

THE GREAT DEBATES

This CQ department is dedicated to bringing noted bioethicists together in order to debate some of the most perplexing contemporary bioethics issues.

Introducing “The Great Debates”

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Debates have long held an important role in history. They can be traced back to the philosophers and political debates in Ancient Greece and Rome, the Shastrartha philosophical and religious debates in India, to the evolution of Parliament from its roots in Medieval England. And, in our own time—for better or worse—they have determined the outcome of presidential elections.

When Covid-19 travel bans struck, they precluded the possibility of holding our traditional Neuroethics Network meeting at ICM, the Paris Brain Institute. Reimagining was required to capture the spirit of onsite energy within a new virtual world. Our solution lay in acknowledging that Ernest Hemingway was right—Paris really is a moveable feast.

The virtual “Paris is a Moveable Feast” meeting introduced a new format, “The Great Debates,” in which leading neuroethicists defended opposite sides of current controversial questions: “Does a Mind Need a Body?” “Should Cerebral Organoids be Used for Research if They Have the Capacity for Consciousness?” “Has the Time Come to Eliminate Controls that Involve Burr Hoes in Neurosurgical Sham Research?” and “Should We Use Technology to Merge Minds?”

This intellectual jousting is being offered as exercises rather than necessarily representing the debaters’ own positions. And, unlike the original meaning of the word “debate” as a fight or an argument, in our “Great Debates,” there were no winners or losers; but something more difficult and far-reaching: the goal was to prompt a critical examination of our own, often strongly held, positions. By including transcriptions of those debates in this issue, we hope they may prompt the same response in readers.

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