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ETHICS & RESEARCH
Why a course like this?

- Tell you what the rules are
- Tell you to follow these rules
- Tell you to follow some other rules the teacher likes
- Get you to think critically and clearly about ethics in general and the ethics of research in particular
- Provide a guide to some of the available positions, and their merits and drawbacks.
From The Swedish Research Council:

- Scientific knowledge has a value not only as an instrument, in other words as a means of achieving something else we value. Knowledge is also worth something in its own right – has its own value – regardless of how it might be used.

*Good Research Practice, p. 19 (2017)*
The right to participate in high-risk research

David Shaw

Institutional review boards have a reputation for impeding research. Indeed, many studies are poorly designed, exploit participants, or do not ask a relevant question; the rejection of such protocols by institutional review boards is entirely proper. However, institutional review boards also frequently reject or tamper with perfectly sound and relevant studies to protect participants from harm, in accordance with the widely accepted message that “clinical research is justified only when participants are protected from excessive risks”. Here, I argue that institutional review boards should never reject a study because it poses too high a risk to participants, and that their role should be confined to ensuring that risks and any potential benefits are fully explained to potential participants. Everyone should have the right to participate in research without paternalistic decisions about risk being made on their behalf.

Risky research is a controversial topic. Cases of benchmarks for acceptable risk in clinical research that will not benefit the participant could be as high as the risks of firefighting or donating a kidney. However, why potential participants should be denied the opportunity to participate in trials that pose even higher risks if they wish to do so, is unclear; competent adults can, for example, go skydiving, potholing or bungee jumping. All of these sports are highly dangerous and, unlike research, confer no benefit to society. For example, skydivers have a one in 100,000 risk of death at each jump, and the injury rate is about one in 200. Almost half of bungee jumpers sustain at least minor injury. Why should people not be allowed to run similar or higher risks by participating in societally beneficial clinical research? Although a lot less fun, and also potentially fatal, participation in such research has the potential to help people and demonstrates solidarity with one’s community. Even if a particular study does not result in a new drug being
The graves of the Rounala cemetery in northern Sweden were excavated in 1915.

A number of crania and other remains of Sami individuals, some dating to the 13th century were brought to Uppsala University, but were later moved to The Historical Museum in Stockholm.

The remains give researchers knowledge of the living conditions of middle age northern Sweden.

Sametinget has petitioned for the return and proper burial of the remains.
What is an ethical problem?

Examples of ethical problems related to (your) research?
How come ethics?

- Our behavior affects others
- We have choices
What is this thing called ethics?

- Ethics: arises from *choices*
- *Why do B rather than A?*
- Values, priorities, duties, restrictions
- Doing ethics is reasoning in a thoughtful way around such matters (as opposed to automatically defending status quo or your individual interest).
When do ethical issues arise?

- All. The. Time.
- We tend to focus on some “hot topics”, gay rights, abortion, euthanasia, genetics etc.
- Every situation where an agent (individual or some more complex body) faces a choice between two or more options.
  (possible qualifier: where someone else besides the agent is affected.)
Julie and Mark are brother and sister. They are traveling together in France on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At the very least, it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love, but they decide never to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other.
The formation of a moral judgment – the dull version

- Stimuli
- Affect
- Intuition; spontaneous judgment
- Argumentation (rationalization)
Why we should ban the cloning of humans.

THE WISDOM OF REPUGNANCE

By Leon R. Kass

Our habit of delighting in news of scientific and technological breakthroughs has been sorely challenged by the birth announcement of a sheep named Dolly. Though Dolly shares with previous sheep the "softest clothing, woolly bright," William Blake's question invites a sense of general public. It is now deliberating about what it should recommend, both as a matter of ethics and as a matter of public policy.

Congress is awaiting the commission's report, and is poised to act. Bills to prohibit the use of federal funds for human cloning research have been introduced in series of questions and objections, culminating in the suggestion that "the programmed reproduction of man will, in fact, dehumanize him."

Much has happened in the intervening years. It has become harder, not easier, to discern the true meaning of human cloning. We have in some sense
Moral psychology

- The vice-president of a company went to the chairman of the board and said, ‘We are thinking of starting a new program. It will help us increase profits, but it will also harm the environment.’ The chairman of the board answered, ‘I don’t care at all about harming the environment. I just want to make as much profit as I can. Let’s start the new program.’ They started the new program. Sure enough, the environment was harmed.

- Did the chairman intentionally harm the environment?
Moral psychology

- The vice-president of a company went to the chairman of the board and said, ‘We are thinking of starting a new program. It will help us increase profits, but it will also help the environment.’ The chairman of the board answered, ‘I don’t care at all about helping the environment. I just want to make as much profit as I can. Let’s start the new program.’ They started the new program. Sure enough, the environment was helped.

- Did the chairman intentionally help the environment?
Each card has a number on one side and a letter on the other:

- If a card has a “D” on one side, it has a “3” on the other side.
- Which card(s) do you need to turn over to discover whether this is true?
- Each card says what the person is drinking on one side, and their age on the other.
- Your job is to make sure no underage customer drinks beer.

Drinks beer
Drinks Coke
Is 25
Is 15

- Which card(s) do you need to turn over to discover whether someone is cheating?
Doing a bit of ethics philosophizing amounts to, minimally, becoming aware of these types of psychological phenomena and using reasoned argument as ways of dispassionately assess the merits of moral principles.
Stipulations and clarifications

- Ethics = moral philosophy
- Ethical problem = moral problem

- Ethics ≠ laws or rules, or will of the majority
- Ethics as independent of religion
Scientific ways of studying ethics

- **Sociology, anthropology, history:**
  - “A majority of Swedes are opposed to the death penalty”.
  - “A majority of Americans support the death penalty”.
  - “In culture X, it is considered morally right to ostracize a daughter if she has sex before marriage”.
  - “As the ideas of the Enlightenment spread throughout Europe, acceptance of slavery weakened”.
Psychology:

“Children tend to go through different stages of moral development, starting with fear of punishment and ending up with reflective ideals of universally binding principles”.

