

Bioethics of the human body in Michael Crichton's *Next* and Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

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Bioethics. Michael Crichton. Rebecca Skloot. HeLa cells. Human body parts. Biobanks.

In this essay, I use two literary works from two distinct genres and with two very different narratives – a satirical techno-thriller and a historical non-fiction piece – to show how they can both convey the same bioethical message – donation of human body parts – to their audience. The two books I examine and contrast here are Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) and Michael Crichton's satirical techno-thriller *Next* (2006). The main question this article will try to answer is obviously not why *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, a carefully researched nonfiction book, belongs on the list of essential works on bioethics, but rather why *Next*, a satirical techno-thriller that continuously blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, belongs on the list as well.

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The relationship between literature and bioethics depends largely on the conceptualization of bioethics, whether it is understood within a narrow or broad definition. According to the narrower definition, commonly applied in the field of biomedicine, bioethics is more or less equivalent to medical ethics, or biomedical ethics (Beauchamp and Childress 2013). Bioethics in this narrower sense is a continuation of the long tradition of medical ethics dating back to ancient Hippocrates. Its focus is on the doctor-patient relationship, which has expanded after World War II to include the ethics of biomedical research and the challenges brought to medicine by scientific and technical advances, such as life-sustaining devices. It turned out that bioethics became more than just one of the professional ethics (health ethics) and becomes an interdisciplinary academic discipline with overlapping concerns from different fields of study, including the life sciences, biotechnology, public health, medicine, public policy, law, philosophy and theology. In such a way, biomedical ethics including ethics of biomedical research goes beyond the borders of healthcare ethics.

There are four ethical principles in the conceptual core of biomedical ethics. Two of them, non-maleficence and beneficence, are old medical ethics principles developed since the Hippocratic tradition. The other two principles, autonomy (the patient's own self-determination in contrast to the traditional physician's paternalism) and justice came explicitly with the beginning of bioethics in 1960s–1970s.

Both biographical and fictional stories may provide useful insights for the analysis of moral dilemmas faced by physicians and patients; they are based on real life situations and serve as sources for complex cases (de la Vieja 2015). Furthermore, according to Tod Chambers (2001), narrative theory should not be considered simply a helpful addition to medical ethics but rather as vital and important to the discipline as moral theory itself. Being free from the constraints of the real world, fictional texts not only reflect the world but can also shape it: “by engaging the reader in a particular presentation of the world, fiction argues for that particular view” (Chambers 2016, 80). Thus, in order to create ethical thought experiments that may later become reality, speculative and science fiction novels can transcend the limits of real-world biomedical frameworks by focusing on the application of advanced research and emergent technologies like cloning, gene therapy, stem cell research, xenotransplantation, longevity, artificial intelligence, and robots. This is bioethics in a broader sense, which goes far beyond the boundaries of healthcare ethics and clinical practice.¹

Michael Crichton is considered to be the master of the modern techno-thriller, but it appears that using this classification for his writings is probably not fully accurate. A number of the topics Crichton addresses have already been treated in bioethical discourse, such as biosafety, brain implants, genetic engineering, cloning and de-extinction, nanotechnology, genetic research, transgenic animals, the legal framework for biotechnology, the ownership of the human body, and its misuse for money. As pointed out by Gilberto Diaz-Santos (2022) an application of a new literary genre category, known as FASP, would be more appropriate for some of Crichton's novels, including *Next*. The term FASP, coined by Michel Petit, is a French acronym for “fiction à substrat professionnel”, fiction with a professional dominant. Novels in this

new category of professional literary fiction ought to be: 1) globally best-selling; 2) written by successful authors in a similar subgenre (for example, medical thrillers, military thrillers, legal thrillers); and 3) written by authors who are skilled in the relevant field (Petit 1999). The specific professional language of FASP novels is “the very pivot of plot and character dynamics”, not just a background to the story (Isani 2004). Actually, Petit’s main observation is that the professional dominant of the different thriller subtypes (medical, military, legal etc.) is as important as the thriller aspects of this literature, if not more. Diaz-Santos (2022) goes even further in his re-categorization of some of Crichton’s novels – they do not fit into an original definition of FASP either, because they are multi-disciplinary, not only from a single professional domain, as in the case, for example, of John Grisham’s legal novels.

