

# The Routledge Companion to Bioethics



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

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

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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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# 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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