Philosophy and Theology Abstracts

Bioethics

D. Fox, **Retracing Liberalism and Remaking Nature: Designer Children, Research Embryos, and Featherless Chickens**, *Bioethics* 24.4 (May 2010): 170–178 • Liberal theory seeks to achieve toleration, civil peace, and mutual respect in pluralistic societies by making public policy without reference to arguments arising from within formative ideals about what gives value to human life. Does it make sense to set aside such conceptions of the good when it comes to controversies about stem cell research and the genetic engineering of people or animals? Whether it is reasonable to bracket our worldviews in such cases depends on how we answer the moral questions that the use of these biotechnologies presuppose. I argue that the moral language of liberal justice—of rights and duties, interests and opportunities, freedom and consent, equality and fairness—cannot speak to these underlying concerns about what the human embryo is, why the natural lottery matters to us, and whether "animal nature" is worth preserving. I conclude that liberal theory is incapable of furnishing a coherent or desirable account to govern the way we use our emerging powers of biotechnology.

P. Lee and G. Grisez, **Total Brain Death: A Reply to Alan Shewmon**, *Bioethics* 26.5 (June 2012): 275–284 • D. Alan Shewmon has advanced a well-documented challenge to the widely accepted total brain death criterion for death of the human being. We show that Shewmon's argument against this criterion is unsound, though he does refute the standard argument for that criterion. We advance a distinct argument for the total brain death criterion and answer likely objections. Since human beings are rational animals—sentient organisms of a specific type—the loss of the radical capacity for sentience (the capacity to sense or to develop the capacity to sense) involves a substantial change, the passing away of the human organism. In human beings total brain death involves the complete loss of the radical capacity for sentience, and so in human beings total brain death is death.

T. Murphy, **The Ethics of Impossible and Possible Changes to Human Nature**, *Bioethics* 26.4 (May 2012): 191–197 • Some commentators speak freely about genetics being poised to change human nature. Contrary to such rhetoric, Norman Daniels believes no such thing is plausible since "nature" describes characteristic traits of human beings as a whole. Genetic interventions that do their work one individual at a time are unlikely to change the traits of human beings as a class. Even so, one can speculate about ways in which human beings as a whole could be genetically altered, and there is nothing about that venture that could not be deliberated in the way other high-impact questions can be evaluated. There might well come a time when it would be defensible to use genetics to change human beings as a class, in order to protect people in the face of changed environmental circumstances or to enhance existing capacities. Moreover, if one understands human nature not in an empirically descriptive way but in a metaphysical way having implications about human behavior, it can make sense to talk about denaturing individuals through genetic changes. Even under a metaphysical conception of human nature, however, one can still imagine that people in the future might want to alter their traits in pursuit of another normative idea of a good and valuable life, and genetic modifications might function as a pathway to that change.

Christian Bioethics

M. K. Peterson, **Salvation and Health: Why the Church Needs Psychotherapy**, *Christ*

Bioeth 17.3 (December 2011): 277–298 • The roots of much of Western medicine lie in the Christian monastic tradition and its commitment to nonstigmatizing compassionate care throughout the life cycle and to the ideal of empathic personal connection between physicians, patients, and the communities and relationships in which both of these are embedded. In the modern West, these Christianly informed aspects of medicine are increasingly being undercut as medical care becomes ever more specialized, technologized, and depersonalized. At the same time, there exists a variety of efforts to counter these tendencies and to foster a practice of medicine that is more sensitive to the personal, relational, familial, and narrative dimensions of health, illness, and medical care. There are, in particular, considerable numbers of physicians, psychologists, and psychotherapists working at the intersections of biomedical and psychosocial care, of care for individuals and care for families, and of the body and the mind. Given the natural affinity that Christian bioethicists might be expected to have to communitarian, narrative, and family-oriented approaches to health care, it is thus remarkable that there appears to be no work of Christian bioethics that interacts in any discernible way with this psychotherapeutic literature concerning health, illness, families, and the mind-body interface. Instead, Christian bioethicists appear to endorse a narrowly reductionistic biomedical view of health and illness while either ignoring the psychosocial, integrative, and collaborative literature, or actively blaming and shaming those pastors or lay Christians who might have anything to do with psychotherapy or psychosocial care. This is unbecoming and unhelpful. In the fragmented, complex, and potentially dehumanizing world that is modern medical care, those who would think Christianly about the care of the sick cannot afford to despise psychology and psychosocial care. On the contrary, the church needs psychotherapy. In this article, I will thus consider, first, what the state of the conversation is where Christian bioethics and psychosocial and psychotherapeutic care are concerned. I will then turn to some of the principal landmarks in the professional literature concerning psychotherapeutic work with the sick, the disabled, the dying, and the bereaved, particularly as these are considered in contexts that include families and lay and professional caregivers. I will then identify a few opportunities for practical and theological reflection that present themselves in this literature, and will conclude with a few comments on the substance and relationship of salvation and health.

