

and the university administration; (2) perspectives on the benefits and drawbacks of unionization for workers, employers, and society more generally; and (3) general literature on the legal and ethical dilemmas raised by subcontracting in Iraq. At the top of the packet, I included a list of questions, the first of which was: “What, if any, ‘bioethical’ issues does the Sodexo controversy raise?”

For many bioethicists, the answer to this question would be “none.” My students and I came to a different conclusion. In class, we discussed the case of one of the workers, who, though pregnant, was denied break time and who, along with the other workers demanding unionization, was presumably struggling to pay her living expenses, including health care. “What if she decided to get an abortion?” I asked. “Would her labor situation be relevant to her decision to abort?” The answer to this question was clear, but the students went even further, pointing out that labor status was relevant not only to abortion but also to practically all of the bioethical topics we had discussed, including euthanasia, organ donation, and eugenics. At the same time, our examination of subcontracting in Iraq showed that, while Emory’s decision to abandon the employees was certainly a moral failure, it was also part of a systemic shift toward subcontracting practices that had created ethical and legal conundrums throughout the world. That bioethicists had written hundreds of thousands of pages on “autonomy” without writing one article about its relation to subcontracting seemed, by the end of class, an indication that the field had misunderstood its own premises.

The goal of bioethics in the next forty years should be to guarantee that such fundamental misunderstandings do not occur. This will happen by stopping the search for new topics and instead becoming more reflective about our methods and more proactive in building institutions that can produce thinkers with the sensitivity and analytical skills to realize the field’s founding ideals. Doing so will require redefining the contours of not only the field, but also our own identity as professionals. It will not be easy, but if we want to live up to our role as moral arbiters of some of our society’s thorniest problems, it is work that we will be glad to undertake.

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1. D. Rothman, *Strangers at the Bedside: A History of How Law and Bioethics Transformed Medical Decision Making* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Aldine Transaction, 2008).

2. R. Cooter, “The Resistible Rise of Medical Ethics,” *Social History of Medicine* 8, no. 2 (1995): 257-70.

3. S.E. Lederer, “Children as Guinea Pigs: Historical Perspectives,” *Accountability in Research* 10, no. 1 (2003): 1-16.

4. See, for example, O. Corrigan, “Empty Ethics: The Problem with Informed Consent,” *Sociology of Health and Illness* 25, no. 7 (2003):

768-92; P. Farmer and N.G. Campos, “Rethinking Medical Ethics: A View from Below,” *Developing World Bioethics* 4, no. 1 (2004): 17-41; and C. Gill, “The False Autonomy of Forced Choice: Rationalizing Suicide for Persons with Disabilities,” in *Contemporary Perspectives on Rational Suicide*, ed. J.L. Werth (Philadelphia, Penn.: Routledge, 1998), 171-80.

5. For more on the investigation of “problem constitution” in philosophically oriented social science research, see S.K. White, “The Very Idea of a Critical Social Science: A Pragmatist Turn,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. F. Rush (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 310-35.

Two Chicks in a Lab with Eggs

BY LISA CAMPO-ENGELSTEIN AND SARAH B. RODRIGUEZ

One winter morning, the two of us—both postdoctoral fellows in medical humanities and bioethics—gathered with a handful of reproductive science graduate students in the lab to watch a demonstration on making alginate beads. Due to their three-dimensional nature, the beads are capable of holding ovarian follicles—the beads act as though they were a small ovary. The scientists in the lab have managed to mature the follicles maintained in the beads into eggs, fertilize these eggs, and produce the birth of live mice. This research was begun in an effort to develop a means of gathering ovarian follicles from young human cancer patients before they commence cancer treatment that may result in their infertility, thus preserving parts of their ovaries for later use in in vitro fertilization.

But the point of this paper is what else happened that day in the lab. The graduate students and the fellows began

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