

The Bioethicist as Public Intellectual

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Abstract

Public intellectuals have long played a role in American culture, filling the gap between the academic elite and the educated public. According to some commentators, the role of the public intellectual has undergone a steady decline for the past several decades, being replaced by the academic expert. The most notable cause of this decline has been both the growth of the academy in the twentieth century, which has served to concentrate intellectual activity within its confines, and the changing nature of the media, which has framed the way in which information is conveyed to the public. We argue that although bioethics has developed primarily within the academic tradition and utilized the role of expert when dealing with the public, bioethicists are well suited to don the mantle of the public intellectual. Indeed, because they address issues in medicine and science of great relevance for the general public, bioethicists have a duty to revitalize the tradition of public intellectuals as a necessary complement to the important, but narrower role of expert.

Introduction

A person of spurious intellectual pretensions.... Supercilious and surfeited with conceit and contempt for the experience of more sound and able men. Essentially confused in thought and immersed in mixture of sentimentality and violent evangelism. A doctrinaire supporter of Middle European socialism as opposed to Greco-French-American ideas of democracy and liberalism. Subject to the old fashioned philosophical morality of Nietzsche, which frequently leads him to jail or disgrace. A self-conscious prig, so given to examining all sides of a question that he becomes thoroughly addled while remaining always in the same spot. An anemic bleeding heart. (Bromfield 1952)

Intellectuals occupy an uneasy spot on the American cultural landscape. Democratic liberalism demands informed deliberation and disagreement through discourse. Yet the distinct strain of anti-intellectualism that imbues American individualism with the rugged "can-do" attitude of the Everyman casts suspicion on anyone claiming superior intellectual status.

On the one hand, certain intellectuals have been lionized for their contributions to democratic public discourse - individuals such as Alexis de Tocqueville and Ralph Waldo Emerson in the nineteenth century, or twentieth-century figures such as John Dewey, John Kenneth Galbraith and E.O. Wilson. They were (and still are) original thinkers who spoke to and wrote for a broad audience of literate readers in such diverse areas as politics, litera-

ture, education, economics and science. On the other hand, as the introductory quote attests, other intellectuals are perceived as elitist-vilified and caricatured as "eggheads"-academic pointy-heads who live in ivory towers, musing over seemingly irrelevant issues and esoteric topics.

The vicissitudes of American anti-intellectualism have played out across the spectrum of American history - in politics, commerce, religion and education (Hofstadter 1963). In subtle and not-so-subtle ways they have influenced not only the public conception of the academy, but also the academy's perception of the public and the relation of academic work to public concerns. The "academization" of intellectual life in the early twentieth century was largely a response to the currents of anti-intellectualism.

As the bulk of intellectual life was cloistering behind the walls of academia, the changing nature of the media in the twentieth century was beginning to reshape the ways in which information, knowledge and ideas were conveyed to and received by the general public. Mass production of newspapers and magazines provided the same information instantly across the country and the homogeneity of news and information did much to unify diverse immigrant cultures. Photography and the advent of photojournalism, along with radio, television and movies, dispensed with the need for literacy and formal education as a prerequisite to becoming informed about domestic and world affairs. Information on matters of science, technology, politics, economics and so forth could be distilled, packaged and distributed to the general public in ways highly accessible to almost everyone. Computers and the internet have accelerated this trend on a global scale.

Bioethics has come of age at a time when the place for intellectual inquiry is clearly located within the academic world and communication with society on matters of public interest is mediated mainly through the electronic media. In its development throughout the late twentieth century, bioethics chose to emulate the academic model. Similar to most academics, when called upon to deal with issues in the public arena, bioethicists step into the role of the expert and utilize the pre-established formulas of media presentation for communication with the general public.

These assumptions - that bioethics belongs in academia and that communicating with the public occurs through the media - seem obvious. But given the subject matter of bioethics and its stakes for society, it is important to examine whether the role of the academic expert is a sufficient interaction with the public, and whether the current ways bioethicists use the media capture the nuances of ethical consideration.

By examining the development of academia as a response to anti-intellectualism in the twentieth century, we argue that bioethicists - by embracing the academic model - unwittingly have incorporated certain responses to anti-intellectualism. This, combined with the use of the media, frame and limit their means of involvement with the public.

We argue that given the nature of bioethics issues, the bioethicist has a duty to reinvigorate and assume the role of the public intellectual - a role that has been largely forgotten or dismissed with the rise of the academic expert and the demands of the media.

