

Human nature, medicine & health care

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The concept of human nature is notoriously difficult. Over the last decade, however, its importance has grown in various topical debates.¹ As a consequence, the 24th ESPMH annual conference (in Zagreb in 18–21 August, 2010) will explore historic and systematic approaches to the concept of human nature as well as the significance of this concept for medicine and health care. In anticipation of this event, the current issue of *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* presents a slight taste of some of these issues. This issue's special section, "Medical Technologies and the Life-World", has been edited by Fredrik Svenaeus. It consists of six papers that were first presented and discussed at a symposium held at Södertörn University in Sweden in November, 2007. They explore the way in which new medical technologies affect the self, the person, the human condition as well as our life world and self-understanding. In doing so they are firmly rooted in European philosophical traditions such as phenomenology and hermeneutics.

The rest of this issue consists of four papers that are each similarly anticipating next year's conference, albeit in slightly different ways. Elisabeth Hildt's "Living longer: age retardation and autonomy" centres around developments in biogerontology. In the future this field might perhaps advance methods of intervening in the biological process of human ageing. This might seem to be a promising prospect. However, how would extending human life by technological interventions play out on an individual, familial and social level? Does the autonomy argument unambiguously support the recourse to age-retarding techniques?

Age is again a central concern in Timothy Krahn's paper, "Preimplantation genetic diagnosis: does age of onset matter (anymore)?" Preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) is increasingly accepted in most jurisdictions to test susceptibility of 'serious' conditions. Amongst the factors determining seriousness are the future disease's expected impact on health, the probability of genotype being expressed as a genetic disorder, therapeutic options, rate of progression, heritability, and age of onset. Krahn's paper critically analyses the debate about these factors with a particular focus on the last condition.

Next, Gerben Meynen explores the concept of free will in "Should or should not forensic psychiatrists think about free will?". In forensic psychiatry there is a debate about whether, and if yes, to what extent psychiatrists should consider issues surrounding free will. Meynen critically analyses this debate and develops his own stance.

Finally, Bjørn Myskja discusses "Rationality and religion in the public debate on embryo stem cell research and prenatal diagnostics". Habermas argues that religious views play a perfectly legitimate role in public debates. Myskja analyses Habermas' arguments and especially addresses questions such as whether experts in political debates on biomedical issues have a duty to state their religious worldview, and to what extent the American government decision to restrict research on embryonic stem cells is an illicit transgression of the divide between state and church.

Reference

Gordijn, B., and R. Chadwick eds. 2008. *Medical enhancement and posthumanity*. New York: Springer.

¹ See for example Gordijn and Chadwick (2008).

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