselah Foundation, and S. Jay Olshansky, PhD, University of Illinois, will kick off the conference on Thursday, March 6, at 7:30 p.m. Other outstanding speakers include John Keown, DPhil, of Georgetown University, Gina Mohr, MD, of Loma Linda University, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, PhD, of Arizona State University, John F. Kilner, PhD, of Trinity International University, and C. Christopher Hook, MD, of Mayo Clinic. Along with world-renowned plenary speakers, opportunities for networking and dialogue will be available. As always, Continuing Education and academic credit offerings exist. Please call 1-888-bioethics or visit www.cbhd.org for more information or to register.



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