The Forgotten Role of the Public Intellectual

What is the difference between a public intellectual and an expert? Why should the role of the public intellectual be reinvigorated, particularly by the bioethics community, in light of the criticisms leveled at public intellectuals from both the academy and the public alike? (Such criticisms will be considered later in the paper.)

Definitions of the public intellectual abound. Albert Jonsen referred to such thinkers as William James and John Dewey as "public philosophers" [who] were outspoken commentators on the political and cultural life of the nation" (Jonsen 1998, 68). In *The Last Intellectuals*, Russell Jacoby defined public intellectuals as "writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience" (Jacoby 1987, 5). A graduate student in the Florida Atlantic University Program for Public Intellectuals defines a public intellectual as "one who extend(s) the best of the academy into the public sphere" (Scheider 1999).

A more general and less flattering depiction of a public intellectual is crafted by Richard Posner in his recent book, *Public Intellectuals: A Study in Decline*:

...[A] public intellectual expresses himself in a way that is accessible to the public, and the focus of his expression is on matters of general public concern of (or inflected by) a political or ideological cast. Public intellectuals may or may not be affiliated with universities. They may be full-time or part-time academics; they may be journalists or publishers; they may be writers or artists; they may be politicians or officials; they may work for think tanks; they may hold down "ordinary" jobs. Most often they either comment on current controversies or offer general reflections on the direction or health of society. In their reflective mode they may be utopian in the broad sense of seeking to steer the society in a new direction or denunciatory because their dissatisfaction with the existing state of the society overwhelms any effort to propose reforms. When public intellectuals comment on current affairs, their comments tend to be opinionated, judgmental, sometimes condescending, and often waspish. They are controversialists, with a tendency to take extreme positions. Academic public intellectuals often write in a tone of conscious, sometimes exasperated, intellectual superiority. Public intellectuals are often careless with facts and

rash in predictions. (Posner 2002, 35)

Thomas Bender, eulogizing the New York intellectual Alfred Kazin,

suggested that Kazin's accomplishments as a literary critic did not themselves suffice to make him a public intellectual. It was rather what he used literature for. 'He used literature for larger purposes, to talk about subjects that mattered to contemporary society. His capacity to speak to more general and deeply felt worries, questions and aspirations, and to do so in a common idiom, made him a public intellectual.'" (Garber 2001, 20)

Each definition captures some major differences between the public intellectual and the traditional academic expert. The public intellectual is engaged in a broad cultural discourse; he or she is not confined to the traditional boundaries of a single technical discipline. The public intellectual is further distinguished from an expert in that an expert is someone who has mastery over a discipline and provides specific information regarding his or her area of expertise. Homi Bhabha of Harvard University claims that the intellectual, on the other hand, provides a more interpretive approach, creating broader meaning for individuals, as opposed to presenting narrow facts about the world (Bhaba and Fish 2001). Moreover, the public intellectual synthesizes disparate areas of knowledge for a broader lay audience. The academic expert typically confines her public comments to the field or discipline that she is trained in.

In recent years, there have been some attempts to rejuvenate the role of the public intellectual. Amid some controversy and criticism from the academy, Florida Atlantic University has started the nation's first doctoral program for public intellectuals. Their mission is to:

return to public life some of its intellectual ballast by instituting a degree program which is precisely not geared to the specialized market and which leaves space to think. Necessarily, this makes our program interdisciplinary. We also hope to provide a place where those already participating in a public profession, however small their place in it, will have a chance to think through and revitalize their contributions to changing the world.¹

The New America Foundation, a recently inaugurated think tank started by then-30-year-old Ted Halstead, has as its mission statement, "to build a new set of political ideas based on innovative and pragmatic solutions" and "to train and support the next generation of public intellectuals."² A few years ago, the February 1997, issue of *Atlantic Monthly* discussed the rise of a new generation of black intellectuals, such as Cornel West, Stephen Carter, and Henry Louis Gates (*Atlantic Monthly* 1997). There is a Center for Public Intellectuals³, and, of course, there are books such as those by Jacoby and Posner [Posner claims that his book is both an academic and a public-intellectual

work (Posner 2002, 161)]. Despite Posner's dim view of the quality of public intellectualism, there seems to be a hunger for reasoned, intelligent discussion on a variety of topics. As Thomas Bender, author of *New York Intellectual*, has said: "There is unmistakably a rapidly growing interest in something that we could call the public intellectual... I think the public wants it, to some extent. Certain academic scholars want to be public intellectuals as well" (Scott 1994). Why, then, have public intellectuals faded from sight in recent decades and are they simply irrelevant - anachronisms in our contemporary high-speed, media-driven, information-overloaded culture?

