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Bioethics, Biolaw, and Western Legal Heritage

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Bioethics and biolaw are two philosophical approaches that address social tension and conflict caused by emerging bioscientific and biomedical research and application. Both reflect their respective, yet different, heritages in Western law. Bioethics can be defined as "the research and practice, generally interdisciplinary in nature, which aims to clarify or resolve ethical questions raised by the advances and application of biomedical and biological sciences" (II, Miller 2000, p. 246). Biolaw, on the other hand, is a legal philosophical concept that can be defined as "the taking of agreed upon principles and practices of bioethics into law with the sanctions that law engenders" (p. 246). Some see biolaw as hierarchical, either evolving from or devolving into bioethics (p. 245), while others think of bioethics and biolaw as a continuum or gradation (p. 246). Whichever view one takes, bioethics and biolaw are, at the least, intertwined (II, Loureiro 2000, p. 71).

Although bioethics came out of the U.S. in the 1970s, the field is now considered Anglo-American (II, Kemp 2000a, p. 67). Biolaw emerged in the 1990s from the French *biodroit* and has become associated with continental Europe (p. 68). These distinctions, however, are based on geopolitical entities. Another way to distinguish bioethics from biolaw is to look at their legal heritage and understand the differences between the common law and the civil law.

Bioethics and biolaw share a Western legal heritage, specifically roots in Roman law. When the Roman empire in the West fell to Germanic tribes in 476 A.D., the Romans had developed a sophisticated system of law that included flexible standards and abstract, rather than concrete, modes of

thought. In 528, Justinian, emperor of the surviving Roman empire in the East at Constantinople, ordered a compilation and consolidation of Roman law. Despite the rise of seventh century Islam, the split of the Christian church into eastern and western branches in 1054, and the Norman conquest of England in 1066, Roman law survived through the courts of canon law and was revived later in the twelfth century at the University of Bologna in Italy. By 1500, what would later become France and Germany had "received" or recognized Roman law, albeit in varying degrees. Not a single event, the Reception, or "direct acceptance of Roman law as a principal source of law," is the definitive turning point in Western legal history that eventually produced the common law and civil law strands (I, Von Mehren 1957, p. 10).

England, however, did not participate in the Reception, although its influence was felt at Oxford University, where Vacarius taught its precepts in 1151, and in the courts of canon law (I, Von Mehren 1957, p. 10). William the Conqueror already essentially had established the common law tradition when he merged Anglo-Saxon law with Norman law and created a centralized system of justice administration for the single fiefdom known as England.

Aside from historical development, the common law and the civil law differ from other legal families in terms of their modes of thought, institutions, sources, and ideology (I, Zweigert and Kotz 1977, p. 62). In the common law, Roman legal concepts were shaped by Christian ethics through the canon law courts. In the civil law, Roman law became the basis for a legal science centered in the universities and interpreted by various schools, such as the commentators, the glossators, and the humanists. The civil law uses a central text as the starting point for legal reasoning and analysis. The common law develops over time through case law, that is, by judges applying principles from preceding cases to resolve the issue at hand. One writer describes the common law as "anything that is not prohibited is permitted" and the civil law as "anything that is not

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permitted is prohibited" (I, Karambelas 2005, p. 28).

The common law and the civil law are only two of the three traditions in Western law. The third is socialist law. All three are founded on morality rooted in Western "religion," so to speak. The common law and the civil law are rooted in Judeo-Christian values, while the socialist law comes from Marxism, a sort of secular theology (I, Glendon, Gordon, and Osakwe 1985, pp. 16–25).

To be fair, other legal families also exist, such as Islamic, Hindu, and Far Eastern. For example, the Far Eastern tradition sees law as a last resort to maintain social order, because winning or losing has no place in the practice of "saving face," that is, amicable settlement (I, Zweigert and Kotz 1977). These legal families, however, are outside the scope of this note.

