

Account of 4th Annual Postgraduate Conference in Bioethics:

The 4th annual postgraduate conference in bioethics was held on Tuesday the 23rd and Wednesday the 24th of June 2009 at Queen's University Belfast. The programme was mainly composed of a diverse range of postgraduate speakers arranged into panels. The opening session was a presentation, by Nathan Emmerich, on three disciplinary case studies in bioethics. He discussed literature, history and sociology in the context of bioethical education and research. Audience contributions were encouraged and this open and participatory discussion set the tone for the rest of the conference.

It was commented on by many that all of the postgraduate papers presented were of a high quality and that each of the speakers did a good job of communicating with the audience. Each of the panel session finished with questions and discussion of the papers and it was felt that this feedback was very constructive. Unfortunately two of the postgraduate speakers had to pull out at the last minute both due to illness although one was nearing the end of her pregnancy. Unfortunately one was unable to provide a copy of her paper; she had planned to produce a video but was in hospital over the weekend. The other provided a PowerPoint presentation and some notes. Nathan Emmerich talked through each slide and encourage members of the audience to comment on the slides and concepts presented. In this way we had a conversation around this particular presentation.

The two presentations from academics were very engaging. Dr Shildrick spoke on the sociological theorisation of the body and how her work relates this to bioethics. Her talk was interspersed with clips from the film 'Naked on the Inside' and her talk rounded off day one in a relaxed, informative, and intellectual way. Prof. Miah's presentation discussed his work in the area of BioArt, an unusual aspect of modern bioethics. The audience found it to be interesting and stimulating.

The final session was a discussion of the future of this conference series. This allowed opportunity for the organisers to garner feedback from the participants on the 2009 conference as we started by listing the benefits people felt they had accrued over the past two days. The words mentioned were:

Supportive and Motivating

Diversity
Egalitarian
Human Contact/ Networking
Well Fed!
As a student learn to present and receive feedback
Multidisciplinary nature
Wide Geographic and age variation
Gets you out of the office.
Fun
Access to range of research
Gives a perspective on your own writing
Opportunity to reflect
Yearly snapshot of what is going on.
Set up and run by PG bioethicists.
See the evolution of our work

This discussion motivated a desire to see the conference continue into its fifth year. We considered the challenges that a institutionally nomadic, postgraduate led conference in the interdiscipline of bioethics presented with funding, continuity of knowledge over time and contacting postgraduates scattered across institutions and discipline being particular focuses. We decided to form a committee to consider these issues and to provide support to the next organiser. The committee will be:

Nathan Emmeirch
Julia Hynes
Barry Lyons
Maria de Jesus Medina Arellano
Bjorn Moller
Jane Langsdale

In the first instance, the committee is going to investigate sources of funding, develop the website and a mailing list.