Genetically Enhancing Athletes?
by C. Ben Mitchell

Readers of both the academic and popular literature in bioethics will be well aware that genetic and other forms of so-called human enhancement are clearly on the drawing board. No one knows how long it will take to develop these technologies, but they are most certainly coming. Already, of course, through the use of preimplantation genetic diagnosis, human embryos are screened for undesirable genetic traits, and embryos with those traits are not transferred to a woman’s uterus—they are discarded or used in embryo-destructive research. This is not enhancement but negative eugenics.

Soon, however, we will be able to direct our DNA to make ourselves different. I say “different,” because it is unclear to me that having keener than normal eye sight is necessarily a good to be desired. Likewise, I hardly think that being able to choose one’s eye color is something worth the cost of genetic intervention. And, while I suppose that ten additional IQ points would be nice, I am quite certain that merely having them will not make people nicer. Finally, physical immortality, it seems to me, is something only some of the well-heeled would want.

The venues for the most rapid development of genetic enhancement will not (and are not) in the medical sector, but in the military and athletics. Competitive advantage means a great deal on both battlefields. For instance, articles in Scientific American (July 2004) and the New York Times Magazine (January 18, 2004), point out that athletes are already trying to access genetic intervention for enhancement purposes. More efficient killing machines (aka soldiers) and a speedier fast pitch seem to be “goods” for many people. But are they?

News junkies could not help but read about Marion Jones’s tearful plea for forgiveness as she returned her Olympic medals because of her past steroid use. In 2004, she tearfully pleaded for forgiveness as she returned her Olympic medals because of her past steroid use. In 2004, she tearfully pleaded for forgiveness as she returned her Olympic medals because of her past steroid use.

In Search of a New Paradigm: Healthcare and the Common Good by Michael J. Sleasman, Managing Director & Research Scholar

I was born in Mission Viejo, California, but moved to Rocky Hill, Connecticut, when I was five years old. I attended a Christian High School, and last May, I graduated from Bob Jones University with a Bachelor’s degree in Biology. The past two summers I have worked with an Orthopedic Surgeon as a Research Assistant. Now I am attending Trinity International University and working on a Master of Arts in Bioethics degree. I am currently working as a research intern at The Center of Bioethics & Human Dignity. Working at CBHD has already helped me to gain experience and knowledge about the emerging issues and current events in bioethics. My work with the Center has given me the opportunity to represent the Center at a local conference and to be involved actively in fulfilling the numerous research initiatives that we receive on a regular basis. After completing my degree I would like to get a PhD in some Bioethics-related field, and, eventually, would like to work at a hospital.

By utilizing this framework to understand healthcare in the language of shared humanity (the “common”), and human flourishing (the “good”), we hope to foster a new, more encompassing, conversation about both health and care. To this end the Center held a networking evening in the D.C. area in which several of our ambassadors, influencers, congressional staffers, and like-minded policy figures gathered to brainstorm the shape and direction of this new initiative. This event was followed by a full-day consultation convened in the House Rayburn building with leading figures from several major D.C. policy organizations and think tanks, as well as key leaders in the field of bioethics and Christian higher education.

The consultation, a joint initiative of CBHD and the Stead Center (Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary), was an opportunity for these leading figures to interact with the facts and figures of the economic situation, two differing open-minded proposals for reform, and a philosophical critique of Rawlsian notions of fairness and equality starkly contrasted with the virtue of charity. In many ways this consultation was merely setting the stage, identifying the key pressure points in this complex conversation and offering preliminary steps forward for future activities and conversations.

This initiative will culminate with our 2008 15th Annual Summer Conference, where you shouldn’t be surprised if it includes something like healthcare and the common good in the title. Given the importance of this debate in our current national climate, the Center is trying to provide leadership in shaping this conversation from a clear commitment to Judeo-Christian Hippocratism in a meaningful manner. This is just one of the many ongoing initiatives of the Center that we invite you to both utilize through our ongoing development of resources, as well as to contribute through your own efforts.