Bioethics and biolaw are grounded in their respective legal histories: bioethics in "law as jurisprudence or judicial practice by which the 'common law' may be interpreted and thus decided in different ways," and biolaw in "law as a hierarchical system of rules grounded in a constitution or fundamental law" (II, Kemp 2000a, p. 69). Each approach has its own principles, coincidentally each numbering four. Bioethics has autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice, whereas biolaw has autonomy, dignity, integrity, and vulnerability (II, Rendtorff and Kemp 2000, pp.18–19). Some countries, such as Denmark, do not perceive an opposition between bioethics and biolaw (II, Kemp 2000a, p. 69).

Countries have complicated, interwoven histories, and each country's legal history reflects its historical origins. For instance, the law in Israel has roots in the Ottoman (Turkish), French, and English systems, in addition to later

enacted law codifying Jewish legal tradition with those earlier systems (I, Israel. Judicial Authority; I, World Jurist 2002, p. 248). [Author's note: Surprisingly, given the country's legal history, the law library of the Supreme Court of Israel has a complete set of West's regional reporters on court decisions in the United States (Author's personal visit, 1999). In the *Shefer* case (III, Israel. Supreme Court. 2003) on parental autonomy, the Court cites a string of American cases on page 3. The United States is arguably the most litigious country in the world, and, as a consequence of such a high level of legal activity in a jurisdiction with rapid developments in science and technology, many issues come into the U.S. courts and at least are addressed, if not resolved. Thus American case law gives guidance to courts in other countries where such an issue may be a case of first impression.]

Bioethics and biolaw are two approaches, based on different cultural histories, to address social issues involving values and biological life. As Diego Garcia paraphrased Kant, "biolaw without bioethics is blind and bioethics without biolaw is hollow" (II, Loureiro 2000, p. 72).

This Scope Note comes in three parts. Part I provides citations to the history of the law and comparative law as discussed in this introduction. Part II is made up of abstracts by various authors on bioethics and biolaw. Part III recognizes two international court cases that reflect the complexity of bioethics and biolaw.

I. Legal History

Eisenberg, Melvin Aron. *The Nature of the Common Law*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. 204 p. Ch. 6, pp. 50–103; Ch. 7, pp. 104–43.

In Chapter 6, Eisenberg analyzes modes of legal reasoning, including reasoning from precedent, from principles, by analogy, from professional literature, and from hypotheticals. In Chapter 7, he explores overruling and other forms of overturning decisions.

Glendon, Mary Ann; Gordon, Michael Wallace; and Osakwe, Christopher. *Comparative Legal Traditions: Text, Materials and Cases on the*

Civil Law, Common Law and Socialist Law Traditions, with Special Reference to French, West German, English and Soviet Law. St. Paul: West, 1985. 1091 p. Pp. 16–25; 34–38.

Glendon and colleagues include in their introduction an essay by Harold J. Berman on the historical meaning of the Western legal tradition, "Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition," which can be found in his book of the same title, published by Harvard University Press in 1983. Further along in the introduction, they include a note on the taxonomy of modern legal systems by comparativists other than Zweigert and Kotz, who are listed below.

Israel. Judicial Authority. **"Historical Background—The State of Israel, 1948."** Available at <http://elyon1.court.gov.il/eng/system/index.html>. Accessed 25 May 2005.

"Continuity: With the establishment of an independent Israel, the Provisional Government was created to carry out the decisions of the Provisional Council of State. The Provisional Council of State became the legislative authority established to enact laws. It immediately adapted the system of British Common Law. This Council determined that in order to prevent a legal vacuum, the law prevailing before 1948 should continue to be in force, with modifications as prescribed by legislation ("Law and Administration Ordinance, 5708–1948," Section 11). This legal system comprised a mosaic of laws, some of which were archaic and had been revoked even in their countries of origin. These included Ottoman laws, religious laws, laws from the Mandate period and English laws, including the substance of common law and doctrines of equity in force in England."

