



Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

## The Jacques Loeb Centre for the History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences

A joint seminar with the Department of Health Systems Management  
**Genetics, Law, and Human Rights**

### Daniel J. Kevles, Yale University

Since the early twentieth century, genetics has joined with law to shape and reshape human rights in reproduction, privacy, and medicine. By World War I, American eugenicists, aiming to rid society of the genetically “unfit,” accomplished the passage of compulsory sterilization laws in many states. In 1927, in the case of *Buck v. Bell*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Virginia’s sterilization law, holding that individual reproductive rights could properly be subordinated to the greater interest of the state in preventing the birth of so-called degenerates. Yet in 1973, in *Roe v. Wade*, genetics was invoked along with notions of a right to privacy to help secure women the constitutional right of elective abortion. Since then, computerized genomics and biotechnology have posed new challenges to law and human rights. One of them was the potential distribution to employers and insurance companies of private genetic information that could disadvantage employees and clients. Another was the privatizing of human genes through patents that, in the case of the two genes known to dispose women to breast and ovarian cancer, restricted scientific research and patient access to sound medical care. However, in 2008 Congress blocked the abuse of genetic information with the passage of the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act, and this past June the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the patents on the two breast-cancer genes. This lecture will examine the three episodes with regard to how and why law and genetics first limited and then came to bolster human rights.

May 28th (Wednesday), Joyce and Irving Goldman Medical  
School, Building M10 ([map](#)), Room 204, 16:00

The Jacques Loeb Centre seminars provide an interdisciplinary forum, in which historians and philosophers of science, as well as scientists, present and discuss new research related to science with a special focus on the life sciences. Case studies and surveys examine the impact of political, socio-economic and personal factors on the conduct of science, the ethics of research, and the causes of progress and setbacks.

**Faculty and students from all disciplines are invited!**

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