Call for Submissions: An Ethical Competition

The Method in Bioethics Research

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American Journal of Bioethics, Bioethics, Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics, Journal of Medical Ethics, Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal, Nursing Ethics, Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics

" 'Tis madness, but there's method in't."

But is there?

There are many different ways of doing bioethics. It is a point of pride and of truth that bioethics is a multidisciplinary and sometimes an interdisciplinary activity. All of the constituent disciplines doubtless have their methods, but in the case of theoretical bioethics, thought of by philosophers or by those with a philosophical turn of mind as philosophical bioethics, there is a problem. What do we answer when asked what is our methodology? Or what methods will we use to address and answer the questions we ask or those which are asked of us?

This may seem an idle question; those who are philosophically trained know what they are doing; but how to describe it? Increasingly, theoretical bioethicists seek funding to support their research. Funding bodies have the annoying habit of wanting to know the methodology or methodologies that will be used in carrying out the proposed research.

Empirical researchers have a ready set of answers to this question but it seems not a little lame, not to say disingenuous, when philosophers, when asked about their methods, are tempted to reply "reading, writing, and thinking." It may not be possible to provide a definitive answer to this question, but what is sought is a persuasive and, it is hoped, plausible answer.

The editors of the leading journals in bioethics have resolved to try to find the answer, or perhaps a set of answers, to this question. Accordingly, we are launching a competition to find an answer to the ultimate question of bioethics: What is or are the methods of theoretical bioethics?

The best five answers to this question will be published in each of the journals listed above. Entrants to this competition must imagine they have been asked on a grant application to state the methodology or methodologies to be used, in not more than 500 words.

You may have applied for funding to answer any of the theoretical questions of bioethics, for example: Is abortion unethical? How would one decide whether euthanasia is justifiable? Is Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research justifiable? What are the ethical issues in producing animal/human hybrids or chimeras? Is research on animals or on nonhuman primates permissible and under what circumstances? Devise an ethical framework for human subject research. Is fully informed consent the gold standard of human subject research and what does it mean to have fully informed consent? On what basis could one decide

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if human enhancement should be pursued or designer children created? This is not intended to be an exhaustive list; you can imagine your own research topic or provide a general methodology for all and any research topics.

Your 500-word answer on the methods of theoretical bioethics should be received no later than February 1, 2008. Mark your entry "METHODS IN BIOETHICS COMPETITION" and submit to: methodinbioethics@yahoo.co.uk.

The competition will be judged by all the editors of these journals and the best five answers will be published in all of the journals simultaneously, thereby, for the one and only time, breaking the absolute prohibition on multiple submissions to journals.

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