

# DIGNITAS

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This year marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Center's engagement in bioethics. While many of our efforts often are forward looking, seeking to analyze the emerging issues in this ever-evolving field and to formulate responses consistent with our commitment to Judeo-Christian Hippocratism, we pause to reflect on the legacy that you have helped to cultivate over the last several years.

The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity (CBHD) is the sole remaining center of the original Bannockburn Institute. The Bannockburn Institute comprised several centers that either ran their course or evolved into something very different from their origin. Situated on the campus of Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois, CBHD has enjoyed a long-standing partnership with the University that consisted first of being a part of the university and then emerging as a separate non-profit entity. For many years we functioned in tandem with, but separate from the University. This past summer we finally came full circle by merging back into the TIU family in order to refocus our activities on thought leadership and to fulfill our mission to explore the nexus of biomedicine, biotechnology, and our common humanity.

The Center itself was the brain child of such key former Trinity faculty and administrators as Harold O. J. Brown, PhD, and Nigel M. de S. Cameron, PhD, who recognized the importance of a distinctly evangelical Christian voice in the interdisciplinary discussions of bioethics. In 1993, a conference was held on the TIU campus, bringing together many leading Christian bioethicists, including our current Director, C. Ben Mitchell, who would not join the TIU family for several years. At the conclusion of the conference, John F. Kilner, PhD, then with the Park Ridge Center, was asked to head a new organization whose purpose would be to educate the media, clergy, medical professionals, and the general public concerning the rapidly expanding field of bioethics. In the intervening years our emphases have wandered into a number of areas, but our core purpose to educate and equip has not wavered.

For many years, CBHD hosted two to five regional conferences, a national conference, and recently an international conference. These conferences have covered the gamut of issues, including healthcare and allocation, end-of-life, reproductive ethics, and the emerging biotechnologies. In 2008, we are

refining our efforts by focusing on two premium conferences: our first spring conference in Phoenix, Arizona (*Extending Life: Setting the Agenda for the Ethics of Aging, Death, and Immortality*) and our 15<sup>th</sup> annual summer conference on TIU's campus (*Healthcare and the Common Good*). While our goal is to be much more than a conferencing organization, our conferences are designed to bring together the very best thinkers to discuss the pressing bioethics issues of our day in order to foster dialogue, research, and the dissemination of critical information.

In addition to these events, CBHD seeks to engage the broader culture by providing information and analysis of current bioethical issues via websites, publications, consultations, and personal presentations. CBHD staff, fellows, and other resources have been quoted on both radio and television, as well as in numerous national and international newspapers, magazines, journals, websites, and blogs. The various websites that CBHD manages reach a combined average audience of nearly 200,000 visits per month, with more than 20,000 downloads of our online audio in December alone. CBHD was an early leader in online bioethics resources and was recognized in November 1999 with the CNS site of the week award for [bioethix.org](http://bioethix.org). Our flagship website, [www.cbhd.org](http://www.cbhd.org), continues this tradition and contains a wealth of materials that range from movie and book reviews, stimulating critical reflections on the difficult issues in bioethics, and the frequently requested Advance Directive. This extensive database of resources grows on nearly a weekly basis. Future projects will seek to digitize archived audio from cassettes and CDs to downloadable formats, so stay tuned as we continue to seek to offer cutting-edge resources, as well as to create more interactive opportunities for public discussion, such as online forums.

The Center continues to develop strategic partnerships in the publishing world as well. In addition to the twenty CBHD initiated volumes that have been in print, we anticipate the publication of two forthcoming volumes already at Eerdmans: J. Daryl Charles, PhD, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (April 2008), and a forthcoming volume on clinical ethics case studies by Robert Orr, MD, expected in 2009. Other series are presently being initiated to serve both our lay and academic audiences.

CELEBRATING  
15  
YEARS

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## Debating Immortality: It's Not a Dead Issue

by C. Ben Mitchell

Cambridge computer scientist Aubrey de Grey is a winsome, even if a bit eccentric, evangelist for physical immortality. He points out in his recent book, *Ending Aging* (2007), that around 150,000 people die each day worldwide. Of those, he asserts, "about two-thirds die of aging" (p. 8). de Grey laments that these numbers do not galvanize us to action the way other human tragedies do. We have been lulled to sleep by notions like "natural death" when there is nothing natural about dying or aging. Thus, de Grey has devised a SENS program to combat our mortality. "Strategies for Engineered Negligible Senescence" (SENS) include a number of potential therapies aimed at eliminating aging.



