

21A.216J
Dilemmas in Bio-Medical Ethics
Short Paper topic #1
First Drafts are due **Wednesday, March 14, 2005 at 11 am.**

In your first short paper, please write 6 to 7 double-spaced pages, using 12-point font, on the following topic:

In his analysis of the enterprise of bioethics, Charles Rosenberg has commented as follows:

The question [for bioethics] is relating the particular to the general, understanding the choices that face individuals in recurring social interactions – in some sense weighing and understanding degrees of individual autonomy, of professional and collective social obligation. I would contend that bioethics must ultimately address such questions and issues that are necessarily historical and unavoidably moral: the move from the individual to the social, from meaning to structure in terms of medicine, from the clinical encounter to the larger society in which that encounter takes place. ... We live in a fragmented yet interconnected world, a world of ideological and social diversity, of inconsistency and inequity, of change and inertia. We cannot discuss relationships among men and women who differ in power and knowledge without acknowledging those inequities: class, geography, gender, race, and education all modify the category *patient*; economic incentives, as well as the institutional and intellectual structures of medicine (such as specialty and organizational affiliation) modify the category *physician*. A growing awareness of such complexities has made bioethics an increasingly labile and self-conscious enterprise. And perhaps a less self-confident one as well: articulating and applying a foundational ethical basis for particular social actions no longer seems an easily attainable goal (1999: 4, 9-10).

As patients and doctors confront the issues of patient autonomy, informed consent, patient competence, and other ethical principles in a culturally and socially diverse world – one in which medical resources and health care are limited, and in which inequities of power constrain choice at the individual and collective level – to what extent is it possible for the “bioethical enterprise” to articulate and apply a universal foundational ethic or code of action that guides medical decision-making?

As you build your essay discuss the pros and cons of a universal approach versus one that is deeply particular. You must address the issues of autonomy and consent, disclosure and prognosis practices, and managed care.