

Remarks on the Occasion of Rosie Tong's Retirement

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The following is the script (to which I more or less kept) of my remarks at an evening celebrating Prof. Tong's remarkable career, on the occasion of her retirement.

I'd like to welcome all of you to this evening's symposium. In addition, I'd like to thank those of you who are Community Advisors or Faculty Associates of the Center – if you could maybe wave your hands for a moment. Finally, before getting truly started, I need to acknowledge a few specific people. One is Dean Gutierrez, who has been supportive of me as a new Center director and in planning for this event. Another is Mai Li Munoz, the CLAS development officer, whose doing all of the behind-the-scenes fundraising. The third is Pam Eudy, my administrative assistant. If she weren't here for the Center, every day, we would be doing pretty much nothing, and there certainly wouldn't be food or really anything else tonight. The effort to administer something really helps you see how dependent leadership is on your supporting cast, and Pam is at the center of that supporting cast. So if we could stop for just a minute to acknowledge her...

An event like this is unusual, and I'd had some trouble thinking of what to call it. The term "Rosie fest" popped into my head, but as I was sitting in traffic the other day I realized that I think I was channeling something Neil Young said on a Bob Dylan tribute album – he welcomed everybody to "Bob Fest." And then the metaphor fell totally apart. What we wanted to do was to present an opportunity for all of us to come together to honor Rosie and her career, both here at UNC Charlotte and in her previous positions at Davidson and then Williams College before that. We settled on "The Many Faces of Bioethics" because it really means two things, and it's one of those terms that lets you say two things at once.

On the one hand – and I'll admit this is what I thought of first – it's a way of talking about how many different kinds of topics are a part of bioethics today, and so it's an occasion to reflect on Rosie's role in making bioethics as diverse and as vibrant as it is. Certainly Rosie's attention to feminist issues – of making sure that the experiences and voices of women are part of the conversation – will be one of her lasting contributions. As I tell colleagues at other institutions, Rosie literally wrote the book on feminist bioethics, and I've run into a lot of people who've either taught that book in their own classes. So that's one thing – Rosie has always tried to make sure that bioethics was an inclusive discussion, with attention to diversity, healthcare disparities, and the experiences and voices of those who aren't always represented very well in our societal conversations. As we look at the amazing innovations in and changes to healthcare even over the last few years – everything from the finding a few weeks ago that something like

2/3 of cancers in a population could be predicted using no variable other than random mutations, to the institutional forces behind the Affordable Care Act – Rosie’s commitment to inclusion is one that we all need to strive to maintain. I’ll talk a little about that kind of thing in a few minutes, as will our other speakers.

In another sense, however, the notion of the many faces of bioethics refers to all of us. It’s always been with both appreciation and gratitude that I’ve looked out at the many different faces that Rosie brought to bioethics. This isn’t a matter of topics but a matter of people. That all of you are here tonight is a testament to her abilities in bringing together and forming a community of people for whom bioethics, and ethics more generally, is a worthwhile topic. I’ll put it this way: if we could have had this event at Art’s, we would have seriously thought about it.

As you know, the other purpose of this evening is to raise some money. I would like very much – and everybody I float this idea to thinks it’s a good one – to use the occasion of Rosie’s retirement as an opportunity to establish an endowed lecture in her honor. The model here is something like the Barnhardt seminar, which many of you know well – and the idea is that one of the best ways to honor Rosie’s accomplishments is to make sure that every year in perpetuity, the Center sponsors a significant event where we bring someone to Charlotte who is engaged in the kinds of work Rosie spent her career doing. So the topic is something about feminist issues in bioethics. I know that the College’s development officer, Mai Li Munoz, has been in contact with many of you, and there are also envelopes on the registration table, if you feel moved to help make this happen, which you can get to at the end of the evening. In the happy event that you feel moved to help more than should go into an envelope, you should find Mai Li at that time – if she could wave or something...

So welcome. I have the honor of sharing some aspects of Rosie’s career with you, which I’ll ask your and her indulgence in talking about for a while, because it really is remarkable. After that, I want to talk about the Ethics Center and what she has bequeathed to me, and then I’ll talk a little at the end about my own work, and how Rosie has helped me to learn to be a better bioethicist.

1. Career

Rosie has a really long c.v. – if you print the whole thing out, it runs to nearly a hundred pages, and her professional accomplishments are impossible to miss. I’m only going to give you the highlights here.

Rosie completed a BA in religious studies and German at Marygrove college in Detroit, followed in short order by an MA in Philosophy from Catholic University in DC. Her MA thesis was on the 19th century German philosopher William Dilthey, who was really important in how we understand the social sciences – the so-called “*Geisteswissenschaften*.” Indeed, Rosie’s thesis – which I confess I have not read – was reinterpreting Dilthey’s understanding of the

Geisteswissenschaften. After that, she earned her PhD in philosophy from Temple University in Philadelphia, where she defended a dissertation called “Towards a Rational reconstruction of Anglo-American Criminal Law: The Insanity Defense.”

