



# Sydney Bioethics Seminar Series

## Democracies of DNA: The Comparative Politics of Bioethics

*Professor Sheila Jasanoff*  
*John F. Kennedy School of Government*  
*Harvard University*



5.00 pm – 7.00 pm  
Wednesday, 17 August 2005  
Carslaw 275  
University of Sydney  
Followed by Refreshments  
Free—Open to the Public—No RSVP Required

**Convened by:**

Australian Health Policy Institute (AHPI)  
Centre for Values, Ethics, and the Law in Medicine (VELIM)  
Unit for History and Philosophy of Science (HPS)

**Sponsored by:**

Centre for Human Aspects of Science and Technology (CHAST)  
Faculty of Medicine  
Research Institute for Humanities and Social Science (RIHSS)



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**Speaker:**  
Sheila Jasanoff

**Title:**  
Democracies of DNA:  
The Comparative Politics of Bioethics

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**Abstract:** Biology and politics have converged across much of the industrialized world. Debates about genetically modified organisms, cloning, stem cells, animal patenting, and new reproductive technologies crowd media headlines and policy agendas. Less noticed, but no less important, are the rifts that have appeared among leading Western nations about the right way to govern innovation in genetics and biotechnology. These significant differences in law and policy, and in ethical analysis, may in a globalizing world act as obstacles to free trade, scientific inquiry, and shared understandings of human dignity. Comparing the politics and policy of the life sciences in Europe and the United States, and showing how public and private actors in each setting evaluated new manifestations of biotechnology and tried to reassure themselves about their safety, three main themes emerge. First, core concepts of democratic theory, such as citizenship, deliberation, and accountability, cannot be understood satisfactorily without taking on board the politics of science and technology. Second, policies for the life sciences have been incorporated into "nation-building" projects that seek to reimagine what the nation stands for. Third, political culture influences democratic politics, and it works through the institutionalized ways in which citizens understand and evaluate public knowledge. These three aspects of contemporary politics help account not only for policy divergences but also for the perceived legitimacy of state actions.

**Shiela Jasanoff** is Professor of Science and Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and the School of Public Health. Her research interests center on the interactions of law, science, and politics in democratic societies. Specific areas of focus include science and the courts; environmental regulation and risk management; comparative public policy; social studies of science and technology; and science and technology policy. She has published more than 60 articles and book chapters on these topics and has authored or edited several books, including *Controlling Chemicals: The Politics of Regulation in Europe and the United States* (with R. Brickman and T. Ilgen), *Risk Management and Political Culture*, *The Fifth Branch: Science Advisers as Policymakers*, *Learning from Disaster: Risk Management After Bhopal*. Her book *Science at the Bar: Law, Science and Technology in America* received the Don K. Price award of the American Political Science Association, Section on Science, Technology, and Environmental Politics, for the best book on science and politics. Jasanoff holds an A.B. in Mathematics from Harvard College, an M.A. in Linguistics from the University of Bonn, Germany, a Ph.D. in Linguistics from Harvard University, and a J.D. from Harvard Law School.

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The **Sydney Bioethics Seminar Series** is convened by The Australian Health Policy Institute (AHPI); the Centre for Values, Ethics and the Law in Medicine (VELIM); and the Unit for History and Philosophy of Science (HPS); with support from The Centre for Human Aspects of Science and Technology (CHAST), the Faculty of Medicine, and the Research Institute for Humanities and Social Science (RIHSS). For more information see: <http://www.cvelim.org/seminars/jasanoff.html>.