

Name _____ Date _____

Bioethics: Scenarios

Directions: Read and discuss the following scenarios. As a group, prepare a one-to-two-sentence statement in response to each scenario.

1. Max and Judy are a married couple. After years of trying to have a baby, they underwent in-vitro fertilization. In total, seven of Judy's eggs were fertilized and made into embryos. Two of these embryos were implanted and resulted in the couple's twins, now five years old. Even though Max and Judy have decided that they do not want any more children, they have been paying a yearly fee to keep the five remaining embryos frozen at the fertility clinic. Their yearly fee is due next month. They are unsure if they should continue paying to keep the embryos frozen, donate them to science, or just let them be thawed out and die. What do you think they should do?

2. Rosa's husband has Alzheimer's disease, now in its late stages. He no longer recognizes Rosa or anyone else in his family. He no longer talks or walks, smiles or laughs. He is in a wheelchair and cannot move on his own. He is dependent on others to wash, shave and dress him. He can chew and swallow his food, but needs someone to spoon it into his mouth. His care is a huge physical, mental and financial burden on his entire family. His son believes that, if he could, he would choose to end his life, and wants Rosa to consider active euthanasia, or medically-assisted suicide. Rosa is unsure if this is the right thing to do, but admits that she thinks it is time for her husband to finally die. What do you think Rosa should do?

3. Tobias has recently been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He has researched the disease and found out that scientists have high hopes that stem cell research will provide some advancements to help treat Parkinson's. In the past, Tobias and his wife, Justine, have actively been against stem cell research that involved the use of human embryos. They felt that a human embryo is a human life that should be protected. However, now that he has Parkinson's, he has been given the option of participating in a clinical study involving stem cells in which stem cells that have been genetically altered to produce dopamine are implanted into patients in the hopes of alleviating the symptoms and progression of Parkinson's disease. Do you think Tobias should participate in the study? Why or why not?

4. John, a college student, has become involved in an animal rights group on campus. He feels that animals should no longer be used for food, clothing, medical research or entertainment. Visiting home for Thanksgiving, he refuses to eat the turkey and gets into a heated argument with his family. His father is furious, arguing that he worked for hours to cook the meal and the bird shouldn't go to waste now. He demands that John eat some turkey, and says that actions like John's are neither practical nor meaningful. How do you think John should respond?

5. Ronald is a farmer. He owns and operates a large farm that chiefly produces corn. It is time to plant his crop and he is considering what to order. He has to choose whether or not to plant and grow a genetically modified version of corn. A gene from a bacteria has been inserted into the corn to make it pesticide-resistant. This would allow him to spray a larger amount of pesticides on his crop, thus killing insects and other pests without killing the plants themselves. It would increase his yield, resulting in greater profits. Times have been tough and he could use the extra money around the farm. However, he also wonders about the long-term effects of using genetically modified products and pesticides on the ecosystem. What type of corn do you think Ronald should plant and why?

6. Dr. Yee is a cardiologist. A 75-year-old patient in need of heart surgery has recently been referred to his practice. The patient is overweight and has known he was at risk for heart disease for years. Still, he never modified his diet or exercise despite his doctor's recommendations. His poor health makes the surgery riskier and less likely to extend his life for long. Regardless, the patient would like Dr. Yee to perform the surgery. Dr. Yee needs to decide if he will operate or refuse the surgery to this patient. What do you think he should do?

In small groups, read, discuss and write short responses to the bioethical dilemmas found on the handout "Bioethics: Scenarios."

(<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/studentactivity/20081209a.pdf>)

When finished with the above assignment, answer the following questions:

1. As a group, how varied are your responses?
2. How quickly were your "minds made up?"
3. Were facts or opinions used to support your decisions?
4. How much would additional information help you make a decision?
5. In general, did you take a "case by case" approach to the dilemmas or were your decisions guided by a set of rules or a "moral code?"
6. Define, in your own words, the term "bioethics."