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24.06J / STS.006J Bioethics
Spring 2009

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Recitation 13: Rights, Responsibilities, and Public Health

1. Administrivia

Please complete the Student Writing Survey [distributed in class]

Please complete the course evaluation

2. Presentations: Ansah, Erik, and Yuki

3. Rights

When (if ever) is a government justified in limiting individual rights in the interest of public health?

Consider a few scenarios:

- A virulent flu pandemic.
- The current swine flu concern.
- HIV/AIDS.
- Obesity and diabetes.
- Helmet laws.

What sorts of measures (if any) is the government permitted to take?

Is there a good slippery slope argument here *against* government intervention?

4. Responsibilities

Do we have a responsibility to be healthy? Consider two scenarios:

- My personal health decisions have no impact on anyone else.
- My personal health decisions have an impact on other people.

Suppose a person does have an obligation to be healthy. Should there be penalties for failing to fulfill this obligation/incentives for fulfilling this obligation (beyond the natural penalties/incentives, like bad/good health)? If so, what should these penalties/incentives be?

When (if ever) are companies to blame when an individual develops a health problem related to their product (*e.g.*, food, alcohol, tobacco)? What should the consequences be?

5. Public Health

Why should we care whether other people are healthy?

- The Egocentric response: when other people are unhealthy, it adversely affects us.
- The Paternalistic response: we have some sort of duty to take care of other people.
- Other responses?