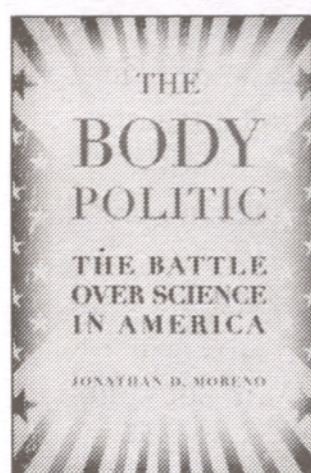


A deep divide wrought by the discovery of the double helix

BY SEAN HUGHES
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



The Body Politic: The Battle Over Science in America, by Jonathan Moreno

Jonathan Moreno's "The Body Politic: The Battle Over Science in America" bridges the academic and popular genres. It is an erudite and sophisticated work, covering a considerable amount of intellectually substantial material in less than two hundred pages of narrative. Moreno's aim — in which he succeeds — is to provide an historical and philosophical framework to enrich present bioethical debates.

The march of science is a particularly American issue because the notion of progress and belief in science were central to the country's founding. With the development of the country led by scientifically inclined people such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, it "is fair to say that no nation has ever been founded by people who were more oriented toward the pursuit and propagation of knowledge than the United States." Indeed, the form of government was itself an experiment. The influence of the founders' pro-science philosophy can still be seen today in patent laws that allow the patenting of genes, Moreno suggests.

Yet tension has long existed between a desire for scientific progress and concern over science's tendency to undermine the shared assumptions of society and life's mysteries. So, too, has science long been exploited for nefarious ends: eugenics, unethical medical experiments, atomic weapons. The controversies playing out today over possible misuse of new knowledge are but contemporary manifestations of ambivalence toward science.

Nonetheless, Moreno identifies the elucidation of the structure of DNA as a transition into a new period, a shift from empirical studies of biology to rational

manipulation of the mechanisms of life. Since that change, the rapid pace of scientific discovery has brought more and more heated debates. New alliances have formed in response to these changes, upending traditional right-left divides. Moreno argues that debates are best understood as between "bioconservatives," those on the right and left who are skeptical of scientific advances, and "bioproggressives," who are broadly pro-science.

Moreno is openly a bioproggressive, but "The Body Politic" is no screed. He rigorously and fairly examines the arguments of bioconservatives on the right and left; in so doing he unveils the philosophical and historical frameworks underlying the conflicts.

Rightist critiques of biotechnology tend to be based in metaphysical and philosophical concern over the ramifications developments such as genetic engineering have for human dignity and the concept of naturalness. In a surprising but compelling turn, Moreno argues that in addition to being heavily influenced by a number of German philosophers, it is Karl Marx in particular who provides the intellectual foundation for the arguments of bioconservatives on the right. Central to their arguments are Marxist notions of alienation and commodification, applied to biotechnology rather than capitalism, but coming to similar conclusions.

Bioconservatives on the left tend to be concerned with possible environmental and social justice consequences of biotechnological developments, such as pollution and corporate control of indigenous farming practices. Moreno argues, in fact, that leftist bioconservatives are more likely to pragmatically aim to reduce the negative consequences of biotechnology than to reject

it wholesale.

Outside of this cerebral sphere, debates over bioethics have become politicized and heated. They've led to tragic spectacles such as the prolonged media attention paid to Terri Schiavo, who, while in a vegetative state, was the center of a seven-year legal battle to remove her from life support. (Two weeks after her feeding tube was removed in March 2005, Schiavo died.) Moreover, profound differences in what issues become salient in different regions suggest that rarefied academic discourse doesn't always transfer equally into the political sphere. For example, European publics are much more likely than the American public to object to genetically modified food — to the extent of keeping it out of their markets — while Americans are much more moved by all things embryonic than are Europeans.

Perhaps most significantly, Moreno argues for an offensive — rather than defensive — attitude toward biotechnology. The notion of human dignity and the definition of naturalness have essentially been ceded to bioconservatives; Moreno reclaims these for bioproggressives. As he illustrates, to do so is quite simple: advancements in the life sciences lead to longer, healthier lives, giving us the ability to thrive in previously unimagined ways and thus providing the possibility of heightened human dignity. Moreover, naturalness need not be defined by bioconservatives. After all, is not the use and development of ever better tools a fundamentally human trait?