The first thing you’ll notice here is the diversity of topics that Rosie is interested in. Only a couple of years ago, she was directly referring to her work in philosophy of law in conversations with me, and certainly the willingness to look at notoriously difficult concepts like the “insanity defense” speaks to her willingness to look at the real-world implications of theories. It’s one thing to talk about what the various DSM definitions of terms like “insanity” mean – but it’s another thing entirely when someone’s life is on the line for a capital crime, and you have to decide if they were competent at that moment to know what they were doing. So too, we see an initial interest in medical topics, as psychiatry moved away from its Freudian beginnings into the mainstream of medical practice. And before all of that, we see Rosie’s work on Dilthey, whose work was fundamental in establishing methods for interpreting human experience, and in relating those to society. So, really, already, there are here three of the main areas where Rosie’s contributions would be coming – medicine, policy, and the meaning of human experience, especially that of women, too often left out of conversations in medicine and policy.

Before I talk more about that, you should know that, with the exception of a few visiting positions, Rosie spent her entire career at Williams College, where she earned tenure in the philosophy department, then as a distinguished professor of humanities at Davidson College, and then as a university professor here at UNC Charlotte. I don’t have a lot to add to that – except to say that UNC Charlotte keeps good company, as those are two of the best liberal arts colleges in the country. I should also add that success at liberal arts colleges means that you’re a good teacher who cares about your students. One of the Center’s speakers this year was a student of hers from Williams, and he spoke glowingly of her as a teacher. And I’ve talked to more than one student of hers here who described learning from her as a life-changing – in a good way! – experience. So when Lisa, Nancy and I speak of learning things from Rosie, we really should never forget something much more important, which is the many, many students whose lives she’s touched.

(a) Feminism/experience

I said that Rosie’s work from day one was concerned about the meaning of human experience, and I think it’s this interest in human experience that probably serves to animate so much of her work. So, for example, I saw her give a paper at the main applied ethics conference a couple of years ago where she talked about ethical concerns in elder care and aging. After working through the details – suffice it to say that the so-called developed countries – the U.S., Western Europe,

and Japan in particular – have fairly rapidly aging populations, and aren't ready for it – Rosie focused on her real concern, which is what this situation meant for caregivers in a world where care for both children and parents falls mostly to women. She urged a society-wide rethinking of care work, a rethink that would make it ok for men to be careworkers, too. Because that's the only way, as a society, that we're going to deal with a major demographic transition. Our third child was born here in Charlotte, and UNC Charlotte – unlike any other place I've worked – has not just maternity leave, but paternity, so I got to spend three months with my baby. It's better this way, and Rosie gets it.

(b) Policy

I'm a geek. I like talking about abstract things in great detail. Unfortunately, it turns out that most people aren't like that. Rosie, to her credit, isn't like that so much. She's been a real advocate for bringing philosophical and theoretical discussions to the policy table – to the so-called real world (I'll leave it to you all to decide if policymaking is actually real-world or not!). Her retirement has forced me to do more of that too – I've inherited the ethics class for the public policy program. Fortunately, copyright law is sufficiently abstruse that it manages to straddle both geek-land and policymaking, and so I could talk about that. But Rosie had been teaching that course for years. A glance through Rosie's c.v. discloses an enormous list of problems and topics that are very, very real: in the mid 1980s, she published several pieces on pornography, often with the additional word "law" in the title. And, ok, you say: please stop talking about feminist issues. Fair enough! Rosie also wrote on surrogacy arrangements, euthanasia and death with dignity (she was way ahead of the curve on this one!), learning how to teach, ethical issues at play in dealing with pandemic influenza, and – this dates back to the 1980s – how to bring ethical values into policy analysis, including a book.

And then there's this. Nowadays, it's more or less normal to call in the ethicist when your lawyer gives up on you, but Rosie was already writing – back in 1991 – on how to make sure that our turn to ethical professionals in policymaking was itself done ethically, without giving too much power to the ethicists, who, Rosie stressed, need to persuade but not force, and to view their main goal as helping individuals make their own decisions.

Rosie, then, took ethics directly to policy. She also took herself there, and took an active role in the low-level process of ethical research. She got grants – big ones by philosophy standards - to develop medical humanities programs, to help ensure that more people, doctors especially, emerge with a good sense of the human aspects of medicine. In 2000, she was funded to host an academic and professional conference here at UNC Charlotte on dealing with healthcare disparities; she worked with Mecklenburg County Public Health on this topic too. She's served as an ethics consultant for numerous hospitals. And she has served

as a grants evaluator for the NIH over and over and over again. These sorts of work aren't appreciated as much as they should be: they don't get you on the cover of any magazines, they don't expand your bank account – but both the academy and policy-making would grind to a halt without people like Rosie who do them.

