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24.06J / STS.006J Bioethics
Spring 2009

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24.06 / STS.006 Final Paper Topics

Due in lecture in Ses #L26

For this paper you have two basic options:

(A) Explore a topic of your own choice within bioethics. Pick a problem, do relevant reading so that you understand the problem, and construct a clear argument about an interesting aspect of the problem. Try to integrate philosophical and historical perspectives. Be sure to define a topic that can be managed in 8-10 pages. If you choose this option, please review your topic and plans with your TA by Ses #R12. Your TA can help you narrow your topic, suggest analytic approaches, and recommend other helpful readings if needed.

(B) Answer one of the three questions listed below (as in the previous assignments). Please write the topic question at the top of your paper.

(1) You are in position to distribute a life-saving medical resource (e.g. organs, stem cells, access to healthcare, etc.). Demand far outstrips supply. There are many considerations you might take into account, in deciding who to give it to: *age*, past and future *health*, past and future *quality of life*, *risk*... etc. What would Harris and Mill say about how to go about distributing the resource? What are the best arguments for and against their views? What is the correct view?

(2) To what extent should we take into account *responsibility for need* in deciding who gets scarce medical resources? Consider James and Jane. Both need heart transplants. James' heart is failing because he has eaten and smoked to excess throughout his life. Jane's heart is failing because she is genetically disposed to high levels of cholesterol. Both have excellent post-transplant prognoses – James has recently quit smoking and started to eat healthily, Jane has been taking drugs that lower her cholesterol. Should the fact that James is responsible for his need of a transplant count against his getting a heart? Exactly when should responsibility for need count?

(3) State and federal governments have long been allowed to constrain individual rights to combat infectious diseases that threaten the public health. In recent years, governments have begun expanding their repertoire of coercive measures to combat diabetes, obesity, and other chronic, non-infectious, "lifestyle" diseases. New York City now requires laboratories to report data about how well patients manage their diabetes. Many cities have implemented bans on trans fats. West Virginia Medicaid punishes patients who do not follow doctors' orders about medications, diet, and exercise. Are such measures justified by governments' motivation to improve health and decrease health care costs? What responses are appropriate for managing the growing burden of behavior-related chronic disease?

General Comments:

The papers should be 8-10 pages, double-spaced. Grading for option B will be based on how well the papers answer the question, specifically their argument, their use of evidence and readings, and their organization and clarity. Grading for option A will consider how well the paper defines a problem and tries to understand it, including use of evidence, argument, organization, and clarity.

Give proper credit with citations whenever you use material (quoted or summarized) from readings or lectures. This is especially important for papers answering option A, which will likely require outside reading. If you have questions about this, see the information at the MIT Writing Center website (<http://web.mit.edu/writing/>).