

TARRYTOWN MEETING DISCUSSION SESSION

BIOETHICS AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

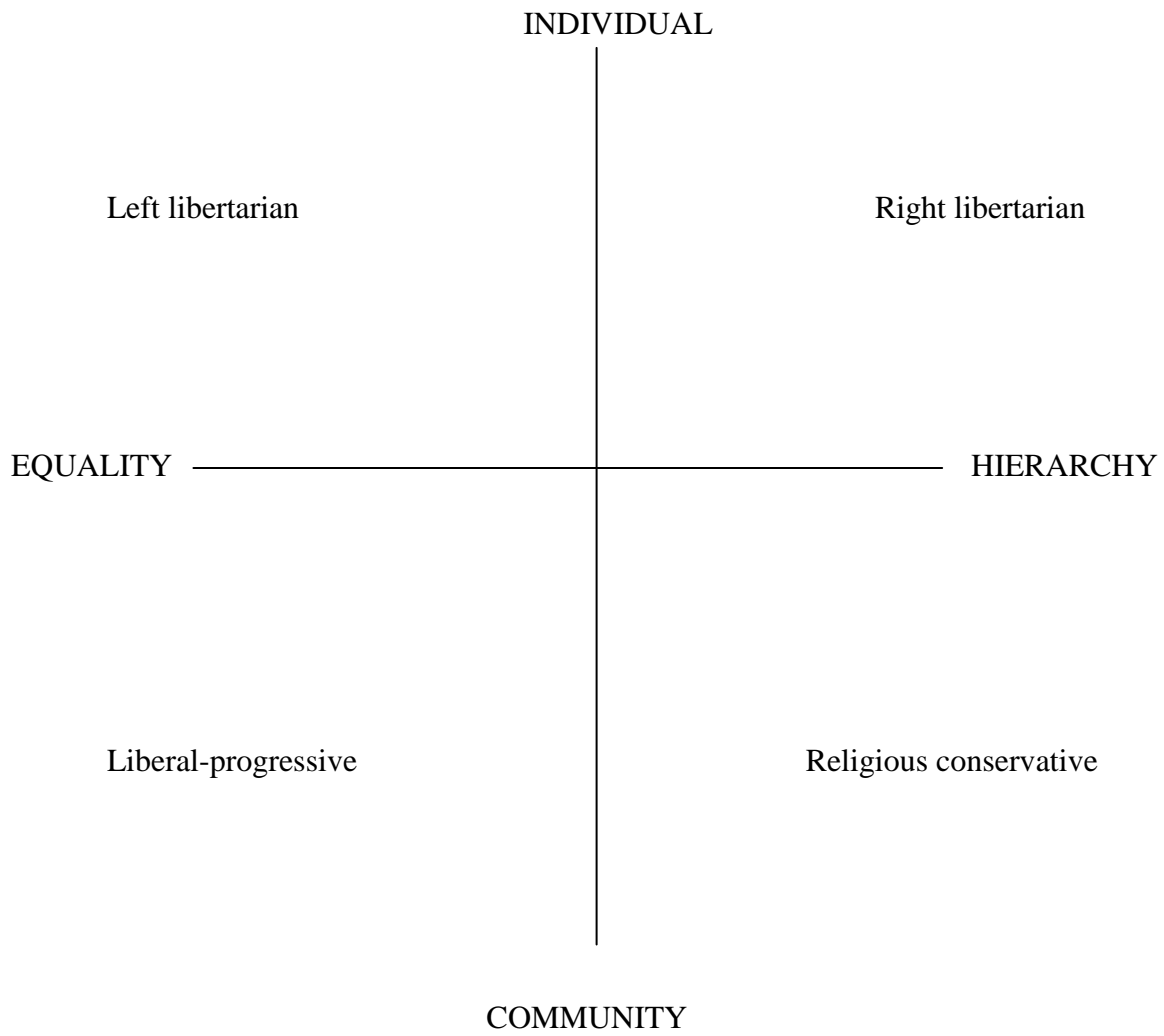
Tuesday, July 24, 2012, 4:10-5:30 pm
Washington Irving Room

Convenor: Mark Brown, California State University, Sacramento
Presenters: Tom Banchoff, Georgetown University
David Goldston, National Resources Defense Council
Amy Laura Hall, Duke University
Silke Schicktanz, University Medical Center, Goettingen

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. How would you characterize the ideological landscape of biopolitics today, in the United States and/or elsewhere?
2. What are some of your personal experiences with biopolitics and ideology? Do you subscribe to a particular biopolitical ideology?
3. What are the important sources of conflict among current biopolitical ideologies? How do you assess the possibility of compromise, collaboration, cooperation or strategic alliance among today's biopolitical ideologies?

