

**IMPURE BIOETHICS:
SOCIAL AND POLICY STUDIES OF BIOETHICS REGARDING
STEM CELL RESEARCH IN THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH
KOREA**

By
Eun-Sung Kim

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Examining Committee:

Michael Fortun, Thesis Advisor
Linda Layne, Member
Nancy Campbell, Member
Lois Peters, Member

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ABSTRACT

This study is a progressive challenge to American bioethics. The main theme of this study is that bioethics is inherently social. At the theoretical level, this study explores three boundaries of American bioethics: ethics vs. society, ethics vs. political activism, and scientific knowledge vs. society. I define American bioethics as *pure bioethics*. Pure bioethics designates scientism in ethical reasoning and bioethicists' belief in pure science. I also develop a model of meta-ethics which I call *impure bioethics*, multilateral credibility struggles among bioethicists. Impure bioethics is not an alternative to pure bioethics, but designates a social context of pure bioethics. I strongly propose sociological, anthropological, and feminist reflexivity as a way to overcome pure bioethics that decontextualizes morality from social contexts and that conceals the political partisanship of American bioethics.

At the empirical level, pure bioethics is prevalent in American bioethics, when ethical analysis is preoccupied with 1) the triumph of micro-ethics such as the “moral status decision” over macro-ethics such as social justice; 2) the rationalist analysis of biological facts as innocent of society and culture in micro-ethics; and 3) lack of reasoning on distributive, recognition, and productive justice in macro-ethics. As for impure bioethics, both liberal and conservative bioethicists create scientific “fact” claims with either embryology or developmental biology, as well as employ technological justifications by downplaying or emphasizing the medical potential of human embryonic and adult stem cells in order to defend their ethical and political claims. Both camps of bioethicists engaged themselves deeply with partisan politics.

By contrast, pure bioethics is not yet pervasive in Korean academic bioethics, given that political activists, sociologists and historians of science, and religion-affiliates play major roles

in bioethics communities. As for public bioethics, the Korean Bioethics Advisory Commission hijacked a public ethical debate into the government by employing many opinion leaders, and because lay citizens paid little attention to bioethics. However, there is no evidence involving the rationalization of the public bioethical debate toward a thinner debate. Hwang's scandals paved the way for improving the system of micro-ethics such as informed consent and research integrity, but eclipsed the "macro-ethical" debate concerning the relationship between medical inequality and technological innovation.