Another dimension of bioethics in literature which is very important in democratic societies is its role in improving citizens’ participation about bioethical issues. As pointed out by Susana Magalhães, Joana Araújo and Ana Sofia Carvalho, “literary texts are laboratories of ethical judgment, where the ethical questions concerning specific scientific/technological issues are addressed in an imaginary world” (2011, 79).

But one should not forget the importance of non-fiction literature for bioethics education and the facilitation of debate on bioethical issues. Therefore the purpose of this study is to show how both fictional and non-fictional literature, each with different narratives, can and should be used to increase public awareness of the bioethical dilemma. This will be demonstrated using two literary works which, although coming from the different genres of historical non-fiction and satirical techno-thriller, can show the public the same controversial bioethical issue. These are Michael Crichton’s satirical techno-thriller *Next* (2006) and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) by Rebecca Skloot. The major question this article will address is not why *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, a meticulously written non-fictional work, should be on the list of must-read books in bioethics, but why Crichton’s satirical techno-thriller *Next*, systematically blurring the line between fact and fiction, should be on the list too. Do these books have anything in common besides the fact that they both became *New York Times* bestsellers (each one in its own literary genre)? I argue here that despite the different narratives of these books, they convey the same crucial bioethical message for their readers and raise the public’s ethical awareness of the complicated issue of human body parts donorship.

THE STORY OF THE HeLa CELL LINE: REBECCA SKLOOT’S *THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS*

Rebecca Skloot’s book explores bioethical concerns pertaining to the ownership of human cells, justice, and relationships between individuals and communities within the context of racial and class inequality in the United States during the 20th century. It is the literary debut of the American author Rebecca Skloot, who was unknown before it was published and adapted into a 2017 HBO TV drama movie of the same name, starring Oprah Winfrey. The book received numerous honors, including those from scientific associations like the National Academies

and AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science). It is a detailed description of Henrietta Lacks, a African American donor of cells which revolutionized medicine beginning in the 1950s but who was for decades unrecognized and forgotten. At the same time it tells of the author's personal struggle for years in writing this book, the difficulties of communicating with Lacks's family members, especially her daughter Deborah, and understanding and perceiving the HeLa bioethical issue from their perspective.

Skloot's book starts in January of 1951, when Henrietta Lacks discovered a tumor on her cervix and went to Johns Hopkins Hospital for a medical checkup. At that time, Doctor George Gey was studying cervical cancer and asked all patients, including Henrietta Lacks, for tissue samples because he was trying, until then unsuccessfully, to set up a tissue culture from the tumor as well as healthy cells. In that time it was not known that tissue culture cannot be obtained from isolated healthy cells, which they are genetically pre-programmed only for a limited number of divisions and then die. However, it turned out that cells isolated from Lack's cervical tumor were special in comparison to cells isolated from other cervical cancer patients. This cell culture, which has been identified as HeLa cells, was the first – and for a long time, only – in vitro human cell culture. After a botched X-ray cancer treatment, Lacks passed away in October 1951, but her cells were kept alive in liquid nitrogen (at -150°C), cloned after her death, and became the focus of medical research for more than 20 years.

Her husband and five children were unaware of this research on HeLa cells until a family friend unintentionally informed them of it in 1973. They were shocked to learn this and lacked the rudimentary biological knowledge to distinguish between their mother and living cell lines that were produced from her body. The Lacks children were asked to provide blood samples to scientists who required particular genetic markers to differentiate HeLa cells from other types of cells. They believed they were being screened for potential cancer, so they agreed to give them samples, but they were not informed of the fact that a for-profit company had been established to produce HeLa cells in large quantities in order to meet the demand for research from all over the world. Thanks to a 1975 article on HeLa cells in *Rolling Stone* magazine, the Lacks family learned to their great surprise and indignation that their mother's cells had made a significant contribution to medical research without any acknowledgement and that companies were profiting financially from their sale. Finally, in August 2023, Lacks's descendants reached an out-of-court settlement with the Thermo Fisher Scientific Company, which doubtless would not have happened without an increased public awareness about the HeLa case thanks to *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and its film version.

