

The Routledge Companion to Bioethics



Edited by John D. Arras, Elizabeth Fenton, and Rebecca Kukla

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO BIOETHICS

The Routledge Companion to Bioethics is a comprehensive reference guide to a wide range of contemporary concerns in bioethics. The volume orients the reader in a changing landscape shaped by globalization, health disparities, and rapidly advancing technologies. Bioethics has begun a turn toward a systematic concern with social justice, population health, and public policy. While also covering more traditional topics, this volume fully captures this recent shift and foreshadows the resulting developments in bioethics. It highlights emerging issues such as climate change, transgender, and medical tourism, and re-examines enduring topics, such as autonomy, end-of-life care, and resource allocation.

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For Adrienne Asch (1946–2013).

*Beloved and devoted friend, pioneering scholar, and
tenacious advocate for human rights.*

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CONTENTS

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxii
<i>Introduction</i>	xxiii
PART I	
Justice and Health Distribution	1
1 The Right to Health Care	3
JOHN D. ARRAS	
2 Social Determinants of Health and Health Inequalities	16
SRIDHAR VENKATAPURAM AND MICHAEL MARMOT	
3 The Ethics of Rationing: Necessity, Politics, and Fairness	33
DANIEL CALLAHAN	
4 QALYs, DALYs, and Their Critics	44
GREG BOGNAR	
5 Immigration and Access to Health Care	56
NORMAN DANIELS AND KEREN LADIN	
PART II	
Bioethics Across Borders	69
6 Bioethics and Human Rights	71
ELIZABETH FENTON	
7 Ethical Challenges of Distributing Limited Health Resources in Low-Income Countries	84
KJELL ARNE JOHANSSON	
8 Medical Tourism	99
I. GLENN COHEN	
9 Do Health Workers Have a Duty to Work in Underserved Areas?	114
NIR EYAL AND SAMIA A. HURST	
10 Moral Responsibility for Addressing Climate Change	133
MADISON POWERS	

CONTENTS

PART III	
Intellectual Property and Commodification	147
11 Intellectual Property in the Biomedical Sciences	149
JUSTIN B. BIDDLE	
12 Bias, Misconduct, and Integrity in Scientific Research	162
DAVID B. RESNIK	
13 Influence of the Pharmaceutical Industry on Research and Clinical Care	172
HOWARD BRODY	
PART IV	
Research	183
14 Biomedical Research Ethics: Landmark Cases, Scandals, and Conceptual Shifts	185
JONATHAN D. MORENO AND DOMINIC SISTI	
15 The Duty of Care and Equipoise in Randomized Controlled Trials	200
CHARLES WEIJER, PAUL B. MILLER, AND MACKENZIE GRAHAM	
16 The Future of Informed Consent to Research: Reconceptualizing the Process	215
PAUL S. APPELBAUM	
17 Ethical Issues in Genetic Research	229
DENA S. DAVIS	
18 Research Involving “Vulnerable Populations”: A Critical Analysis	238
TOBY SCHONFELD	
19 The Ethics of Incentives for Participation in Research: What’s the Problem?	249
ALAN WERTHEIMER	
20 The Ethics of Biomedical Research Involving Animals	261
TOM L. BEAUCHAMP	
PART V	
Autonomy and Agency	275
21 Autonomy	277
CATRIONA MACKENZIE	

CONTENTS

22	Capacity and Competence JESSICA BERG AND KATHERINE SHAW MAKIELSKI	291
23	Incentives in Health: Ethical Considerations RICHARD ASHCROFT	302
24	Privacy, Surveillance, and Autonomy ALAN RUBEL	312
25	Public Health and Civil Liberties: Resolving Conflicts JAMES F. CHILDRESS	325
PART VI		
Reproduction		339
26	Conscientious Refusal and Access to Abortion and Contraception CAROLYN MCLEOD AND CHLOË FITZGERALD	343
27	Human Embryos for Reproduction and Research FRANÇOISE BAYLIS	357
28	Regulating Reproduction: A Bioethical Approach ISABEL KARPIN	370
29	Children, Parents, and Responsibility for Children's Health AMY MULLIN	381
30	Reproductive Travel and Tourism G.K.D. CROZIER	393
31	Population Growth and Decline: Issues of Justice MARGARET P. BATTIN	403
32	Reproductive Testing for Disability ADRIENNE ASCH AND DAVID WASSERMAN	417
PART VII		
End-of-Life and Long-Term Care		433
33	Alzheimer's Disease: Quality of Life and the Goals of Care BRUCE JENNINGS	437
34	Family Caregivers, Long-Term Care, and Global Justice LISA ECKENWILER	449
35	Brain Death WINSTON CHIONG	462