A Model of Political Ideologies

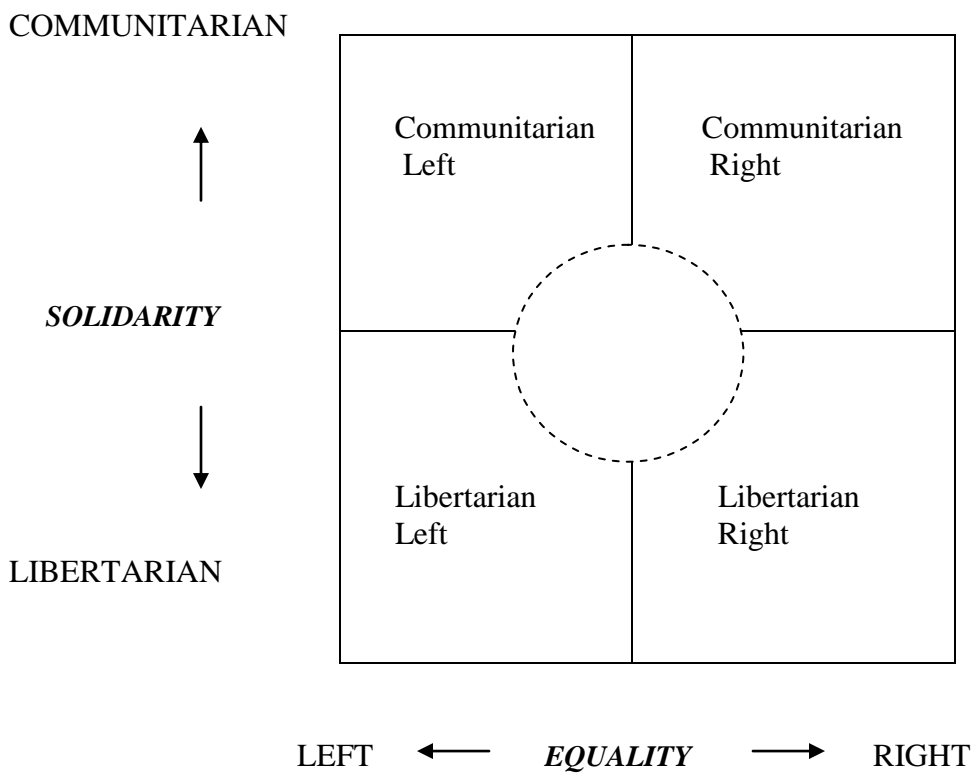


Idealized Models of Bioethics and Politics

| | Key Values | Politics | State | Biotechnology | Bioethics |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Liberal-Progressive | Substantive equality, social progress | Partisan competition | Promotes social justice | Neutral tool | Neutral expertise |
| Libertarian | Individual liberty, formal equality | Constitutional rights | Protects individual liberty | Neutral tool | Neutral expertise |
| Conservative | Traditional morality | Inspired by religion or tradition | Promotes moral values | Disenchanted | Wise leadership |
| Liberal-Communitarian | Community | Reasoned deliberation | Promotes community values | Disenchanted | Promotes reasoned deliberation |
| Radical Democratic | Democracy | Public participation | Promotes democratic justice | Socially embedded, promising and problematic | Promotes robust public engagement |

Political ideologies and the new human genetic technologies (R. Hayes 2008)

Many efforts have been made to replace the conventional ideological categories of “liberal” and “conservative” with categories that more closely map the real world. In 1970 Libertarian Party leader David Nolan used the values of “personal freedom” and “economic freedom” to generate the four ideological categories of Liberal (high personal freedom, low economic freedom), Conservative (low personal freedom, high economic freedom), Libertarian (high in both freedoms) and Authoritarian (low in both freedoms). The popular *Political Compass* website uses a similar formula to generate the four categories of Libertarian Left, Authoritarian Right, Libertarian Right, and Authoritarian Left. The Gallup Poll replaces Nolan’s “Authoritarian” with “Populist.” In the diagram below, I use “Communitarian” to denote a more general ideological orientation that emphasizes the importance of social values and institutions as contrasted with individualist or Libertarian ones.¹



In the diagram, the focal value along the Left-Right (liberal-conservative) continuum is *equality* (i.e., of condition). In this scheme, the Left tends to value equality more, while the Right tends to value it less or not at all, or to positively value *inequality*.