A TECHNO-THRILLER ABOUT SERIOUS BIOETHICAL ISSUES: MICHAEL CRICHTON'S *NEXT*

In contrast to Skloot, Michael Crichton was a bestselling American writer with over 200 million copies of his books sold worldwide. He was also a successful screenwriter, film director, and TV producer, perhaps best known to the general public as

the author of *Jurassic Park* (1990), as well as the screenplay to Steven Spielberg's 1993 film adaptation whose immersive visualization of resurrected dinosaurs made pioneering use of computer-generated imagery. Next was Crichton's 25th novel, the 15th published under his own name, and the last book he published before his death in 2008. It is written in a dynamic pulp-fiction style, with many characters and many contested genetic technologies which are the subject of interest of greedy biotechnological and pharmacological companies. It is not among his best-known works, nor considered one of his best. Critics found that it covered too many topics and lacked a clear main storyline. Its main message for the readers, as seen from the author's note at the end, is the question of the use of human tissues and genes for profit without informing the persons from whom they were isolated.

The book begins as Frank Burnet is suing the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) for unauthorized misuse of his cells. He had leukemia, underwent successful treatment, and had regular check-ups for years at the UCLA Hospital. Doctor Gross, the physician who treated Burnet, while taking blood samples regularly over four years, had discovered that Burnet's white blood cells produced a powerful cancer-fighting substance called interleukin. UCLA had licensed the cell line derived from Burnet's cell and sold it to a biotechnology start-up company BioGen Inc., but Burnet was told nothing about it at all. When he discovers that his cells were sold and bought without his knowledge and consent, he starts to sue UCLA for unauthorized exploitation of them. At the end of Chapter 1, the attorney asks Burnet if he knows what those cells are worth: "The drug company said three billion dollars.' The jury gasped" (5–6). The judge, in accordance with US legislation, rules that Burnet's cells were his body "waste", UCLA could dispose of them as it wished, and therefore it had the right with Doctor Gross to sell Burnet's cell line to the BioGen company. But in the company Burnet's cells are destroyed by sabotage – infected with mold. BioGen, now the owner of Burnet's cell line, claims the rights to it and with the judge's permission hires the bounty hunter Vasco to obtain cells from Frank Burnet's daughter Alex and her child Jamie, who inherited Burnet's special cells. After Frank and his family go on the run, Jamie is kidnapped and transferred to a private clinic for tissue extraction but saved from it by his mother. Finally, the judge rules in Alex's favor, citing the 13th Amendment from the US Constitution, which will impact future research and tissue sales. Meanwhile, the cognitive animal researcher Henry Kendall discovers that he has created a transgenic chimpanzee, Dave, who can talk.

Among other storylines, we encounter Gerard, a transgenic parrot (being injected with human genes responsible for the human ability to talk) who can not only talk but also help the researcher's son with his homework. An orangutan is discovered in the Sumatra rainforest speaking Dutch and French, and is suspected to be a result of secret experiments with transferring of human genes to apes. Human subjects are exposed to a "maturity" gene developed by the biotech company, but they all die of accelerated old age. These storylines are interrupted with almost twenty "boxes" of "science news", about discoveries in genetics, the use of animals with transferred bioluminescent gene from jellyfish for advertising, and Google Search screenshots for some unbelievable topics. At the end of the book, the Kendalls' household is praised

as a trend-setting inter-species transgenic family including humans, the transgenic chimp and the transgenic parrot.

Next confronts us with a whole patchwork of intertwining storylines, a large cast of figures, and a plethora of professional legal, biomedical, biotechnological, and genetic engineering terms and themes that are not easy to follow. Although it is true that book lacked a single clear motif around which the main storyline unfolded, this does not mean that it does not carry a main message, seen from a bioethical perspective. That message is the question of the use of human body parts for medical research, and the biotechnological production of biological drugs.

DEEP RESPECT FOR FACTS VERSUS BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION

Skloot starts *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* with the words: “This is a work of nonfiction” (ix). She first had the inspiration for writing it in a biology course in 1988, when she learned that despite the fact that HeLa cells were one of the most important developments in medical research in the last 100 years, no one even knew the name of the cell donor. Skloot began to investigate who Henrietta Lacks was, where she came from, how she lived and died, and how her family dealt with the discovery that their mother’s cells were still being used for medical research for decades, becoming a source for financial profit, without their knowledge. A turning point comes in 1999 when Skloot meets the Professor Roland Pattilo in Atlanta, who had been the only African-American student of Doctor George Gey at John Hopkins. Pattilo gives her a contact for the Lacks family and explains to her how difficult it will be to ask the Lacks family members about their mother.