On the other hand, Jay Olshansky, senior researcher at the University of Illinois in Chicago, maintains that the science demonstrates that however much we would like to extend our lifespans, there are built-in limits. Senescence is a fact of life, and we have already extended life to its far limits. Some cancers, Alzheimer's, and other age-related illnesses are evidences that we have pushed the biological boundaries. The Fountain of Youth remains as elusive as ever.

It seems to me, and others, that those of us who are concerned about bioethics and a truly human future have a stake in this debate. Brent Waters, for instance, argues that so-called transhumanists and Christians share similar interests. Both agree (1) that the current state of the human condition is less than ideal; (2) that it is important to seek a remedy; (3) that death is the final enemy; and (4) that hope lies in reaching beyond physical mortality (*From Human to Posthuman*, 2006). What we lack is consensus on how we get there.

To bring us up to speed on the science of life extension, these two "titans of immortality research"—Olshansky and de Grey—will debate the issue in the IMAX theatre of the Arizona Science Center on Thursday, March 6, 2008. Readers of *Dignitas* will not want to miss this opportunity to participate in the conversation.

In the meantime, to prepare for the debate, you might want to spend some time with:

- Aubrey de Grey, *Ending Aging: The Rejuvenation Breakthroughs That Could Reverse Aging in Our Lifetime* (St. Martins, 2007).
- Jay Olshansky and Bruce Carnes, *The Quest for Immortality: Science at the Frontiers of Aging* (Norton, 2001).
- Nigel Cameron, "Preserving Humanity—and Technology? A Response to de Grey," *Studies in Ethics, Law, and Technology*, Vol. 1:1, Article 11. Available at: <http://www.bepress.com/selt/vol1/iss1/art11>
- Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Ashgate, 2006).

To bring us up to speed on the ethics of life extension we have put together an exciting conference that follows the debate. You can find more details elsewhere in this issue of *Dignitas*, and you can register online at <http://www.cbhd.org/conferences/2008/phoenix> or by calling toll-free 1.888.246.3844.

Join us in Phoenix!

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## AN OPEN LETTER TO CBHD

### Maureen “Moe” Girkins, Adult Education Intern

I have really enjoyed my experience working at The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity this past fall. In my short time volunteering with the Center, I have discovered a special passion for the unborn and the value and dignity of human life. As a result, I expect to become more active in this area in the future. As I embark on my new responsibilities at Zondervan, I hope that we can advocate for the work of the Center and play a strategic role in these important conversations.



Meanwhile, my thoughts and prayers will be with the Center and its staff. I believe their work is exactly what the world needs in the bioethics arena in our time. The Center offers an incredibly important outlook and sensitivity to these pressing issues, and I learned a lot from my time working with them. In particular, I gained great insights into effective strategies to develop an informed Christian perspective and to lead critical discussions on these hotly debated topics. Perhaps most significantly, I learned that the Bible does not have specific answers to all of our modern technological dilemmas— and thus it is essential that we all renew our understanding of the pertinent biblical themes and concepts surrounding Human Dignity. I will miss all of you.

Editors Note: After her time at CBHD, Moe was appointed as the President & CEO of Zondervan Publishing

#### *Continued from page 1*

In our increasingly complex world, we realize that global partnerships are essential. To this end, the Center has been involved through the leadership of John Kilner, Senior Scholar, in the Bioethics Forum of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. This initiative resulted in the publication of a small volume available through our website. Our commitment to involvement in the international bioethics discussions has led to historic partnerships with non-U.S. institutions such as the Centre for Bioethics and Public Policy in London, England; the Linacre Center, London, England; the Lindeboom Instituut for Medical Ethics in Ede, Holland; and the Ustav Medicinskej Etiky a Bioetiky, in Bratislava, Slovakia. Furthermore, our long-term engagement with the cross-cultural and global dimensions of bioethics will be the focus of our 2009 annual summer conference. This conference is in the very early stages of planning, but promises to take on such pressing global issues as black-market organ transplantations, medical tourism, and the nature of medical missions.