The Landscape of American Intellectuals

In the late 1980s, Jacoby critically examined the retreat of American intellectuals away from the public forum and into the cloistered halls of academia in his book *The Last Intellectuals* (Jacoby 1987). He recounted how writers such as Lewis Mumford, Edmund Wilson, C. Wright Mills, and Dwight Macdonald, in the early twentieth century, eloquently wrote for an educated lay audience. Later intellectuals such as Alfred Kazin, Irving Howe, and Daniel Bell divided their lives between the academy and the public forum.

In Jacoby's recent history of American intellectuals, most intellectuals have ensconced themselves in the cozy environs of academia, never really engaging themselves in broader cultural and political debates. Over the last several decades there has been a hyperspecialization of scholars left talking to each other, shutting themselves off from a broader public discourse. What is being lost in the process, according to Jacoby, is a tradition of public intellectuals - individuals who engage in a broad cultural discourse with the general public.

The movement toward concentrating intellectual activity in the academy and away from the public forum has been a trend throughout the twentieth century. A number of factors contributed to this decline, most notably the growth in the network of academic institutions, which have located the bulk of intellectual activity in its centers and defined the nature and dissemination of intellectual work.

As late as the waning decades of the nineteenth century, American intellectual activity was an extension of the pursuits of the wealthy elite. Intellectuals were not a distinct, coordinated group and their esoteric interests were identified primarily with a patrician class devoted to upholding traditional values and the status quo. Dominated by the growth of industry and business values, the nineteenth century did not view formal education as particularly useful in a century defined by self-made captains of industry. There were not yet institutions that could forge intellectuals

into a numerous social order with some capacity for cohesion and mutual communication on a national scale. Only at the end of the century did the country develop a system of genuine universities; great

libraries suited to advance research; magazines with large circulations ...well-organized professional societies in various scholarly disciplines ... and wealthy foundations to subsidize science, scholarship, and letters. (Hofstadter 1963, 408)

With these changes, the link between wealth and intellectual activity was de-coupled. Intellectuals became a social force and "the whole question of the intellectual and society was reopened" (Hofstadter 1963, 408).

By the mid-twentieth century, additional factors converged, changing the focus and scale of the American academic enterprise:

o **Growth of the academy:** In the decades after World War II, the U.S. government allocated billions of dollars to the development of academic institutions. During the late 1950s and 1960s there was a rapid growth of American universities, and from 1950 to 1970 government spending on higher education increased more than tenfold - from \$2.2 billion to \$23.4 billion increasing to \$31 billion in the next twenty years (Bender 1997). One result of this large-scale investment and academic institutional growth was to relocate the locus and redefine the nature of intellectual discourse within the university setting.

o **Hyperspecialization:** Concomitant with the growth of the academy has been an increasing emphasis upon specialty fields along old and new disciplinary divides. As American higher education emerged after the Second World War, the needs of the Cold War prompted tremendous investments in research in the applied sciences. Between 1940 and 1990, "federal support for higher education increased by a factor of twenty-five and enrollment by ten, while average teaching loads were reduced by half" (Kerr 1995). The orientation of universities shifted to research agendas and faculties became more autonomous in the development of their respective disciplines. Drawn by science as the model *par excellence* of professional maturity, "the disciplines were redefined over the course of the half-century following the war: from the means to an end they increasingly became an end in themselves, the possession of the scholars who constituted them" (Bender 1997). The focus of individual intellectual inquiry became more narrowly circumscribed. Medicine created more specialties and even embattled humanities disciplines proliferated, with the creation of such fields as women's studies, black studies and gay and lesbian studies. Although these new fields represented a substantial broadening of intellectual inquiry within the academy, their high degree of specificity often, though not always, served to limit individual scholars to the subject matter itself, rather than to its connections to larger social issues.

o **Culture of experts:** As disciplines have become increasingly specialized, fragmentation occurred, requiring expert knowledge and interpretation. Although this approach does much to advance the discipline, it does not often easily translate to relevance outside the boundaries of the scholarship: "One of the subtlest and most prevalent effects of specialism has been that...subjects have tended to be conceived and taught with an eye...to their own internal logic rather than their larger usefulness..." (Harvard University 1946).

o **Institutionalization of discourse:** As the disciplines became increasingly professionalized, academics sought to further disciplinary development and cohesiveness by exploring issues in formal and rarefied venues, such as conferences, symposia and classrooms. Disciplinary maturity required vocabulary specific to its methodology and content, and the result was often a *lingua franca* accessible only to disciplinary specialists.

