

2018 FALL BIOETHICS LECTURE

Immigration, Health Care, and the Duty to Rescue: Ethical Challenges of an Open Society

THE LECTURE

The 2018 Fall Bioethics Lecture is dedicated to the issue of immigration, an issue most urgent for a bioethics mindful of global problems, but also central to our own national public debate.

The topic is of extraordinary relevance. The news of a so called “caravan” of over 5,000 refugees from Central America, pushing through Mexico and soon arriving to our US borders, is only the latest story. For sure, the tragedy of people’s migration, triggered by social, political, and economical factors, has a much longer history, and certainly effects a wider impact in many parts of the world today.

The focus of our Fall Bioethics Lecture is “immigration and health care,” a perspective most central to the problem, especially in light of the policies implemented by our current U.S. administration. These policies, whether officially stated or simply enforced without clear legal mandate, are cruel enough to warrant moral outrage. One example for all might be the treatment of immigrant children, a treatment so ethically problematic that, in April 2017, it prompted the American Academy of Pediatrics to issue a public statement against Homeland Security rules (see <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2017/03/09/peds.2017-0483.full>)

In the statement, the American Academy of Pediatrics decries the conditions in which children are detained and the lack of support services available to them. It asks that, in accordance with internationally accepted rights of the child, immigrant and refugee children be treated with dignity and respect, without being exposed to conditions that may harm or traumatize them.

This and other aspects of the issues we face are not without political implications. Yet, the main questions raised by the human tragedy of immigration are of an *ethical* nature: they interrogate our responsibility as a society that prides itself for being grounded on values of tolerance, openness, and compassion.

Should a liberal society inspired by those values recognize that the presence of immigrants at our borders -- or indeed already in our midst, if only anonymously, entails, on our part, something like a “duty to rescue”?

If so, what are the extents and limits of such a duty? And how to understand its priority, when a duty to rescue needs reconciling with broader commitments to the common good, so as to be not only prophetic but also reasonable?

THE SPEAKER

Dr. Rodríguez is Professor and Vice Chair in the UCLA Department of Family Medicine and Professor in the UCLA Department of Community Health Sciences, Founding Director of the Health Equity Network of the Americas, and Founding Chair of the UCLA Minor in Global Health.

He completed his undergraduate training at the University of California, Berkeley; received his medical degree from UCLA; completed his residency from the UC San Francisco's Family Medicine Residency Program; received his Master of Public Health degree at the Johns Hopkins University and was a Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar at Stanford University.

Dr. Rodriguez is also a prolific scholar, whose research activities include focus on health equity and social determinants of health. Specific areas of research and policy include intimate partner violence, healthcare and health for immigrants across the life course and health systems.

He has published widely and consulted for the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Institute of Medicine.

He is also a Board Member for the Blue Shield of California Foundation and Latino Coalition for a Healthy California.