Karambelas, Nicholas G. **Civil Law Notary: An Office Whose Time Has Come?** *Washington Lawyer* 19 (7): 28–31, March 2005.

Von Mehren, Arthur Taylor. *The Civil Law System: Cases and Materials for the Comparative Study of Law*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1957. 922 p. Pp. 3–13.

Von Mehren sketches the growth of the civil and common laws, paying particular attention to why Continental Europe embraced

codification, but England did not.

World Jurist Association, ed. **Law and Judicial Systems of Nations**, 4th rev. ed. Washington, DC: World Jurist Association, 2002. 653 p.

Zweigert, Konrad, and Kotz, Hein. **An Introduction to Comparative Law, Vol. I, The Framework**, trans. Tony Weir. Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1977. 385 p. Pp. 57–67.

Zweigert and Kotz group legal families based on five factors: historical development, distinctive mode of legal thinking, distinctive legal institutions, sources of law, and ideology of a legal system. Consequently, despite hybrids such as Quebec, Louisiana, South Africa, and Israel, they group legal systems into the Romanistic family, the Germanic family, the Nordic family, the Common Law family, the Socialist family, the Far Eastern systems, the Islamic systems, and Hindu law.

II. Bioethics and Biolaw

Arnoux, Irma. **Bioethique et Biodroit en France**. In *Basic Ethical Principles in European Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. II, Partners' Research. Report to the European Commission of the BIOMED-II Project*, ed. Jacob Dahl Rendtorff and Peter Kemp, pp. 281–320. Guissona (Catalunya), Spain: Centre for Ethics and Law (Copenhagen) and Institute Borja de Bioethica (Barcelona), 2000. 372 p.

In this invited paper as a guest lecturer to the BIOMED-II Project, Arnoux examines the four principles of autonomy, dignity, integrity, and vulnerability. Her concluding section concerns state responsibility and solidarity. According to her, bioethics emerged in France following three events: the Code of Nuremberg (1947); the Asilomar conference (1975); and the birth of Louise Brown, the first child conceived by IVF (1978).

Beyleveld, Deryck, and Brownsword, Roger. **Legal Argumentation in Biolaw**. In *Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. I, Judgement of Life*, ed. Peter Kemp, Jacob Rendtorff, and Niels Mattsson Johanssen, pp. 179–217. Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers and Centre for Ethics and Law, 2000. 313 p.

Beyleveld and Brownsword assert that "legal

argumentation presupposes moral argumentation *in all cases*," not just biolaw ones (pp. 184, 217). A clear articulation of this relationship is given by Lord Hoffman in *Airdale NHS Trust v. Bland* ((1993) All ER 821), the leading English case on termination of treatment of a patient in a persistent vegetative state.

Kemp, Peter. **The Bioethical Turn**. In *From Ethics to Biolaw/De l'Ethique au Biodroit*, ed. Peter Kemp and Jacob Rendtorff, pp. 9–20. Copenhagen: Center for Ethics and Law, University of Copenhagen, 1998. 145 p.

Kemp writes of two turns, the first being the turn of ethics toward bioethics, followed by the turn of bioethics toward biolaw. He sees no reason to distinguish bioethics from biolaw because he considers bioethics as a presupposition for biolaw. As he puts it, bioethics is the ethics of the body, and the ethics of the body is the foundation for biolaw.

Kemp, Peter. **Bioethics in Law and Biolaw in Ethics**. In *Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. I, Judgement of Life*, ed. Peter Kemp, Jacob Rendtorff, and Niels Mattsson Johanssen, pp. 63–77. Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers and Centre for Ethics and Law, 2000a. 313 p.

Kemp works from the belief that law is influenced by ethics, specifically by a view of the good life. He starts with the basic conceptions of ethics and law, then he traces how ethics became bioethics and law became biolaw. Last, he writes about bioethics in law and biolaw in ethics.