HEC Forum

G. Coleman, **Direct and Indirect Abortion in the Roman Catholic Tradition: A Review of the Phoenix Case**, *HEC Forum* 25.2 (June 2013): 127–143 • In Roman Catholic Moral Theology, a direct abortion is never permitted. An indirect abortion, in which a life threatening pathology is treated, and the treatment inadvertently leads to the death of the fetus, may be permissible in proportionately grave situations. In situations in which a mother's life is endangered by the pregnancy before the fetus is viable, there is some debate about whether the termination of the pregnancy is a direct or indirect abortion. In this essay a recent case from a Roman Catholic sponsored hospital in Phoenix is reviewed along with the justifications for and arguments against viewing the pregnancy termination as an indirect abortion. After review of several arguments on both sides of the debate, it is concluded that termination of the pregnancy itself as the means of saving the mother cannot be considered an indirect abortion and that the principle of "double effect" does not justify the termination. In addition, the importance of a breakdown in communication between the local bishop and the administration of the hospital is shown to have contributed to the ultimate loss of Catholic sponsorship of the hospital.

J. Varelius, **Voluntary Euthanasia, Physician-Assisted Suicide, and the Right to Do Wrong**, *HEC Forum* 25.3 (September 2013): 229–243 • It has been argued that voluntary euthanasia (VE) and physician-assisted suicide (PAS) are morally wrong. Yet, a gravely

suffering patient might insist that he has a moral right to the procedures even if they were morally wrong. There are also philosophers who maintain that an agent can have a moral right to do something that is morally wrong. In this article, I assess the view that a suffering patient can have a moral right to VE and PAS despite the moral wrongness of the procedures in light of the main argument for a moral right to do wrong found in recent philosophical literature. I maintain that the argument does not provide adequate support for such a right to VE and PAS.

Journal of Ethics

J. McMahan, **Causing People to Exist and Saving People's Lives**, *J Ethics* 17.1–2 (June 2013): 5–35 • Most people are skeptical of the claim that the expectation that a person would have a life that would be well worth living provides a reason to cause that person to exist. In this essay I argue that to cause such a person to exist would be to confer a benefit of a noncomparative kind and that there is a moral reason to bestow benefits of this kind. But this conclusion raises many problems, among which is that it must be determined how the benefits conferred on people by causing them to exist weigh against comparable benefits conferred on existing people. In particular, might the reason to cause people to exist ever outweigh the reason to save the lives of existing people?

Journal of Medicine and Philosophy

A. Michel, **Psychiatry after Virtue: A Modern Practice in the Ruins**, *J Med Philos* 36.2 (April 2011): 170–186 • Contemporary psychiatry maintains the myth that it is value neutral by appeal to modern medical science for both its diagnostic categories and its therapeutic interventions, leaving the impression that it relies on reason—that is to say, reason divorced from tradition—to master human nature. Such a practice has a certain way of characterizing and defining humanity's lapses from acceptable human behavior—a lapse from human being. The modern practice of psychiatry applies a particular notion (largely influenced by Enlightenment ideals) of scientific instrumentation to the human person in order to diagnose the ailment and manufacture a corresponding treatment in keeping with a hidden conception of human biological flourishing. This covert vision is an impoverished (and possibly dangerous) one. As much as the practice of psychiatry is constrained by the goals of the dominant moral tradition of our day, it becomes a tool (or technique) for achieving the transient and partial ends of modern individualism. Given this truncated view of human nature and human end, modern psychiatry fails to attend comprehensively to the unity of a life, missing altogether the essential relevance of character formation, and thereby forfeiting excellence in human flourishing.