The book’s two chronological lines follow in parallel – from 1951 on, the story of HeLa cells and the Lacks family, and from 1999 on, Skloot’s struggles to communicate with Lacks’s descendants, mostly with her daughter Deborah, to give a detailed personal story of the family. She eventually spoke with Lacks’s friends and family for over a thousand hours, as well as with journalists, ethicists, attorneys, and researchers who have written on the Lacks family. In addition, she drew upon an extensive collection of historical and scientific sources, as well as the private diaries of Deborah Lacks, making every effort to accurately quote the language that each person used while speaking and writing.

In contrast, Crichton begins his novel *Next* with the words: “This novel is fiction, except for the parts that aren’t.” He had an extraordinary talent for identifying themes that, for many experts, may seem pure science fiction, but he foresaw their possible real-life implications. Where others saw mere facts, Crichton saw a gripping story, often carrying a clear message about how original intentions can go awry due to chance and the complexities of the world. But the main problem with *Next*, from the perspective of bioethical education and public awareness in bioethical issues, is his blurring of the line between fact and fiction. As Diaz-Santos states: “media critics, literary analysts, scientists, and FASP researchers/practitioners blame Crichton’s mixing and blurring of contemporary science and plausible fiction to entertain and educate readers” (2002, 2).

Crichton was known for doing thorough research and preparation before writing, including conversations with experts, and he was able to describe facilities, equipment, and procedures in detail. However, in his techno thrillers, including *Next*, he did not write stories as realistically as possible, but rather manipulated reality, making it difficult for the reader to distinguish between facts and fiction. On the one hand, the characters are portrayed as “real, flawed people, not simple caricatures” (Grazier 2008, vii), but on the other hand, readers can easily take pure fictions as scientifically verified facts. As Robert Golla has pointed out, in 1999 Crichton declared on the Charlie Rose TV show that he was “attracted to the challenge of trying to write a story that will be persuasive, even for a few hours, on some subject that’s impossible or highly, highly unlikely” (2011, 169). This recalls the 1938 radio drama adaptation by Orson Welles of the science fiction novel *The War of the Worlds*, which incited a panic among some listeners that a real Martian invasion of Earth was happening.

BIOETHICS AND BIOPOLITICS OF THE HUMAN BODY IN *THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS* AND *NEXT*

For many readers, it may seem that the absurd storylines of *Next* are presented only with the goal of entertaining the reader, but in many cases they have very little if anything to do with reality. Michael Goldman’s review for the journal *Nature* criticizes the fact that *Next* addresses “every aspect of the biotechnology craze at once” (2007, 819), and expresses an opinion that would presumably be shared by most scientists and legal experts:

Next is a veritable catalogue of what could go wrong with biotechnology. This is what would happen if every patent attorney and judge had a prefrontal lobotomy. [...] Body parts and eggs are traded like commodities, and genetically engineered fish display illuminated advertising billboards on their sides. I admit that Crichton had me going with the *Tyrannosaurus rex* in *Jurassic Park*, but somehow that was a bit more believable, and had a lot more suspense. (Goldman 2007, 819)

However, it is instructive to compare Frank Burnet’s cell line story from *Next* with the following real-life story known as the *Case of Moore versus the Regents of the University of California*. In 1976, John Moore was been diagnosed with a severe form of leukemia, and was sent to David Golde, a prominent cancer researcher at UCLA, who told Moore that his spleen had to be removed. In 1983 Moore found that Golde had developed, patented and marketed the “Mo cell-line”, taken from his cells, which naturally produced lymphokines in a very high concentration and therefore could be used for cancer treatment. Moore sued Golde, but the California Supreme Court denied Moore a property right and he lost the case.

Clearly, Crichton fictionalized the real story of John Moore, but he added the completely fictitious motive of bounty hunters chasing cells (making his text a thriller) and exaggerated the absurdity of the real legal system (adding satire). However, satire can be, and often has been, used for constructive social criticism. From the author’s note at the end of the book we know exactly what Crichton is criticizing through the fictional Burnet’s story: “Historically, the courts have decided questions about human tissues based on existing property law. In general, they have ruled that once