Kemp, Peter. **Four Ethical Principles in Biolaw**. In *Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. II, Four Ethical Principles*, ed. Peter Kemp, Jacob Rendtorff, and Niels Mattsson Johanssen, pp. 13–22. Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers and Centre for Ethics and Law, 2000b. 178 p.

Kemp analyzes the four principles of autonomy, dignity, integrity, and vulnerability, which he views as expressions of aspects of the good life and from which moral norms must be constructed.

Lenoir, Noelle. **Legal Argumentation in**

Biolaw. In *Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. I, Judgement of Life*, ed. Peter Kemp, Jacob Rendtorff, and Niels Mattsson Johanssen, pp. 219–27. Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers and Centre for Ethics and Law, 2000. 313 p.

Lenoir states that "[b]ioethical laws are meant to solve conflict of values . . . especially individual rights and collective or social interests" (pp. 221–22). She notes that traditional legal notions must be reconsidered. As an example, Lenoir uses informed consent—considered the cornerstone of bioethics—which implies the recognition of two individual rights, namely, the right to dispose freely of one's own body and the right to corporeal dignity. Abortion falls under the first right, and medical experimentation falls under the second one.

Loureiro, Joao Carlos. **The Kemp Principles: A Bio-Legal Perspective.** In *Basic Ethical Principles in European Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. II, Partners' Research. Report to the European Commission of the BIOMED-II Project*, ed. Jacob Dahl Rendtorff and Peter Kemp, pp. 65–77. Guissona (Catalunya), Spain: Centre for Ethics and Law (Copenhagen) and Institute Borja de Bioethica (Barcelona), 2000. 372 p.

Loureiro was one of 22 partners in the BIOMED-II Project. His research report critiques the draft report of the project. His comments focus on identification of principles; whether a hierarchical order exists between principles; whether bioethics principles also structure biolaw; and a parting of practical applications of the principles and the solutions sought.

Miller, Judith. **Is Legislation in Bioethics Desirable? An Explanation of Aspects of the Intersection of Bioethics and Biolaw.** In *Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. I, Judgement of Life*, ed. Peter Kemp, Jacob Rendtorff, and Niels Mattsson Johanssen, pp. 243–67. Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers, and Centre for Ethics and Law, 2000. 313 p.

Miller's paper looks at the Canadian experience with two examples, the ethical standards for research with human subjects

and the protection of children in research. She summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of bioethics in professional codes or guidelines and in biolaw, by which she means legislation, interpretation of legislation, and case law. She highlights four key aspects of the relationship between bioethics and biolaw: a professional ethos in determining attitudes toward biolaw; power; a legislative framework for complex ethical issues; and the timing and nature of biolaw.

Palazzani, Laura. **Person and Human Being in Bioethics and Biolaw.** In *The Legitimacy of Truth/Die Legitimitat der Wahrheit*, ed. Riccardo Dottori, pp. 313–26. Munster, Lit Verlag, 2003. (U.S. distributor: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 35 Berrue Circle, Piscataway, NJ 08854.)

Palazzani tackles the concept of person, which she sees as the most frequently used philosophical concept in bioethics and biolaw. She contends that the ambiguous use of person by empiricists and functionalists exploits the emotional nature of the term and thus allows social acceptance of ideas in both bioethics and biolaw.

Parizeau, Marie-Helene. **The Tension Between Autonomy and Dignity.** In *Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. II, Four Ethical Principles*, ed. Peter Kemp, Jacob Rendtorff, and Niels Mattsson Johanssen, pp. 47–58. Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers and Centre for Ethics and Law, 2000. 178 p.

Parizeau examines the principle of autonomy in American bioethics and the principle of dignity in European bioethics. She argues that an emphasis on autonomy puts morality on the side of the good life, whereas an emphasis on dignity puts morality on the side of justice.