Other vital partnerships include such domestic friends as Americans United for Life, Christian Legal Society, Christian Medical and Dental Associations, and Nurses Christian Fellowship. These historic partners along with such new friends as Bioethics Defense Fund, The Center for Bioethics and Culture, and The Tennessee Center for Bioethics and Culture, represent the leading bioethics voices, and we count it a privilege to partner with them in conference events, as well as to provide essential research and strategic thought leadership. It has been our great joy to see several of these new centers emerge from former students and conference attendees, to become strategic voices in the ongoing effort to engage our culture on these difficult issues.

As we look to the future, we know that requests for information will continue to increase, as the controversial issues

grow surrounding the ever-increasing pace of medical and scientific research. CBHD initiated a strategic plan that details how we will meet the challenges that we face. Most institutions that deal with bioethics are committed to a relativistic worldview that embraces the notion that the ends justify the means. CBHD is committed to help people honor God when they make critical decisions concerning bioethics. To this end, CBHD remains committed to integrating an evangelical point of view with the urgent needs that bioethicists often confront. Many times when people seek good counsel concerning urgent personal needs they turn to medical professionals and the clergy. As we equip these professionals, they come to better understand the options that the urgent dilemma causes. It is precisely at this point that an individual seeking counsel may for the first time in their life need to face the reality of an eternal destiny. By integrating bioethical training with the good news of the gospel, the professionals who counsel these individuals will be able to more effectively reach people for Christ. We invite you to partner with us in this endeavor. We continue to cultivate our website dedicated to equipping clergy and lay-leaders at [www.churchbioethics.org](http://www.churchbioethics.org) and hope to unveil several exciting additions in the very near future.

As we celebrate fifteen years of engaging bioethics, we realize that this is a celebration that many of you have made possible. We thank you for your ongoing partnership both financially and through your time and energy. Many of our members are long-time contributors both in thought and in deed. The breadth of our engagement and voice is a testimony to your faithfulness. So we invite you to celebrate with us and to join us in the ongoing work of the Center. As always, we invite you to utilize the Center as a resource for speakers, for media enquiries, for information requests, and for opportunities to serve and to support.

## CONFERENCE NEWS

### “THE TITANS OF IMMORTALITY RESEARCH”



**AUBREY DE GREY, PhD**, Methuselah Foundation  
Co-author of *Ending Aging: The Rejuvenation Breakthroughs that Could Reverse Human Aging in Our Lifetime*, and  
Editor-in-Chief for *Rejuvenation Research*

*VS*

**S. JAY OLSHANSKY, PhD**, University of Illinois, Chicago  
Co-author of *The Quest for Immortality: Science at the Frontiers of Aging*

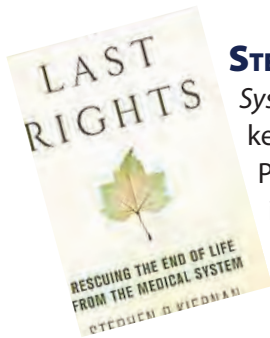


#### DEBATE: DO YOU WANT TO LIVE FOREVER?

Thursday, March 6, 7:30p.m.

IMAX Theatre at The Arizona Science Center  
600 E. Washington Street, Phoenix, Arizona

### FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2008, DINNER AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER



**STEPHEN KIERNAN**, author of *Last Rights: Rescuing the End of Life from the Medical System*, <http://stephenpkiernan.com/>, will be joining us Friday, March 7, 2008, for a special keynote address and dinner during our upcoming *Extending Life* conference in Phoenix, AZ. Plated dinners with meal options are \$75 per person, \$700 per table (seats 10). For more information or to register for this special evening event, please visit our website at [www.cbhd.org](http://www.cbhd.org) or call us at 1.888.246.3844.

### SAVE THESE DATES!

15<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE ON BIOETHICS

## HEALTHCARE AND THE COMMON GOOD

July 17-19, 2008

on the campus of Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois

A major national/international conference examining current developments.  
Topic groups in all areas of bioethics will again meet during lunch.