(c) Medicine

You've heard the list of topics – most of them, you'll notice, have to deal with healthcare and healthcare delivery, and you've heard evidence of her engagement on a daily basis with the ethical concerns that arise in medical contexts. Certainly it is here where her influence has been the greatest, partly because, as I said a few minutes ago, she wrote the book first on feminist ethics, and then the one on feminist bioethics. It's also where her connections in Charlotte run deepest, and it's been my privilege to get to know some – a very small part! – of her many friends in the Charlotte medical community. Medical ethics had been one of those awkward children within philosophy – it wasn't deemed theoretical enough – and Rosie's work has been instrumental in making it something respectable, both in and outside the academy. I won't go on with more article titles and topics, because you won't be able to keep everything in your head, and plus I'm talking too much already – but I think it's worth noting here that Rosie has served on a lot of editorial boards. Again, it's not work that gets your picture on the front cover – if you're lucky, they'll list you on the inside of the back cover somewhere near the journal's logo, but in smaller print than “Editor in Chief” – but it's the kind of work that really changes the direction of academic work, because it involves deciding what academic work gets published. I am not a medical ethicist – but I don't see that the field would be where it is today without Rosie and folks like her.

2. Ethics Center

I've talked enough about Rosie's cv. I want to talk a bit about the UNC Charlotte Ethics Center, since that's where I've worked with Rosie the most. And, as you know, I've inherited the job of director from her. I don't have a lot of time left (actually, I probably do, since I keep being told I'm the ‘Director,’ but I don't want to abuse you), but I want to say that Rosie bequeathed to me a center that had a couple of things going for it that most Centers don't – and I went last year to a national conference with a day-long session for Ethics Center directors, so for once I know whereof I speak. First, the Center here looks both inward to the academy, and outward into Charlotte. Most Centers do only one of those, and it's a testament to a lot of work on Rosie's part that this one does both. That's its own challenge, of course, but it means that the Center's impact and work is a lot more visible than it would otherwise be. It also means that we are able to help keep conversations going between the academy and other constituent communities in

Charlotte. There is no better example of this than a lunch we had a couple of weeks ago with Elizabeth Racine, a UNC Charlotte professor who has done some and is doing some really important work about food deserts here in Charlotte. I haven't seen the exact headcounts, but we had a lot of people attend, and they came from the university, local neighborhood activist groups, the medical community, and so forth.

Second, she has taken enormous strides in securing the fiscal base of the Center. We don't have a lot of money, but we are absolutely blessed compared to a lot of other institutions. This legacy makes my job possible, and it was secured only by endless hours writing grants, meeting people. It's an ongoing project – the envelopes are on the registration table! – but it only took about twenty minutes into that conference session for me to realize just how much we do, and are able to do. Finally, and this is most important, she left me with a phenomenally diverse and loyal constituency. She has a gift for remembering names and breakfasts that I don't – and this is my apology in-advance to those of you that I meet and then forget your name two days later – and a gift for meeting individual people where they are, listening to their concerns and needs, and then working collaboratively to help meet those needs. At the end of the day, it's people that are most important to a Center, and, well, all of you are here.

3. My own work

I wanted to spend just a second talking about my own work. I mainly study the history of political philosophy, and issues that emerge at the intersection of law, technology, ethics and politics. The main ones of those are intellectual property and privacy. Before I took over the center, my office was in the little suite where the Center is headquartered, and I think there must have been some osmosis: I have since found myself working on medical and clinical issues surrounding patents, for example. What should we as a society do about the coming widespread availability of genetic testing – most probably in direct-to-consumer form? What does it mean as a human being to be told you have inherited the BRCA gene mutation, and face a 50% lifetime chance of developing breast cancer (quite likely when you are young)? What should you do? Should you have children early if you think you might want them? Should you have prophylactic surgery? Should you get preimplantation genetic testing for any children you want to have? What kinds of support networks do you need to make meaningful decisions, and how does the clinical context fit into that decision? I'm supposedly writing a book about intellectual property, and was drawn immediately to this example from patents and medicine. It's the osmosis.

At the same time, Rosie was always very supportive when I wanted to invite people to the center that presented a bit of a change of direction – I am thinking here of Rebecca Tushnet, a law professor who works on mashup videos and intellectual property. As I think about my own work now and in the future, I hope

that Rosie's example of engagement and policy – and most of all, the importance of human experience – is something I carry with me.

It's an exciting time to be here. Charlotte is growing into a major city – the numbers they were talking about on the radio just in uptown were amazing, and you can't walk ten feet without running into new luxury apartments in the Southpark area, where I live. UNC Charlotte is growing into a major research university. I've been helping out with the ethical component of the university's Big Data program, which will hopefully both generate new ideas and new, really good jobs. And apparently Google fiber is coming to town – so all that data can get around a little faster. It's an honor to step into a leadership role at this moment, and the Center wouldn't be in any shape to assume a leadership role without Rosie's dedication to it.

Finally, as part of transitioning to other speakers, I've been getting some copied on some email from Rosie's colleagues around the country, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention a couple of representative ones. Daniel Wueste, who's the director of the Rutland Center for Ethics at Clemson offers his congratulations on a "career worth celebrating."

But I'll give the last words to Deni Elliot, who's the Eleanor Poynter Chair in Media Ethics and Press Policy at the University of South Florida. She writes: "Congratulations Rosie! And thanks for all of your talent and skill in helping to create the bioethics field that we know today."

Thank you.