Rendtorff, Jacob Dahl. **The Critiques of Basic Principles in Bioethics and Biolaw.** In *From Ethics to Biolaw/De l'Ethique au Biodroit*, ed. Peter Kemp and Jacob Rendtorff, pp. 77–92. Copenhagen: Center for Ethics and Law, University of Copenhagen, 1998. 145 p.

This chapter closely parallels Part V in the volume below. The positions that Rendtorff includes are American principlist (autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice);

utilitarian and consequentialist; Green ("Deep Ecology"); strong religious; casuistic; relativistic and pluralistic; materialist and poststructuralist; Renaissance humanist; Nietzschean; anti-humanist; and anti-technological.

Rendtorff, Jacob Dahl, and Kemp, Peter, eds. *Basic Ethical Principles in European Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. I, Autonomy, Dignity, Integrity and Vulnerability. Report to the European Commission of the BIOMED-II Project*. Guissona (Catalunya), Spain: Centre for Ethics and Law (Copenhagen) and Institute Borja de Bioethica (Barcelona), 2000. 428 p.

In this report of the BIO-MED II project, which involved 22 individuals from throughout Europe, the editors describe the analysis of autonomy, dignity, integrity, and vulnerability as "ethical politics" rather than "moral epistemology." The European legal culture, with its emphasis on constitutional texts and human rights, treats human beings as ends in themselves. With the exception of autonomy, the principles also concern respect for and protection of living animals and organisms. Part C of Section III highlights the similarities and differences in the European countries by topic. Areas such as medical experiments, research ethics, and genetic technologies share wide accord about basic legal questions, while areas such as reproductive technologies, embryo experiments and the status of the embryo, organ transplantation, and euthanasia reflect great differences of opinion or divergent legal practice and legislation. Part V covers criticism of these four principles from diverse viewpoints, including the Greens, along with justification of these principles from within a justice framework. The volume also includes "The Barcelona Declaration," the project's policy proposals made to the European Commission in November 1998.

von Engelhardt, Dietrich. **Basic Principles in Bioethics—A Historical and Cultural View.** In *Bioethics and Biolaw, Vol. II, Four Ethical Principles*, ed. Peter Kemp, Jacob Rendtorff, and Niels Mattsson Johanssen, pp. 23–24. Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers and Centre for Ethics and Law,

2000. 178 p.

Von Engelhardt links the present bioethics principles to the European history of medical ethics, which is based in philosophy and theology and also influenced by the arts, economy, laws, and politics. He argues that bioethics can be understood by the many viewpoints of history, rather than simply the one of analytic philosophy.

III. Court Decisions

Iceland. Supreme Court. *Guomundsdottir v. Iceland*. No. 151/2003. 27 November 2003. Available at <http://www.mannvernd.is/english>. Accessed 25 May 2005.

Appellant daughter sought to prevent transfer of her deceased father's medical records into the Health Sector Database. She also asked for judicial recognition of her right to prohibit such a transfer. The Court recognized this right based upon the threat to the appellant's right to privacy because the statute is silent about such a right and the existing legal provisions about the database cannot replace assurance about privacy concerning genealogical and genetic information with monitoring.

Israel. Supreme Court. *Shefer v. Israel*. No. CA 506/88. 24 November 1993. 148 p. Available at <http://elyon1.court.gov.il/eng/verdict/framesetSrch.html>. Accessed 25 May 2005.

Appellant mother had sought a declaratory judgment allowing her to withhold treatment from her daughter, age 2, who was terminally ill with Tay-Sachs disease and in a persistent vegetative state. The Court, sitting as the Court of Civil Appeal, denied the appeal in 1988 without giving its reasons. The child died at age 3. The Court issued this judgment in 1993, holding that judicial intervention was not allowed because of the principle of the sanctity of life and because the child was not suffering due to her terminal disease. The Court began its analysis with an examination of the Basic Law of Israel on human dignity and liberty, a law which the Court saw as the cornerstone and basis for the fundamental values underlying the case, values in accord with Jewish tradition and Judaism.

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