Journal of Moral Philosophy

S.M. Liao, **The Genetic Account of Moral Status: A Defense**, *J Moral Philos* 9.2 (2012): 265–277 • Christopher Grau argues that the genetic basis for moral agency account of rightholding is problematic because it fails to grant all human beings the moral status of rightholding; it grants the status of rightholding to entities that do not intuitively deserve such status; and it assumes that the genetic basis for moral agency has intrinsic/final value, but the genetic basis for moral agency only has instrumental value. Grau also argues that those who are inclined to hold that all human beings are rightholders should reconsider speciesism. In this paper, I argue that Grau's objections do not undermine the genetic basis for moral agency account of rightholding, and I also offer criticisms of Grau's defense of speciesism.

S.M. Liao and A. Etinson, **Political and Naturalistic Conceptions of Human Rights: A False Polemic?**, *J Moral Philos* 9.3 (2012): 327–352 • What are human rights? According to one longstanding account, the Naturalistic Conception of human rights, human rights are those that we have simply in virtue of being human. In recent years, however, a new and purportedly alternative conception of human rights has become increasingly popular. This is the so-called Political Conception of human rights, the proponents of which include John

Rawls, Charles Beitz, and Joseph Raz. In this paper we argue for three claims. First, we demonstrate that Naturalistic Conceptions of human rights can accommodate two of the most salient concerns that proponents of the Political Conception have raised about them. Second, we argue that the theoretical distance between Naturalistic and Political Conceptions is not as great as it has been made out to be. Finally, we argue that a Political Conception of human rights, on its own, lacks the resources necessary to determine the substantive content of human rights. If we are right, not only should the Naturalistic Conception not be rejected, the Political Conception is in fact incomplete without the theoretical resources that a Naturalistic Conception characteristically provides. These three claims, in tandem, provide a fresh and largely conciliatory perspective on the ongoing debate between proponents of Political and Naturalistic Conceptions of human rights.

Linacre Quarterly

M. Latkovic, **The Catholic Church in America, the Discipline of Bioethics, and the Culture of Life: Looking to the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* for Guidance**, *Linacre Q* 78.4 (November 2011): 415–436 • In this paper, I will first briefly discuss why the Catholic Church has always had and continues to have such a great concern for bioethics or health-care ethics, while I also highlight the biblical roots of this concern. Secondly, I will describe some of the ways in which the Catholic Church in America has exercised a positive influence in the field of bioethics, or what was in the mid-twentieth century often called medical ethics. Thirdly, I will sketch how and why the Church has to a large extent lost this influence, tracing how secularization both inside and outside the Church contributed to the destruction of the so-called "Catholic ghetto" and to the assimilation of ideas from the culture that were often alien to the Gospel and sound moral reasoning. Finally, I will offer some general reflections on how the Church can regain her influence in this area—especially with the goal in mind of building a culture of life in American society—and how Catholic scholars in particular can contribute to this effort by following the lead of the late Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical on bioethics, *Evangelium vitae*, whose twentieth anniversary is fast approaching.

Neuroethics

J. Varelius, **Minimally Conscious State, Human Dignity, and the Significance of Species: A Reply to Kaczor**, *Neuroethics* 6.1 (April 2013): 85–95 • In a recent issue of *Neuroethics*, I considered whether the notion of human dignity could help us in solving the moral problems the advent of the diagnostic category of minimally conscious state (MCS) has brought forth. I argued that there is no adequate account of what justifies bestowing all MCS patients with the special worth referred to as human dignity. Therefore, I concluded, unless that difficulty can be solved we should resort to other values than human dignity in addressing the moral problems MCS poses. In his new book *The Ethics of Abortion*, Christopher Kaczor criticizes the argument I put forward. Below, I respond to Kaczor's criticism. I maintain that the considerations he presents do not undermine my argument nor succeed in providing adequate justification for the view that all MCS patients possess the worth referred to as human dignity.

