

Editorial

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Received: 26 February 2011 / Accepted: 28 February 2011 / Published online: 12 April 2011
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Muse to health care practitioners and writers alike, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's successes and struggles as a physician, author, and even public health officer set a standard since the late-nineteenth century and indelibly into the future for all who study the human condition.

On the one hand, he is remembered for his medical exposé of a Siberian “penal colony where 10,000 convicts and political prisoners lived in frozen exile”; his dedicated private practice in Melikhovo (south of Moscow) amid a cholera epidemic; and his tireless fund-raising efforts “for a tuberculosis sanitarium” in Yalta, even as he, himself, suffered from the “great white plague” (Schwartz 2004, 213–14).

On the other, he is known as social journalist, celebrated playwright, and virtuoso of the modern short story. Prolific to a degree few dare to aspire,

Chekhov lacked neither skill nor inspiration. As author and writing scholar Francine Prose recounts in her book, *Reading Like a Writer*:

Once, when someone asked him his method of composition, Chekhov picked up an ashtray. “This is my method of composition,” he said. “Tomorrow I will write a story called ‘The Ashtray’” (Prose 2006, 243).

More often quoted, however, is Chekhov's declaration in an 1888 letter to friend and newspaper publisher Alexei Suvorin about reconciling his two loves: “Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one I spend the night with the other. Though it's disorderly, it's not so dull, and besides neither of them loses anything from my infidelity” (2006, 62).

Scholars and students of bioethics have much in common which Chekhov, who examined not only health and medicine in historical, social, and professional terms but also the lives of the underprivileged and oppressed.¹ Doing so is nothing if not a

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¹ One task—and perhaps the most important—of a bioethicist is advocating with and for those who cannot adequately do so themselves. Chekhov's track record has its blemishes in this area. Although he documented the inhumane conditions on Sakhalin Island in 1890 (Chekhov 2007), “dispensed free medicine” in his private practice (Schwartz 2004, 213), and publicly defended alongside Émile Zola falsely imprisoned Jew and French captain Alfred Dreyfus in 1898, he was and has been criticized for writing for *Novoye Vremia*, a right-wing newspaper published by the anti-Dreyfus and anti-Semitic Alexei Suvorin (Gottlieb 2005, lxxvii).

challenging duty accompanied by some amount of trepidation. And whether we produce our discourse about “ashtrays” effortlessly or laboriously, we know the interdisciplinary, international charge of bioethics to be also vital and rewarding. We must don many hats, we must bridge myriad professions, we must keep an eye on history and our lives today even as we envision the future.

We are, therefore, delighted and honored to introduce ourselves as the new co-editors in chief of the *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, a publication we believe is dedicated to carrying out this mission. Whether inspired by Chekhov and his now infamous “adulterous” arrangement, we are grateful to the journal’s Editorial Board for its decision to appoint two people share this key position and to our predecessor, Kate Cregan, for her exemplary leadership and tireless service. Following in her footsteps, we hope our dual editorship is a marriage that will be fruitful, for the journal and for the larger field of bioethics.

In one sense, as co-editors we are very much alike—both lovers of medicine, literature, philosophy, law, social science, history, and the humanities. These passions attract us to a working relationship with one another and to the inclusive round-table that is the *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*.

Like any good pairing, though, we come from two very distant places. Leigh is an anthropologist and public health professor at a regional university in Savannah, Georgia, in the United States, with special interests in the body, biotechnology and the law, and media and communication; Michael is a palliative care physician in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, with special interests in death and dying. We hope these differences ensure the whole is stronger than the sum of its parts.

Together, we come to the journal at a time in its history where, although still small, it is well established and with an emerging identity in the global bioethics conversation. Its extended family already consists of an international community of scholars who consider, in depth, some of the most challenging issues in the fast-growing world of health and the life sciences.

It falls to us not only to care for the day-to-day processes of producing a scholarly journal but also to nurture its growth and future achievements.

We understand the journal’s origins, which always will remain important, and we are united in our strategic plan regarding what it can become. First, the *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* is an international forum born in Australia and New Zealand, with a growing presence in North America, the United Kingdom, and Europe. Second, it provides an opportunity for the publication of serious academic work that is accessible across disciplines. Third, it is an essential tool for bioethics, which necessarily involves vibrant and dynamic conversation among different fields and professionals as well as the application of diverse methods. Qualitative approaches and the humanities have as much to say in ethics as philosophy, medicine, and the law. Logical positivism and evidence-based research are necessary for scientific progress and practice, but they cannot tell the whole story and have their limits in the pursuit of the human dimension of biology and the health sciences.

To even attempt to understand the human condition, then, we must spend time with our lawful wives and our mistresses, and they must know one another as intimately as we engage them.

Additionally, we want the journal to mature into the reputable resource we know it to be, but on a larger scale. Corners of the world such as Asia, Africa, and South America still need to be brought into the fold so that our conversation is current and truly cross-cultural. Because bioethics touches the lives and has “real” implications for “real” populations, the journal can and should become a source of appropriate information for those beyond academia as well. We must create dialogue with those we ultimately serve, most readily through the mass media. As the journal emerges from its adolescence, we also can help shape its personality by encouraging the examination of certain themes and balancing the totality of symposia, invited papers, and submitted papers.

In our joint custody of the journal, we promise to hold dear its mission and give it room to grow, beyond us and even further into its own. We realize, at least in relation to scholarly publications, that having two people in charge is “disorderly” and not exempt from old-fashioned academic rows. It is,

however, “not so dull,” and more productive and less perilous than other affairs.

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