

**PSC 275: ISSUES IN POLITICAL THOUGHT  
BIOTECHNOLOGY AND POLITICS  
SPRING 2009  
TTH 10-11:15 JHN 109  
PROFESSOR ARISTIDE TESSITORE**

**OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS:**

The aim of this course is to reflect upon new challenges arising from the development of recent and future technologies in the field of biology from the point of view of the tradition of political thought. The course focuses less on the technologies themselves, and more on the explicit and implicit questions of value they raise. Whereas gratitude is the most appropriate response for those developments in biological science that have done so much to alleviate human suffering, it is also the case that we now find ourselves on the threshold of an unprecedented power to shape the character of human life—a “brave new world” that brings with it a number of fundamental questions that warrant serious and sustained examination.

This course explores two sets of questions, both of which have deep roots in the tradition of political thought. The first of these revolves around our understanding of the nature or character of human life itself: What does it mean to be human? Does nature offer any guidance about what constitutes a good human life? Is there an enduring human nature? Are we wrong to privilege the human species over other species? Is there any scientific support for the notion of human dignity, particularly widespread belief in the equal dignity of every individual human being? The second group of questions arises from the undisputed and still-growing authority of science in the modern world: How are we to navigate the competing claims to authority put forward by science, politics and religion? or, in the language of Aristotle, Who among these competing claimants should rule? Should politicians monitor or put limits on scientific development? Should scientists be left to monitor themselves? On the basis of what values could they do so? What are the implications for political democracy in a world that increasingly defers to scientific expertise? Is the authority of science an adequate replacement in the modern world for the authority that once attached to religion? In short, what is or ought to be the relationship between scientific, religious, and political authority in the modern or post-modern world?

**COURSE DESIGN:**

“Biotechnology and Politics” integrates two distinct types of material. The first consists of classic texts in the history of political thought, supplemented by classic religious and literary texts that bear directly on the theme of the course. The second draws upon the work of the most influential contemporary thinkers who address the underlying ethical issues embedded in the biotechnological revolution. A unique aspect of this course is that it includes campus visits and lectures by scholars or public intellectuals who are on the cutting edge of this debate. This has been made possible through the generosity of the *Tocqueville*

*Program* at Furman University. Students will have an opportunity to interact with speakers in both formal and informal ways during the course of the term.

The course will provide students with a brief overview of the kinds of issues raised by classic texts in the history of political thought as they bear on biotechnology and politics. Students will be challenged to examine critically the often competing perspectives raised by these authors—from Socrates' claim that an unexamined life is not worth living, to Bacon's vision of a utopia ruled by scientists, to Rousseau's insistence that moral improvement does not accompany scientific progress. Against this backdrop, students will read a variety of contemporary authors whose engagement with the revolutionary new technologies in biology have led them to grapple with questions about what it means to be human, as well as the relationship among the competing authorities of science, politics and religion in the modern world.

**GUEST LECTURERS:** Sponsored by *The Tocqueville Program*

**February 12: Francis Fukuyama, "Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution"** Francis Fukuyama is Bernard L. Schwartz Professor of International Political Economy at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of Johns Hopkins University. He is also director of the SAIS International Development program, and a member of the President's Council on Bioethics. His many books include *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002), and *Beyond Bioethics: A Proposal for Modernizing the Regulation of Human Biotechnologies* (2006).

**March 4: Leon R. Kass, "For Love of the Game: Biotechnology and the Adulteration of American Sport"** Leon R. Kass, M.D., Ph.D., is the Addie Clark Harding Professor in the Committee on Social Thought and the College at the University of Chicago and Hertog Fellow in Social Thought at the American Enterprise Institute. He was chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics from 2002 to 2005. He has written widely on the moral questions raised by modern science, including his 1984 book *Toward a More Natural Science: Biology and Human Affairs* and in 2002, *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity*. His latest book, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, is a commentary on the Book of Genesis.

**April 22: Virginia Postrel, "Biotechnology and the Self-made Man: Beyond Horror and Glamour"** Virginia Postrel is a contributing editor to the *Atlantic Monthly* and former editor of *Reason Magazine*. Her columns have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and many other publications. She donated a kidney to a friend in 2006, and speaks frequently on the subject. She has written two books, *The Future and Its Enemies* (1998) and *The Substance of Style* (2004).