o **Atrophy of the public sphere:** As intellectuals within the academy became more specialized in the nature of their work, the gap between academics and civics became sharply pronounced. Matters of public importance therefore were relegated to the private sphere, whether in the academy or the corporation. Moreover, intellectuals have increasingly found a smaller space for ideas in the public sphere; reflection and thought are seen as time-consuming at best, and irrelevant at worst.

o **Nature of media and technology:** In the face of an intellectual vacuum, the media has usurped and replaced traditional democratic values with entertainment values. As Neil Postman commented in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, "[t]he problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining...Entertainment is the supraideology of all discourse on television" (Postman 1986).

As a result of the academization of intellectuals, buttressed by the demands of the media, the public intellectual has been withering on the vine and dying a slow death. The world has become more sharply defined into "experts" and "laymen." Displacing the role of the public intellectual, the rise of the expert in recent decades can be understood as the instrumentalized form of intellectual life designed to straddle the academic and public world.

Not everyone views this trend with consternation, particularly those within the academy. The aforementioned lengthy tome by Richard Posner (Posner 2002) is the most recent jeremiad against the American public intellectual. Posner takes public intellectuals to task for lack of quality control. Rating them à la *Consumers Report*, he claims that American public intellectuals have a dismal record of predicting accurate social trends - whether they be economic forecasts or environmental disasters - and overall contribute very little to society. "[I]nsofar as they are mere-

ly translating academic ideas into language that the general educated public can understand, they may be doing nothing more than accelerating slightly the diffusion of academic ideas...they are doing what journalists would do..." (Posner 2002, 161). Posner concludes that since academic work "has a diffuse but cumulatively significant effect on public opinion and public policy" (Posner 2002, 160), if academics avoid "the temptation to engage in public-intellectual work, their influence on society might be greater than it is with the divided focus that defines the academic public intellectual" (Posner 2002, 160).

On occasion, an academic's interactions with the public may even be viewed with skepticism or downright hostility by academic colleagues. "Public-intellectual work may even be a superior kind of entertainment, the kind that provokes thought and stimulates curiosity" (Posner 2002, 165). One recent flap over the boundaries of academic scholarship involved Harvard President Lawrence Summers and Harvard University Professor Cornel West. Summers is said to have "criticized West for conduct unbecoming of a Harvard professor" (Abel 2001). At issue were West's time spent as campaign advisor to Bill Bradley and Al Sharpton as well as his time spent producing the hip hop CD, *Sketches of My Culture*, a blend of rap, jazz and blues that according to the New York Times "could easily be lecture subjects" turned into song (Abel 2001).

Not surprisingly, references to an academic's work as being "fashionable" or "journalistic" are meant to be devastating criticisms. "For a scholar to describe a scholarly book as 'journalistic' is to say that it lacks hard analysis, complexity, or deep thought" (Garber 2001, 33). The reception of an academic's work within the public sphere is likewise fraught with criticism: "For a journalist to describe a scholarly book as 'academic' is to say that it is abstruse, dull, hard to read, and probably not worth the trouble of getting through" (Garber 2001, 33).

One reason for the scorn leveled at an academic for involvement in the public sphere is that the public is perceived as having no ability to advance the academic's intellectual interests. Within the academy, "every scholarly move is part of a dialogue" whereby a scholar attempts to advance an ongoing intellectual discussion. This requires detailed knowledge, not only of the subject itself, but also of the scholarship surrounding it - sophisticated material and knowledge not readily found in public interactions.

On the other hand, the public's perception (or often bemused skepticism) of an academic's work as seemingly esoteric or irrelevant stems from the high degree of specificity of the academic work. Often a scholar's contribution is a response to a particular piece of scholarship or argument and, taken out of this larger context, can often make the scholar's comments seem ridiculous. "One of the most difficult of intellectual challenges is to describe a complex concept in terms simple enough for the layperson to understand. All too often such simplifications run the risk of losing the very nuances and counterintuitive implications that make the original idea important and valuable" (Garber 2001, 34-35).

