Bioethics and Worldview: How Fundamental Assumptions Will Shape the Future

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Some clinics are reporting a surge in the number of women applying to donate eggs or serve as surrogate mothers for infertile couples. The going rate for a surrogate is about $25,000. Egg donors generally receive $3,000 to $8,000. But a few agencies advertise that they'll pay much more for specific characteristics. One ad running in campus newspapers promises $25,000 for a donor who is ‘100% Jewish with ... High SAT Scores... Attractive, at Healthy Body Weight and Free of Genetic Diseases’.
“Scientists at Newcastle University have created part-human, part-animal hybrid embryos for the first time in the UK . . . Under the microscope the round bundles of cells look like any other three-day-old embryos. In fact they are hybrids - part-human, part-animal. They were created by injecting DNA derived from human skin cells into eggs taken from cows ovaries which have had virtually all their genetic material removed.”
“Toward Responsible Use of Cognitive-Enhancing Drugs by the Healthy”
*Nature* (December 11, 2008)

“We should welcome new methods of improving our brain function. In a world in which human workspans and lifespans are increasing, cognitive enhancement tools — including the pharmacological — will be increasingly useful for improved quality of life and extended work productivity, as well as to stave off normal and pathological age related cognitive declines. Safe and effective cognitive enhancers will benefit both the individual and society.”
Defining “Bioethics”

- The term “bioethics” simply means the “ethics of life”
  - Bio – Greek term pertaining to life
  - Ethics – having to do with morality – what is good/bad, right/wrong – how one ought to live
## Making Life

**Common Issues**
- Contraception
- Assisted Reproduction
  - *In vitro* fertilization (IVF)
  - “Snowflake” adoptions
  - Intrauterine insemination (IUI)
- Surrogacy
- Egg/Sperm Donation
- Embryonic Stem Cell Research

## Taking Life

**Common Issues**
- Abortion
- Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) & Euthanasia
- Advanced Directives
  - “living wills”
- Palliative Care
- Embryonic Stem Cell Research

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**Categories in Bioethics**
Categories: REMAKING LIFE

**Genetics**

- Prenatal Genetic Screening
- Stem Cell Research
- Genetic Manipulation
  - Therapy vs. Enhancement
  - Somatic vs. Germ line
Pharmaceuticals

- Physical Enhancement
  - Steroids

- Cognitive Enhancement
  - Ex: Adderall, Ritalin, & Modafinil

- Pharmacogenetics
Categories: REMAKING LIFE

**Technology**
- Wearable computing
- Human-machine interfacing
  - Artificial limbs
  - Brain implants
- Nanotechnology
- “Transhumanism”
Worldview & Bioethics

- How individuals and societies respond to the bioethical challenges of our day is a direct function of worldview.
- At the heart of a worldview is an implicit or explicit assumption about the purpose of life and the proper limits (if any) on the means to succeed in fulfilling life’s purpose.
Prevailing Cultural Worldviews

Hedonistic Consumerism
- Life is principally about pleasure
  - Either for oneself or the greatest number
- Market or democratic forces determine the proper limits of pleasure-seeking

Technological Humanistic Altruism
- Life is principally about advancing human interests/well-being
- Researchers in science & technology (in cooperation with government) are best situated to determine what will advance human interests/well-being
Prevailing Cultural Worldviews: A Christian Critique

- A Christian critique of the prevailing cultural worldviews must be based on a biblical view of reality – a biblical meta-narrative.

- The biblical meta-narrative consists of four major movements in God’s cosmic story.
  
  **Creation**
  **Fall**
  **Redemption**
  **Consummation/Restoration**
Prevailing Cultural Worldviews: A Christian Critique – \textit{Creation}

- Neither of the prevailing cultural worldviews take seriously the implications of \textit{creation}.
- Creation implies . . .
  - God exists – “In the beginning God . . .”
  - Thus, life is ultimately about God’s purposes as opposed to human desire or intention.
  - Moreover, the reality of God’s purposes for creation entails an inherent normativity or moral order to which human beings are subject from the start – by virtue of being \textit{creatures}.
Prevailing Cultural Worldviews: A Christian Critique – Fall

- Neither of the prevailing cultural worldviews take seriously the implications of the Fall.
- The reality of the Fall implies . . .
  - Human desires and interests are corrupt.
  - Thus, human desires and interests cannot be trusted as the ultimate basis for determining what is good – even what is good for human beings.
- Both cultural worldviews assume that we will ultimately know what is in our best interest and that we’re capable of so acting; the Fall undermines such confidence.
Prevailing Cultural Worldviews: A Christian Critique — **Redemption**

- Both of the prevailing cultural worldviews fail to grasp the nature and means of *redemption*.

- **Redemption’s Nature**
  - Redemption is fundamentally *spiritual*
    - The prevailing cultural worldviews think of “redemption” as something fundamentally and exclusively *physical*.

- **Redemption’s Means**
  - Redemption is achieved by God in Christ (not us!)
    - The prevailing cultural worldviews think of “redemption” as something that human beings can achieve through their own (collective) capabilities.
Both of the prevailing cultural worldviews fail to grasp the nature and means of *consummation*.

**Consummation’s Nature**

- Consumption is fundamentally about the restoration of the whole of creation with its Creator.
  - The prevailing cultural worldviews think of “consummation” as fundamentally about the conformity of reality to human desire or intention.

**Consummation’s Means**

- Consumption will be achieved by God (not us!)
  - The prevailing cultural worldviews think of “consummation” as something that human beings can achieve through their own (collective) capabilities.
What’s At Stake?

- The choices that we make individually and culturally about the issues in bioethics (making, taking, & remaking life) **will inevitably** be shaped by *worldview*
  - How we think about life’s purpose and the proper limits in fulfilling its purpose.
- In a vacuum of deliberate Christian thinking about these issues, the prevailing cultural worldviews will determine the course of the future.
What’s At Stake?

- The prospect that the prevailing cultural worldviews will shape the future of making, taking, & remaking life calls for serious engagement with these issues from a Christian perspective.

- For it is only a Christian view of reality that offers a proper understanding of happiness, health, and what it means to be human.