**All lectures are at 8:00 p.m., Watkins Room, University Center**

#### **SOMEWHAT TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE:**

Introduction: (2 weeks)

- William Saleton, "Best Human Nature Stories," *Slate* ([www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com))

- Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
- PART I: Classical Perspectives (3 Weeks)
- Aristophanes, *Clouds*
  - Plato, *Apology of Socrates*
  - **February 12: Francis Fukuyama visit**
    - Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future*
    - Special Class Time: Thursday, February 12 at 3-4:15
    - Public Lecture: 8:00 p.m. “Our Posthuman Future” (CLP)
- PART II: The Biblical View (3 Weeks)
- Genesis, Chapters 1-12:3
  - Exodus, Chapters 1-20
  - New Testament, Gospel
  - *Midterm Exam: Thursday, February 26*
  - **March 4-5: Leon Kass visit**
    - Kass, *Life, Liberty and Defense of Dignity*
    - Public Lecture: March 4 at 8:00 p.m. “For Love of the Game” (CLP)
- PART III: The Modern Project and its Critics (6 weeks)
- Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis*
  - John Locke, *Second Treatise and Letter Concerning Toleration* (Moodle)
  - J.J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (Moodle)
  - J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*
  - Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
  - **April 22-23: Virginia Postrel visit**
    - Postrel, *The Future and its Enemies*
    - Public Lecture: April 22 at 8:00 p.m. “Beyond Horror and Glamour” (CLP)
- PART IV: The Contemporary Debate (3 Weeks, one in each Part above)
- Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future*
  - Leon Kass, *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity*
  - Virginia Postrel, *The Future and Its Enemies*
- (Readings from this section are inserted into the course so as to coincide with the visits of guest lecturers)
- *Final Exam: Monday, May 4, 8:30 a.m.*

**REQUIRED TEXTS:** (in the University Bookstore)

*Please use specific editions listed below*

- Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harper Perennial)
- Plato, *Four Texts on Socrates* (Cornell)
- Bacon, *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration* (Crofts Classics)
- J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Prometheus Books)
- Kant, *Grounding for a Metaphysics of Morals* (Hackett)
- Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future* (St. Martins Press)
- Leon Kass, *Life, Liberty and Defense of Dignity* (Encounter Books)
- Virginia Postrel, *The Future and its Enemies* (Simon & Schuster)
- Find, borrow, or purchase a *Bible*

**REQUIREMENTS:**

- Regular attendance and active participation in class
- Attendance at the three lectures in Biotechnology and Politics
- Midterm and Final examinations
- One 10-13 page Paper
- Brief Oral Presentations in Class

**GRADING:**

The two exams and one paper will be equally weighted to determine the course grade. The final average can be lowered or raised according to the quality of a student's class participation.

**OFFICE HOURS:**

- Johns Hall 111E; Telephone extension: 3331
- Officially: M-F: 3:00-4:00. I am, however, in my office a lot and you are always welcome to come by. If I am busy at the moment, we will schedule a mutually convenient time to meet.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

Students with more than two *unexcused* cuts adversely affect their participation grade. Beginning with the third unexcused absence, each missed class is penalized one-third of a letter grade. Conversely, the quality of a student's active engagement with course materials raises participation grades.

**DISABILITIES:**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services (294-2320). The office is located in ADM 207. After this meeting, please see me to discuss any needed accommodations. It is in your interest to attend to this EARLY in the term.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

Integrity gives the educational enterprise its legitimacy. Honesty, respect, and personal responsibility are principles that guide academic life at Furman, in and out of the classroom. Academic misconduct in any form (plagiarism, cheating, inappropriate collaboration, and other efforts to gain an unfair academic advantage) threatens the values of the campus community and will have severe consequences, such as failure in the course, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.

If you have any question about what constitutes plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct, it is your responsibility to consult with me so that you will fully understand what I expect of you in this course. If you have any doubts, ask! You should also be familiar with the information available at [www.furman.edu/main/integrity.htm](http://www.furman.edu/main/integrity.htm). A copy of Furman's policy on academic dishonesty can also be found at this site.