Thus for those public interactions deemed necessary, the role of "expert" evolved, offering the academic a sort of diplomatic immunity from the criticisms of colleagues and the public alike. "The academic as expert" is accepted by both camps as a resource whose advanced knowledge can be usefully harnessed to a specific and immediate social concern. Some noteworthy examples of media programs that successfully utilize the academic expert model are the radio show *Odyssey* on Chicago Public Radio and the Fred Friendly seminars that appear on PBS. On the *Odyssey* program, the host Gretchen Helfrich assembles a panel of experts on a given topic (such as the state's interest in public health) and then has a robust conversation for the show's hour-long duration. Although the experts on the program may or may not be public intellectuals, the program provides a useful public intellectual service for many listeners by addressing a variety of important topics.⁴

The Public Roles of Bioethicists and the Bioethicist as Public Intellectual

Over the last several decades, bioethics has evolved into a distinct and legitimate field within the academic world. Although still shunned by many traditional philosophy departments except for the occasional course or two, bioethics has made solid in-roads to being a credible and respectable area of study, one which some claim to have reached the status of discipline (Jonsen 1998, 325). There is a distinct canon of intellectual work with its own specialized language and references that define the corpus of the field. Specialty journals have proliferated and conferences abound. In addition to bioethics courses, many universities now boast bioethics centers, faculty positions, endowed chairs, graduate programs, undergraduate concentrations, certificate programs, and fellowships - in short, all of the academic accoutrements that herald a serious discipline.

However, far more frequently than their academic counterparts in other disciplines, bioethicists play numerous direct roles in public affairs. In addition to their academic commitments, they often serve on government commissions and task forces, institutional review boards and ethics committees, testify in the courts, are interviewed on television news programs, and solicited by journalists to provide background and content for news pieces covering medical, scientific and bioethical topics.

But these roles, by virtue of being roles in the public eye, do not necessarily constitute the bioethicist as a public intellectual. More often than not in these positions, bioethicists function in the important but more narrow capacity of expert. The public intellectual role we are advocating is one that fosters more than expert opinion and factual information. Daniel Callahan alludes to this role in his work *Setting Limits*:

We must have a lively tradition of civic discourse that allows difficult, highly personal matters of meaning to be openly discussed...[Q]uestions of meaning and significance are...worth our searching

for together as a community, not merely in our private reveries or uneasiness....(Callahan 1988).

Informed civic discourse is integral to a democratic society. As science and technology reach ever deeper into individuals' lives, the objective of greater civic discourse becomes even more critical. Deliberative democracy demands that citizens be informed and knowledgeable about public issues. The bioethicist qua public intellectual should play an important role in helping to educate citizens in a variety of venues by becoming part of a dialogue that includes many different actors on the public stage.

The burgeoning public interest in emerging bioethical issues places upon bioethicists and medical humanists a responsibility to be engaged in a wider public discourse, not simply as experts but as instigators and facilitators of public dialogue. Albert Jonsen aptly characterizes bioethics as a public discourse; this discourse takes place not only in the ivory tower of academia, but also in the media, in the boardroom, and in the government. As Jonsen has noted in *The Birth of Bioethics*, "it (bioethics) is public discourse carried on by many people in many settings" (Jonsen 1998, 352). Currently, however, instead of thoughtfully sustained reflections, issues are obfuscated by highly technical academic jargon not accessible to the general public or trivialized by snappy sound bites that do not do justice to the complexities involved. Haavi Morreim has commented that the choice between depth and brevity may be a false dichotomy; indeed, bioethicists and members of the media may be able to collaborate on a much more meaningful level (Morreim 1999). We hope she is correct, because the alternative would be a perpetual impasse.

Although bioethicists have traditionally played the role of ethics consultants, researchers and teachers, the very nature of the issues bioethicists study requires some level of public intellectualism. It seems that bioethics would be a natural environment for the cultivation of public intellectuals. After all, bioethics does have the sensibilities of a popular social movement and its issues are relevant to a broad audience. Certain institutions, notably the Hastings Center, have emerged unaffiliated with traditional academic settings, yet produce original contributions and participate in an ongoing dialogue regarding issues of health care and environmental ethics.

Increasingly, following the academic model of development, bioethics has become more institutionalized, with formal programs, commissions, and regulatory bodies. Yet public interest in bioethics issues has only magnified. Given the relevance and oftentimes immediacy of these issues, bioethicists should carve out a space for public intellectualism and define appropriate roles for public intellectuals in the field. Indeed, several bioethicists have taken on the role of Public Intellectual in the Jacoby tradition, as well as public intellectual in the Florida Atlantic sense of the term. The first definition refers to those intellectuals who are nationally known through their writings and work; the second definition refers to those intellectu-

als who work at the more local level, achieving change through direct action.