your tissue leaves your body, you no longer maintain any rights to it. They analogize tissues to, say, the donation of a book to a library” (Crichton 2006). As Crichton said in one interview there are such “bounty hunters” as the ones in the novel, but we call them lawyers (2006).² Thus his use of the “bounty hunter” metaphor perfectly fits in Paul Ricœur’s understanding of metaphor (1977) as a vivifying principle in which imagination is used for thinking more at the conceptual level. In *Next*, Crichton also sees the question of tissue ownership from the perspective of cells and genes, but he fictionalizes this by including the possible use of human genes, such as giving animals genetically enhanced human-like capacities, and discusses the new kind of capitalism that goes with it – biocapitalism. Using relatively believable stories, and inserted news reports, he presents the position that genetic and biomedical research needs to be developed, but sensitively regulated. The development of biotechnological, pharmaceutical and genetic start-ups with investment from venture capitalists, but also the monopoly imposed by multinationals, can be left entirely to the rules of free market economics. However, it is equally wrong to adopt a stance that promotes the development of genetics and biomedical sciences, as is the case with genetic manipulation or embryonic stem cells.

Although we can hardly find more different narratives and literary styles than those used by Crichton in *Next* and by Skloot in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, the goal of both narratives is almost the same. Skloot focuses on a one historical example, HeLa cells, in the context of the issues of informed consent, property rights over the cells and genes of one’s own body, and class and race discrimination. For all the differences in genre, narrative, or facts, Skloot, like Crichton, concludes the book with an “Afterword” (315–328). There is not only a great overlap in what both authors cover in these afterwords, but also in their arguments, even though neither author mentions the other. Crichton makes no reference to *Henrietta Lacks* and HeLa cells in *Next* (despite the similarity of the case, he could not have been familiar with Skloot’s book, which came out after his death). Nor is there any mention of *Next* in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, in which Skloot might have referred to Crichton’s hearing at the US Senate to change the law regarding the biomedical use of tissues and the patenting of genes.

Crichton’s afterword focuses on five topics where the changes of US laws are necessary to avoid absurd situations described in his fiction: banning patents on genes, setting clear and ethical rules for the use of human tissues, passing a law about gene testing, avoiding ban on research, and rescind universities’ patents on their research results. He argues for new and “emphatic legislation” concerning human tissues, because “people have a strong feeling of ownership about their bodies, and that feeling will never be abrogated by a mere legal technicality” (312). Skloot’s afterword argues in a similar way: “people often have a strong sense of ownership when it comes to their bodies. Even tiny scraps of them. Especially when they hear that someone else might be making money off those scraps, or using them to uncover potentially damaging information about their genes and medical histories” (316–317). She is not against the commercialization of human tissues and tissue research, because it is necessary for companies to make drugs and diagnostic tests for medical use, but

an answer must be found to the question of “where the people who donate those raw materials fit into that marketplace” (322).

BIOETHICS OF THE HUMAN BODY

In *The Body in Bioethics* (2009), the eminent British bioethicist Alastair Campbell points out the changing situation in biomedical ethics concerning the human body:

The body has become big business. With the rapid expansion of transplantation organs and tissues, the development of cell technology and the hope of ever new therapeutic marvels from targeted pharmaceuticals, the body and its parts have become of increasing interest to the health care industry. (11)

Since money and other forms of remuneration were first offered for blood donation in the 1960s, there has been an ongoing debate about whether medical donations in general should be based only on pure acts of altruism or whether financial compensation should also be permissible. In 1970, Richard Titmuss published his seminal work *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* in which he formulated the central problem as a dichotomy: will human body parts be altruistically given to those who need them, or sold and bought and treated like any other commodity? He was dealing with the problem of paying for blood donations, but he saw the issue in a much more general terms: “ultimately human hearts, kidneys, eyes and other organs of the body may also come to be treated as commodities” (219). He argued in favor of implementing biopolicies (regulations) based on the morally superior altruistic principle – giving blood and all human body parts as an altruistic gift, without expectation of anything in return, including financial or non-financial compensation. His book had an important impact on the later formulation of organ donation for transplantation in the 1980s in the USA and other countries.

However, the altruistic foundation of the donation of human body parts has been challenged as human cells, tissue, and genes have become extensively used for research and new drug development, and biotechnological and pharmaceutical companies started to have a significant, sometimes high financial gain. Unlike the case of blood or organ donations, for centuries human biological material was understood as biological waste, not having any value for a donor except when used for individual diagnosis, but this is not the case anymore. The problem of commodification of human tissue has been reflected and analyzed from various perspectives – economic (Rajan 2006; Waldbly and Mitchell 2006), ethical (Radin 1996; Wilkinson 2003), legal (Bainham, Sclater, and Richards 2002), feministic (Dickenson 2017), and societal (Cheney 2006).