The focal value along the Libertarian-Communitarian continuum is *solidarity*. In this scheme, libertarians tend to devalue or even repudiate solidarity, while communitarians tend to value or even reify it.

The **Libertarian Left** is the late 1960’s counter-culture: free sex, free dope, no draft. Society is best served when individuals can do as they wish. Think Timothy Leary, many civil liberties groups, much of the entertainment industry and assorted anarchists and post-modernists.

The **Libertarian Right** is ideological capitalism: free markets, free trade, no taxes. Society is best served when corporations can do as they wish. Think Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, the Koch brothers, *Reason* magazine and the Cato Institute.

The **Communitarian Left** runs the spectrum from mainstream U.S. liberalism (near the center) moving diagonally north-west through European social democracy to democratic socialism to authoritarian socialism (at the top left corner). Think Mario Cuomo => Willie Brandt => Michael Harrington => Leon Trotsky. Also think religious social justice activists, many environmentalists, *Tikkun* and *National Catholic Reporter*.

The **Communitarian Right** runs the spectrum from U.S. mainstream conservatism (near the center) moving diagonally north-east through neo-conservatism to paleoconservatism to authoritarian conservatism (at the top right corner). Think John McCain => Bill Kristol => Pat Buchanan => Augusto Pinochet. Also think Focus on the Family, Promise Keepers, *First Things* and *Commentary*.

These categories can help us understand the ways in which different people regard the new human genetic technologies. Libertarians of the right and the left tend to view procedures such as cloning and germline modification respectively as property rights or as individual rights, and thus presumptively permissible. Right communitarians tend regard such procedures as violations of natural law or religious conviction, while left communitarians typically reject them because they could greatly exacerbate inequality and exclusion.

Can we imagine a way in which people of different ideological orientations might unite around proposals to constrain the development and use of the new human genetic technologies? Perhaps. Whereas right libertarians generally care little about equality, left libertarians typically identify with recent historical movements that strongly affirm equality. A case might be made to left libertarians that technologies of human genetic modification could exacerbate inequality to a degree that would undermine the conditions that allow civil liberties to flourish in the first place. At the same time, a case can be made to right communitarians that their insistence on drawing the line at any research whatsoever involving the use of human embryos forecloses the possibility of a majority coalition that would otherwise be able to enact strong prohibitions on eugenic applications of this research.

The Gallup Poll conducts an annual survey which, among other things, categorizes the political ideologies to which American subscribe. Following Nolan, it defines four ideological categories based on varying commitments to “economic freedom” and “personal freedom.” Survey results for 2006 are shown in Table A.ⁱⁱ The full survey is proprietary, and without access to the survey protocol it’s difficult to know what the data really tell us. Assuming for the moment that the correspondence between the Gallup Poll categories and our categories holds as shown in the far right column, we see that Americans divide their ideological commitments roughly equally among the four categories, with an edge given to the communitarian right. This suggests that the adoption of comprehensive policies addressing the new human genetic technologies will require that persons of different ideological orientations find ways to collaborate around core concerns they share.

TABLE A. Gallup Poll, February 2006.

| <i>Gallup Poll categories</i> | <i>Free market economic values</i> | <i>Individualist personal values</i> | <i>Percent of Americans</i> | <i>Our categories (possible correspondence)</i> |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Conservative | high | low | 27 | Communitarian Right |
| Liberal | low | high | 24 | Libertarian Left |
| Libertarian | high | high | 20 | Libertarian Right |
| Populist | low | Low | 20 | Communitarian Left |
| Data not given | | | 09 | |

Source: *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2006.

ⁱ For an extensive discussion of the Nolan Chart see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nolan_chart. For the Political Compass see <http://www.politicalcompass.org/>. For the Gallup Poll see David Boaz's op-ed, "Libertarian Orphans," in the *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2006 and at http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=5431

ⁱⁱ I use the phrases "free market economic values" and "individualist personal values" in place of the Gallup Poll's normatively loaded phrases "economic freedom" and "personal freedom."