

Los Angeles, CA, April 2009 - The Academic Coalition for Jewish Bioethics (ACJB) held a two-day invitational conference specifically for scholars in Jewish Bioethics. This fifth national meeting of the ACJB was held April 26-27, 2009, at the Pearlstone Conference and Retreat Center near Baltimore. The ACJB is a joint venture of seminaries and institutes of higher education in the U.S. and Israel, including the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health. The ACJB seeks to engage the Jewish community in considering biomedical decision. Since its inception in 2002, the ACJB has held four national conferences that have addressed issues such as quality of life, healthcare economics, and genetic science, and has promoted discussions relating to the field of Jewish Bioethics itself.

This year's meeting included presentations made by some of the leading scholars in contemporary Jewish Bioethics. The sessions concentrated on procedures and methods, with a select group of participants who engaged in a meta-examination of the principles under which clergy, bioethicists and healthcare practitioners work. Papers concentrated on issues of research, theology, resources, and the difference between Jewish bioethics as practice in Israel and the United States. While some of the sessions included discussion of particular questions for which solutions are sought, behind each specific question stood the larger issues of how liberal Jews find authority for their conclusions; the possibility of multiple conclusions to the same problems; the search for new sources of Jewish context; the relationships of several parties engaged in research projects; and definitions of norms and expectations in health and healing.

Discussions reached their high point as a consequence of the presentation of Dr. Jonathan Cohen, who argued that non-Orthodox Jewish "decisors" (those who help people make decisions in bioethics) are free to establish a range of authority that takes thinkers beyond the conventional boundaries of Jewish thinking. Cohen is HUC-JIR's director of the Center for the Study of Contemporary Moral Problems affiliated with the University of Cincinnati. His presentation was joined with papers by Rabbi Yuval Sherlow of Israel, Dr. Deena Zimmerman, physician and decisor in Israel, Elliot Dorff, Aaron Mackler and Laurie Zoloth of Northwestern.

The Coalition includes Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, The Jewish Theological Seminary, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, The Shalom Hartman Institute, The University of Judaism, University of Pennsylvania - Center for Bioethics. Support is provided by the The Gimprich Family Foundation, The Solomon and Sylvia Bronstein Foundation, the Whizin Foundation and the Maurice Amado Foundation. For further history and detail about the ACJB, go to <http://www.huc.edu/kalsman/bioethics/activities/>.