"The Body Politic" is a challenging and rewarding work for the serious student of the interface between society and the life sciences.

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While the interim board is laying the foundation for the co-operative with Massa's help, Ojeda continues to communicate with the park's seller. And Catto works to put together a financing package to pay for the park's purchase. Purchasing the parks is completely dependent on CASA's ability to secure loans and grants; the park's residents do not have the income or savings to pay for the purchase. The purchase price for the parks CASA has converted have been between \$800,000 and \$1.5 million; the purchase price of Vida Lea is approximately \$1.25 million.

The goal, Catto says, is to purchase the park at as close to market value as possible. "Lenders aren't going to approve much over market value," she says.

Among the financing for the Vida Lea purchase is a \$600,000 grant from the Oregon Housing and Community Services department, a loan from the Network for Oregon Affordable Housing (NOAH), an affordable housing developer, and other sources. The residents also agreed to a small rent increase of between \$15 and \$25 per month. "It changes," Catto says. "I'm always searching for different financing sources."

The process has not been without its setbacks or challenges. There were some points when it seemed that the seller was no longer interested in selling the park. And during a routine assessment of infrastructure, which CASA does as part of the conversion process, it was discovered that Vida Lea's septic system is, Massa says, "going to fail at any moment." New septic tanks and drainage fields will be needed, to the tune of between \$250,000 and \$300,000.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to Blythe and others was simply calming the nerves of residents who worried the financing would not come through, which jeopardized the entire deal. Until residents received word that Oregon's Community and Housing Services department would be giving them the grant, many doubted it would actually happen.

"We wouldn't have been able to buy it," Blythe says. "The monthly payment for a loan

would far exceed the input from the rent."

The process to purchase Vida Lea is nearly finished. Members of the board, along with CASA, will make presentations to the various organizations providing grants and loans. After that, the money will be released. And by mid-February, CASA will assign the purchase and sale agreement to Vida Lea's co-operative, allowing them to formally purchase their park.

Is turning parks into resident-owned communities the solution to preserving manufactured housing? Even the CASA staff think it's not possible to convert every park in Oregon. Some owners won't be willing to sell them, and the purchase price of some parks, such as Hayden Island's, may be too large to secure financing.

Rita Loberger lives in Tigard's El Dorado Mobile Villa park and is a board member of Manufactured Housing-Oregon State Tenants Association (MH-OSTA), a group that advocates for manufactured housing park residents. She thinks it's impossible to convert her park.

"The park has the original plumbing in it," she says. "They have never been replaced and are becoming very porous. They're leaking. It would be millions of dollars."

Van Landingham says there will be residents who will be happy in their retirement and unwilling to do the work needed to sustain a cooperative. Peter Ferris, a park resident in Waldport and uncompromising manufactured housing park advocate who created and headed up the organization Oregon Manufactured Homeowners United until he recently resigned, says that if CASA converts one park a year every year, it will take until 5030 to finish. "It's piecemeal" against the forces of powerful and rich real estate, he says.

There is at least one more law Van Landingham would like to get on the books that would give tenants an "opportunity to purchase," a sort of right of first refusal that would give them the first opportunity to buy the park if it went on the market.

"The park is beautiful now, but it's going to



PHOTO COURTESY OF CASA

A home in Vida Lea, where residents are in the process of buying their housing park

be really beautiful when we get through redoing everything," Blythe says.

In the coming months, Blythe will help oversee all the maintenance and repairs at Vida Lea. "I want to make sure that the park is run in a proper manner and that all our goals are completed in a timely manner," he says.

Fountain says it is important for the repairs to take place right away. "We're all low-income people," Fountain says. "We can't afford any big hits down the road. (When) we get it fixed and updated ... we won't have any major expenses hanging over our heads."

Another goal of the co-operative's members is to replace the RV section of the park with units that are more permanent so that all of Vida Lea's residents live at the park on a permanent basis. "That is our goal," Fountain says. "It's going to take a few years, but I think we can get there."

Another thing that will take a few years is something you don't hear very often when you talk about rental housing: lowering the rent. Blythe says that once repairs are complete, maintenance costs will be low enough for the co-operative to start building a trust fund that can be used to subsidize rent payments. "We're a nonprofit. We don't need to make a profit," Fountain says. "Our whole goal is affordable living."

"I'm really looking forward to it."