One of the central questions in both *Next* and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* is that of the property rights in human body parts (including genes). Do we own our bodies, our cells, tissue, genes? The answer may seem counter-intuitive that we are not the owners of our bodies, but legal systems in theory and practice are grounded on this assumption, rather than on the assumption that our bodies are naturally ours (Bovenberg 2006).

On the other hand, based on the principle of distributive justice, upon which liberal democracies are built, it should be the other way around, and we have a right to decide how to use our extracted cells, tissue, and genes in order to share the profit (Fabre 2006). Thus it is important to take into account the fact that “our bodies hold psychological importance for us while we live and, after we die” (Goold et al. 2014, 1), as Skloot demonstrates in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*.

However, both *Next* and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* focus the problem on property rights, commodification versus non-commodification, distributive justice or the psychology of body, but ignore the real cause of what is perceived as an absurd and contra intuitive legal system dealing with body parts – that it is a consequence of accepting altruism as the only founding ethical principle of donating human biological samples. Therefore, as previously pointed out, it is necessary to re-think the altruistic “gift” principle in the donation of human parts and to go beyond the charitable trust model (Sýkora [2009] 2016). Suggested solutions include framing the ethical challenges associated with the donation of human cells and tissues to biobanks, even organs for transplantation, within the broader conceptual framework of indirect reciprocity as an additional ethical principle to altruism (Sýkora [2009] 2016, 2021) or with the concept of bioequity as a new property class for human material (Hoppe [2009] 2016).

CONCLUSION

Despite their different narratives and literary styles, Michael Crichton’s *Next* and Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* have both raised awareness of the ethical and legal contradictions regarding human body parts: on the one hand, how tangible (cells, tissues) and intangible (genes) body parts are perceived by the people from whom they are isolated, cultivated in vitro, and deciphered (DNA), and on the other hand, how these parts are used not only for medical research and treatment, but also for profit by biotechnological and pharmaceutical companies without any compensation for the donors. The question raised by both books, each in its own way, is not only that of property rights and informed consent, but also that of the application of the principle of justice. It is the problem of a mutually just relationship between individuals (donors of body parts for the common good), and society (including commercial companies), which benefits from it.

In case of some donors, the commercial benefit has been enormous. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* has had a profound impact, and it was an opportunity for the media to popularize bioethical issues among the general public. Media analysis confirmed that “the success of the book should demonstrate to bioethicists and scientists there is an intense public appetite for compelling narratives about advances in medical research and the ethical issues involved” (Nisbet and Fahy 2013). According to the publisher, the book “was selected for common reading at more than 250 colleges and universities”, as well as many high schools in the US.³ It has become the subject of empirical research, as in for example, the study of the multiple pedagogic impacts on the public health classroom setting (Dimaano and Spigner 2016).

Skloot is highly regarded as an author in scientific circles, thanks to her efforts to be as historically accurate and comprehensive as possible.

Crichton's perception among experts has been largely negative, especially after the publication of his book *The State of Fear* and his controversial statements in the media about global warming, where he sided with conspiracy theorists. Nevertheless, Crichton's book should also be used for bioethics education, as long as we focus on the issue of human tissue. I agree with Michael Goldman that *Next* "could have a role as a conversation starter for a course in bioethics. Most students would find it more entertaining than the typical textbook, and it covers a similar range of issues" (2007, 820). It is important for bioethics education precisely because, as Goldman points out, Crichton's scientific ability and imagination transcend the current ethical and legal situation.

Finally, the two books have another feature in common that is relevant from a bioethical perspective. Neither *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* nor *Next* addresses the full philosophical and ethical underpinnings of the issues that have been analyzed and debated in the bioethical literature for decades in this context: namely, the question of anchoring the biomedical donation of human body parts on the principle of pure altruism, and why it is important to re-think the issue from the point of biomedical solidarity.

NOTES

- ¹ For a wider definition of bioethics see, for example, <https://bioethics.jhu.edu/about/what-is-bioethics/>.
- ² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMt5WkNSKdU>.
- ³ See <https://penguinrandomhousesecondaryeducation.com/book/?isbn=9781400052189>.

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