CONTENTS

36	From the Persistent Vegetative State to the Minimally Conscious State: Ethical Implications of Disorders of Consciousness	474
	JOSEPH J. FINS	
37	Disability and Assisted Death	486
	LESLIE P. FRANCIS AND ANITA SILVERS	
38	End-of-Life Decisions for Newborns	500
	MARIAN A. VERKERK AND HILDE LINDEMANN	
PART VIII		
	Embodiment	511
39	Medicalization, “Normal Function,” and the Definition of Health	515
	REBECCA KUKLA	
40	Human Enhancement	531
	NICHOLAS AGAR AND FELICE MARSHALL	
41	Race and Bioethics	543
	ALEXIS SHOTWELL AND AMI HARBIN	
42	Transgender	557
	JAMIE LINDEMANN NELSON	
43	Organ Transplantation Ethics from the Perspective of Embodied Personhood	570
	FREDRIK SVENAEUS	
44	Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID) and the Matter of Ethics	581
	NIKKI SULLIVAN	
	<i>Index</i>	594

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INTRODUCTION

The term *bioethics* was first used to capture the concerns of life scientists about the human capacity to alter nature and the impact of that capacity on our global future (Potter 1971). With hindsight, and our contemporary understanding of the wide-ranging health impacts of human-caused environmental damage, we can appreciate the prophetic resonance of this original use of the term. Yet the field that went on to shape the evolution of bioethics was not biology but medicine and biomedical research, and bioethics is now firmly established as an integral part of both enterprises.

As traditionally understood, bioethics as an interdisciplinary field has enjoyed exponential growth and has made significant contributions to our public debates about important and fascinating questions, such as the definition of death, the ethics and law of biomedical research, abortion, euthanasia, the ethical deployment of genetic knowledge, the possibility of enhancing human nature, and the nature and limits of an individual's right to health care.

Critics have argued, however, that the limited focus of traditional bioethics upon clinical medicine and research has blinded it to the most pressing moral challenges in public health, in particular vast and unjust global health inequalities, the impact of economic and environmental policies on health, domestic health disparities, and human rights and health (Farmer and Campos 2004). Yet more recently, systematic attention to and engagement with the social and political dimensions of health and health care has begun to transform the field of bioethics (Wikler and Brock 2008; Daniels 2006; Powers and Faden 2006). This transformation, which we believe will and should continue and intensify, is due to at least three interlocking factors.

First, the globalization of our economy, culture, and communications has forced bioethicists to examine how research and care are imported, exported, and delivered across national borders and economic and cultural divides. For example, relatively new key issues in bioethics include research designed and funded by individuals and groups from rich countries and performed in poor countries, duties to provide health care and resources to other countries, international pharmaceutical patenting policy, medical tourism, and the importation of medical values and practices into other countries and the attendant risks of cultural imperialism.

Second, many of the most important, visible, and ethically charged contemporary threats to health can only be understood at the level of populations rather than individuals. The risks of global climate change and pandemics raise key ethical questions, such as resource allocation during a widespread crisis, duties to future generations, and the relationship between health risks and economic and social vulnerability. Tropical diseases such as malaria and sleeping sickness comprise a huge share of the global disease burden yet command a tiny share of our research dollars, raising questions about the social obligations of those who fund and conduct research. New genetic technologies generate questions about indirect eugenics and the long-term effects of manipulating our gene pool.

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