Reproductive Biomedicine Online

A.L. Kalfoglou et al., **Ethical Arguments for and against Sperm Sorting for Non-medical Sex Selection: A Review**, *Reprod Biomed Online* 26.3 (2013): 231–239 • Much has been written about the ethics of sex selection. This article thoroughly explores the ethical arguments put forth in the literature both for and against non-medical sex selection using sperm sorting. While most of these arguments come from philosophers, feminist scholars, social scientists and members of the healthcare community, they are often echoed in empirical studies that have explored community values. This review is timely because the first efficacious method for sex selection via sperm sorting, MicroSort, is currently in clinical trials and moving

closer to FDA approval for marketing in the USA. While the clinical trials are currently focused on the use of MicroSort to avoid X-linked genetic diseases, MicroSort can also be used to satisfy parental preferences. Throughout history, people have attempted to control the sex of their children. Some countries that have a strong preference for male children use prenatal testing or ultrasound followed by abortion to avoid the birth of girls. Additionally, embryos that have been created through IVF can be genetically tested to identify sex. Only embryos of the desired sex are transferred to the woman's uterus. Scientists and healthcare providers have long sought a way to sort spermatozoa because spermatozoa carry the X or Y chromosome that determines the sex of the child; however, none of the marketed sperm-sorting technologies have been proven effective. MicroSort®, currently in clinical trials, is a technology that appears to effectively sort X and Y spermatozoa. Given that an effective sperm-sorting technology might soon be marketed in the USA and abroad, we have reviewed the ethical arguments in favour of and against the use of sperm sorting for sex selection for non-medical purposes. (One reason couples might want to use sperm sorting for sex selection is to avoid the risk of having a child with a sex-linked genetic disease such as Duchenne's muscular dystrophy or haemophilia.) We also review the arguments for and against governmental regulation of this technology. We conclude that, should this technology be approved by the FDA, there is not adequate evidence at this time that use of the technology would result in social harms to justify governmental prohibition.

Southern Journal of Philosophy

T. Chappell, **On the Very Idea of Criteria for Personhood**, *South J Philos* 49.1 (March 2011): 1–27 • I examine the familiar criterial view of personhood, according to which the possession of personal properties such as self-consciousness, emotionality, sentience, and so forth is necessary and sufficient for the status of a person. I argue that this view confuses criteria for personhood with parts of an ideal of personhood. In normal cases, we have already identified a creature as a person before we start looking for it to manifest the personal properties, indeed this pre-identification is part of what makes it possible for us to see and interpret the creature as a person in the first place. This pre-identification is typically based on biological features. Except in some interesting special or science-fiction cases, some of which I discuss, it is human animals that we identify as persons.

Theological Studies

A. Vicini, **Bioethics: Basic Questions and Extraordinary Developments**, *Theol Stud* 73.1 (March 2012): 169–187 • In the past few years, a variety of alarming narratives, global concerns addressed locally, and new biotechnological developments have shaped contemporary bioethical discourse. This note identifies (1) five of these narratives that come from other disciplines: history, journalism, surgery, literature, and personal experience; (2) original voices, particularly from Asia and Africa, that shape the innovations emerging in today's global theological bioethics; and (3) three biotechnological developments—neurosciences, oncofertility, and synthetic biology—that call for our attention. Throughout each section, one can see that an interdisciplinary approach could sustain conversations and generate transformative practices.

Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics

D. Shoemaker, **Personal Identity and Bioethics: The State of the Art**, *Theor Med Bioeth* 31.4 (August 2010): 249–257 • In this introduction to the special issue of *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* on the topic of personal identity and bioethics, I provide a background for the topic and then discuss the contributions in the special issue by Eric Olson, Marya Schechtman, Tim Campbell and Jeff McMahan, James Delaney and David Hershenov, and David DeGrazia.