“The mechanism of cognitive dissonance makes it likely that if an individual engages in a certain behavior she will be inclined to accept values in defense of that behavior”.
Ethics : normative

- What are the best arguments for and against the death penalty?
- In such a debate, is one position right and the other wrong?
- Is it possible to establish by rational methods the reasonableness of some moral judgment or principle over others?
Ethics in philosophy

- Developing basic, general moral principles (theories) that identify the features that make an act morally right or wrong.
The is-ought gap

- Scientific knowledge is factual, it tells us how the world is.
- Moral principles tell us how things ought to be.
- Because of this dichotomy, no scientific theory or fact could directly imply or be incompatible with moral principles.
- Moral philosophy not a science.
What was said in previous slide is compatible with the fact that

- researchers may be *motivated* (both in the good and the bad way) by their ethical convictions, and
- The results of science may be (mis-)used to defend certain ethical positions over others
- Disagreements in ethics are often muddled by disagreement on other matters.
What is this thing called ethics?

- Is ethics “subjective”?
- Is ethics “objective”?
Moral language, moral reality

- Australia is the smallest continent
- Colorless green ideas sleep furiously
- Tigers are the most important predators in Swedish fauna
- Go Celtics! Go Celtics!
- Human activities have caused global warming
- “Revolver” is The Beatles’ best album.
- 7 is a prime number.
- Abortion is killing
- Abortion is always morally wrong
Semantics and ontology

- Only utterances that express *propositions* have truth value, i.e. are either true or false.
- Propositions are either true or false depending on how the proposition corresponds to the *facts*.
- Do moral claims express propositions? (semantic question)
- Are there moral facts, making some moral propositions true? (ontological question)
“Ethics is subjective”: 1st version

- Claims in ethics do not assert propositions, i.e. something that is either true or false.
- Instead ethical claims express the speaker’s attitudes.
- Saying “The death penalty is morally wrong” is like saying “Down with the death penalty!”
- Ethics is not “cognitive” but “emotive”; hence ‘non-cognitivism’, ‘emotivism’, ‘expressivism’.
“Ethics is subjective”: 2\textsuperscript{nd} version

- Ethical claims assert propositions, i.e. they have a truth-value.
- Because there are no ethical facts, all these statements are false.
- Compare discourses on witches, astrology (religion!).
- Ethics is something of an illusion; seems objective, but corresponds to nothing real.
- Hence, ‘error theory’.
“Ethics is subjective”: 3rd version

- Ethical claims assert propositions, i.e. they have a truth-value.
- The truth value of an ethical claim is given by how the claim fits into an implicit framework or moral code.
- Ethical claims are true or false relative to these codes, but there is no fact of the matter as to which codes are correct or incorrect.
- Hence, ‘relativism’.
Challenge of cultural relativism

1. Different societies have different moral codes.
2. There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one societal code better than another.
3. The moral code of our own society has no special status; it is merely one among many.
4. There is no "universal truth" in ethics; that is, there are no moral truths that hold for all peoples at all times.
5. The moral code of a society determines what is right within that society; that is, if the moral code of a society says that a certain action is right, then that action is right, at least within that society.
6. It is mere arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. We should adopt an attitude of tolerance toward the practices of other cultures. diversity; no single true morality.
The Appeal of Relativism

- Tolerance and lack of arrogance.
- Pervasive disagreement is suggestive of lack of objective truth.
- Impossibility of “proving” ethical beliefs to be true or superior to others.
The Drawbacks of Moral Relativism

- Moral criticism is made impossible: external, and maybe even internal.
- Can’t a culture change for the better?
- According to relativism everyone is beyond critique; now that’s arrogance.
Assessing relativism

- Denying moral relativism is not saying we’re right and the others are wrong; it’s saying anyone could be wrong.
- Criticizing a practice on the grounds that it harms the basic interests of the people living with the practice is fair game.
Ethics is objective

- Claims in ethics express propositions, i.e. something with a truth-value (cognitivism).
- There are moral facts or properties.
- Some moral claims are true.
- Ethics is "real"; hence 'realism'
What fuels the debate?

- Some features of ethics more easily accommodated into an objectivist stance.
- Other features of ethics more easily accommodated into a subjectivist / relativist / expressivist / nihilist stance.
Moral motivation

- Accepting a moral claim entails motivation to act accordingly (other things being equal).
- Acceptance of a fact in itself is neutral with regards to motivation.
- Ergo: accepting a moral claim is not like believing in a fact.
  - This speaks in favor of the non-cognitive, emotive stance
Moral disagreement

- Moral claims can be contradicting one another.
- If there is no moral disagreement, people who accept slavery are not disagreeing with people who oppose slavery.
- Disagreement entails at least one of the views is in error; it is not the case that slavery both is and isn’t morally okay.
  - This speaks in favor of the objectivist, realist stance
Methodological suggestion: moderate objectivism

- Ethical views are open to criticism and revision in light of criticism.
- Some ethical positions are mutually inconsistent; hence disagreement is real.
- It is not rational to accept inconsistent positions; we should iron those out.
- We should evaluate ethical positions by their scope, intuitive appeal, consistency with other justified beliefs etc.