A more orchestrated approach toward establishing a public intellectual dimension to the field occurred in October 2000. Laurie Zoloth, the newly inaugurated president of the American Society of Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH), the major professional organization of the field, "called for the organization to take an official stance on certain key issues, especially on the question of national health care...her call was met by a standing ovation, if also by criticism" (Andre 2002). Philosopher and bioethicist Judith Andre believes that due to Zoloth's initiatives, "ASBH will soon articulate its public role more self-consciously ... [finding] a middle way between activism and 'informing the debate,' a way more tentative and reflective than a political group can be" (Andre 2002). In this way, the "organization will find a way to participate in a kind of national moral development about health care, health science, and health policy" (Andre 2002).

What, then, is the proper role of a public intellectual in this field? There are, in fact, a number of roles that public intellectuals have traditionally played: educator, critic, interpreter, advocate, and reformer. For academics, the roles of educator, critic and interpreter seem the most natural. Indeed, that is what academics do in their respective fields: They teach new generations of students, critique colleagues' work and interpret the world around them. These activities play a significant role in the life of a public intellectual as well. Bioethics and medical humanities, unlike most traditional humanities disciplines, address issues that are immediately relevant and practical to the general public. This has triggered the emergence of many more voices. Earlier this century, only a handful of magazines were read by educated lay readers. Nowadays, there is a cacophony of voices to be heard, on websites, list serves, television, and in a multitude of magazines and journals.

Daniel Callahan (ASBH 2001) has mentioned that although books on bioethics have not been frequently reviewed in *The New York Times* (among other indicia of prestige), there is nonetheless an intense interest by the media for bioethics. Journalists often eagerly seek out the expertise of bioethicists. Bioethicists, therefore, through the role of the public intellectual, could play a prominent role in shaping public opinion on a variety of topics. The general public learns about bioethical issues principally through the media. Becoming public intellectuals would require bioethicists to better understand the media and improve their communication skills. Bioethicists therefore should learn more about the fourth estate and courses in bioethics programs should more thoroughly examine the role of the media in bioethics.

Richard Posner has rightly criticized some public intellectuals for being "careless with facts and rash in predictions" (Posner 2002, 35). Although many bioethicists are broadly educated, given the interdisciplinary nature and quickly evolving issues of bioethics, it would be easy for bioethicists to overstep their bounds with regard to expert-

ise. In reaching a larger audience, therefore, credibility will only be built if bioethicists qua public intellectuals are scrupulous in establishing the facts before opining on a given topic.

Given these caveats, we think that bioethicists as public intellectuals provide a useful service. Going beyond the demands of the academic expert, the bioethicist as public intellectual synthesizes information from various sources, integrates it into a coherent message, and addresses a broad audience of readers, listeners and viewers. Although critics such as Posner believe public intellectuals fail as predictors of future events, we believe that bioethicists are more than just prognosticators. They help individuals think more deeply about the far-reaching effects of medicine and technology in our lives.

Our call, then, for a greater role for bioethicists qua public intellectuals is not a request for certain anointed "philosopher-kings" to preach to the great unwashed masses. Rather, we believe that democracy requires an educated citizenry and that public intellectuals play an important role in educating the public. Instead of the normal binary way of thinking (the academy versus the real world, for instance), public intellectuals help people appreciate the importance of ideas and thought in their own lives. Rather than leaving the "heavy thinking" only to academics, citizens can and should become better equipped in dealing with such thorny bioethical issues as physician-assisted suicide, the genetics revolution, reproductive technologies, among many others. Instead of a vicious cycle where issues become ghettoized within the academy and citizens are cut off from the discourse, we have a virtuous cycle whereby an informed and educated citizenry through the work of bioethicists as public intellectuals help shape and define the issues within the field of bioethics and medical humanities for the benefit of the common good. ☺

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Notes

1 Florida Atlantic University web address located at www.artsandletters.fau.edu/phd.htm

2 New America Foundation web address located at www.newamerica.net/new_america_foundation.htm

3 The mission of the Center for Public Intellectuals is to attempt to "bridge the gap between the university and the larger community, create opportunities for public discourse on socially relevant issues across boundaries of discipline and difference, and provide a hothouse for the creation of new knowledge that can further the common good." In an effort to "reach out to a broader audience and to appeal to more democratic and inclusive notions of intellectual work" the Center has recently been renamed CPI/The Public Square. The website can be located at www.publicintellectuals.org or www.thepublicsquare.org.

4 Chicago Public Radio web address is located at www.chicagopublicradio.org. Archived Odyssey programs are available.