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Obituary

Honoring a Lasting Impact: Dr. Tom Beauchamp

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Abstract

Dr. Tom Beauchamp wrote multiple seminal articles that influenced bioethics, research ethics, and animal ethics. But his influence extends beyond his academic scholarship. Here we honor Dr. Beauchamp's contributions as a scholar, mentor, and teacher.

Keywords: Bioethics

Bioethics lost one of its greats with the passing of Tom Beauchamp in February 2025. As a young staff member to the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, Beauchamp drafted what would become known as the Belmont Report. This Report became seminal to protecting research participants and building a field that focused on research ethics. The Belmont Report identified respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as the foundational principles. These principles were later incorporated into the federal regulations governing human subjects research and became the cornerstone of bioethics. Beauchamp's work on the Belmont principles was informed by his collaboration with Jim Childress on what would become their *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, adding nonmaleficence to the three Belmont Principles. Over eight editions (that have been translated into several languages), Beauchamp and Childress examined these principles. Importantly, they also applied their analyses to real world dilemmas. This provided a seminal tool for a field of bioethicists that would serve on ethics committees, clinical consultation services, institutional review boards, as well as scholars and researchers. These two contributions alone would have cemented Beauchamp place among bioethics greats, but, of course, they are not Beauchamp's only bioethics work. For example, he expanded our understanding of informed consent through multiple articles and the influential work, *A History and Theory of Informed Consent*, with Ruth Faden. He also focused attention on animal ethics, with two books and multiple articles.

While his achievements are notable, his contributions to the field extend beyond the number of publications or the impact of the 4 Principles approach to bioethics. Beauchamp mentored and fostered a love of ethics that allowed the field to develop. Despite his stature and prominence in the field, Beauchamp was also known for his commitment to mentoring junior scholars. Beauchamp's towering intellect and red pen challenged generations of scholars and researchers to test and strengthen their arguments, causing a ripple effect of mentorship that began with Beauchamp and continues to influence emerging bioethics scholars to tackle the tough bioethics questions. But Beauchamp's generosity extended beyond those in his students and trainees. Stories like Jalayne's reflect his kindness and willingness to invest in the future of the field:

> *I met Tom Beauchamp by chance and at the time I underestimated the effect this would have on my career. At my first ASBH meeting I was randomly selected to sit at his table during a mentoring breakfast. We shared a casual conversation with a table of 10 or so other junior scholars and trainees. I was in the first year of my fellowship and naïve to what a career in bioethics and law might entail. He offered a card and willingness to have future conversations. While in Washington, DC several months later — we connected again. He offered to take me to lunch in Georgetown where we talked about career, life, and ethics. He had no reason to invest this time or energy. Yet, he was unrushed in our conversation, demonstrated curiosity in my interests, and offered wisdom that has stayed with me throughout my career. Some intellectual and some very practical. More importantly, he made me believe that I had something unique to offer. Several years later he helped introduce me to ethics colleagues at a new institution. This experience has instilled in me a sense of responsibility to support and welcome emerging scholars and trainees.*

We know that Jalayne's story is not unique, and it is entirely fitting for the man. As brilliant as Tom Beauchamp was, he was equally warm and funny. He was devoted to his wife, Ruth Faden, and their children and grandchildren. Beauchamp and Faden have invited many students and colleagues into their home for friendship and food, along with stimulating conversation. Thus, he has nurtured the relationships with and among his students and colleagues as people as much as he has nurtured their development as intellectuals.

In short, Tom Beauchamp embodied the heart of bioethics — the careful, critical thinking and analysis, coupled with compassion for the real people impacted by the decisions made from that analysis. He will be greatly missed. Yet his impact on the field has left a lasting impression through his scholarship and generosity.

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