



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2000 Volume VII: Bioethics

Introduction

The five teachers who signed up for the seminar in *Bioethics* had never before had formal instruction in this field of study. In view of the recent origin of the field, and of its original limitation to medicine, I opened the seminar by outlining my intention to go beyond that restricted definition, and to include also the fields of genetic ethics (which includes both medical and agricultural components) and environmental ethics (of increasing importance). I asked the teachers to purchase two books to give them a background in these subjects, and to orient them as well to ethical theories useful in the analysis of problems we intended to study. These reference books were: *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*, by John Arras and Bonnie Steinbock (Mayfield, 1999), and *State of the World 2000*, by Lester Brown et al (Norton, 2000). We devoted the first two weeks to discussion of various ethical theories and their applicability to modern bioethical problems; thereafter we dealt with problems outlined in the two books and, later on, in the current press.

Our sessions were spirited and involved considerable crosstalk. My role was limited to supplying or authenticating scientific information and, most importantly, to the raising of questions for discussion and ethical analysis. The subjects of the completed curriculum units reflect the teachers' original interests as modified by classroom discussions.

Two of the units deal with food. Waltrina Kirkland-Mullins, who teaches first graders at the Davis Street Magnet School, led her students to appreciate the biological sources of the common foods they eat and the bases for an adequate nutritional regime. She introduced bioethical problems by asking the students to compare ordinary agricultural products, cultivated with chemical fertilizers and pesticides, with organically grown products and also with bioengineered crops. Her unit is abundantly augmented with interesting "hands-on" exercises. Richard MacMahon, a Ph.D. who teaches upperclass students at the High School in the Community, examined the genetic engineering of agricultural crops in considerable detail, then analyzed the political, social, economic and ideological controversies surrounding their use in Europe and America.

Lynn Marmitt, a seventh-grade teacher at the East Rock Global Studies Magnet School, summarized modern thought and progress in genetics and cell biology, leading to a discussion of ethical problems associated with the human genome project and the cloning of organisms. Carolyn Kinder, an assistant principal at that same school, provided a summary of ethical theories related to the problem of developing a fair, effective and sustainable medical system for the United States. Finally, Grayce Storey, of the Jackie Robinson Middle School, prepared a unit on the general subject of surrogate motherhood, emphasizing the different roles played by genetic, gestational and care-giving parents. Much of her ethical analysis was derived from scriptural sources.

After successive revisions, the five papers included in this bioethics volume represent a stimulating introduction to bioethical problems of great current interest, and illustrate how this subject can be included

into the curricula of elementary and secondary schools.

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