

WEEK 9: Research Ethics

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Aim:

The aim of this lecture is to introduce ethical issues into social research.

Objective:

The lecture will provide an understanding of

- ethics as a branch of moral philosophy.
- the way ethics is done in practice.
- analytical frameworks solving ethical dilemmas, including ethical theories, ethical principles and ethical rules.
- ethical issues regarding research and power.
- the extent to which ethics shall form a part of science education (some controversies).

Reading:

Crow, I (2000) "The power of research" in Burton, D. (ed) Research Training for Social Scientists, London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 59-67

Kent, G. (2000) "Ethical principles" in Burton, D. (ed) Research Training for Social Scientists, London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 68-80

Reiss, M (1999) "Teaching ethics in Science", Studies in Science Education, 34, 115-140.

Vanderpool, H. Y. (ed) (1996) The ethics of research involving human subjects: Facing the 21st century, Maryland: Frederick (Chapter 1), 1-33.

Lecture outline

- 1: What is ethics
- 2: The way ethics is done in practice
- 3: Two Ethical Theories
- 4: Four Ethical Principles
- 5: Four Ethical Rules
- 6: Analysing ethical dilemmas: An example of an analytical framework
- 7: Widening the moral communication beyond human subjects
- 8: The levels at which ethical decisions are taken
- 9: Research and power
10. Teaching ethics in Science: Some controversies
11. Ethical dilemmas to consult after the break

1: What is ethics

“Ethics is a branch of philosophy concerned with how we should decide what is morally wrong and what is morally right. It can be useful to distinguish between ethics and morals, as the two are frequently used interchangeably - though the distinction is less valid in some languages than in the English” ... “Ethics ... is the particular discipline which tried to probe the reasoning behind our moral life, especially by critically examining and analysing the concepts and principles which are or could be used to justify our moral choices and actions”

Michael J. Reiss 1999

Ethics is a branch of moral philosophy concerned with the systematic study of human values. It involves the study of theories of conduct and goodness, and of the meanings of moral terms.

The Hutchinson Encyclopaedia: Helicon 2000

- The roots of ethics are often associated with prophets (Budda, Jesus, Muhammad) and philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) who made recommendations about how people should live.
- Ethics is closely linked to anthropology, ethnology, political theory, psychology, and sociology.
- More recently it has been mostly discussed in relation to social policy.

2: The way ethics is done in practice

Ethics is a branch of knowledge, just as other sciences, - but it differ from some sciences (mathematics and physics etc.) in the sense that

- ethical conclusion cannot be unambiguously proved in the way that mathematics can.

→ this does however not mean that all ethical conclusions are equally valid,

There are three criteria which normally will have to be met regarding ethical conclusions:

1. the argument leading to a particular conclusion needs to be reasoned with internal consistency.
2. the arguments needs to be conducted with one or more well established ethical frameworks
3. there need to exist a significant degree of consensus among all interested parties about the validity of the ethical conclusions

However,

- (1) Reasoning not enough.
- (2) Established frameworks are not enough.
- (3): Consensus is not enough:

3: Two Ethical Theories

In order to decide if an action is morally right or wrong there exist academic disagreements amongst moral philosophers

Consequentialist theory: People should act in accordance with the consequences of their behaviour in which they shall minimise suffering and maximise overall well-being.

The consequentialists view begins with the assumption that most actions leads to pleasure or dis-pleasure. In a situation in which there are alternative courses of action, the desirable action is the one which leads to the greatest net increase in pleasure.

Strengths of this approach:

- It *provides a single ethical framework* in which, in principle, any moral question may be answered.
- It takes seriously the notion of pleasure - it is *not about telling people* what to do but simply says that *people shall do what maximises the total pleasure in the world.*

Deontological theory: There are some basic rights which should never be violated.

- The term derives from Greek 'deon', meaning duty.
- The theory is based upon that morals ought to be based on obligations to others. According to this theory, we ought to follow natural laws and rights. Researchers ought to respect every human being, even if this could have some unfortunate consequences.

Consensus

We need to look at both

- the consequences of any proposed course of action (consequentialists view) as well as
- the relevant intrinsic considerations (deontological theory)

before reaching any ethical conclusion.

4: Four Ethical Principles:

The principles are not absolute. That is, it may be ethical to override a principle if there is adequate justification for doing so.

Autonomy: We ought to respect the right to self-determination.

- The term comes from Greek 'auto' (meaning self) and 'nomos' (rule, or governance). The idea here is that the researchers have an obligation to recognise that a person has the right to agree or not agree to take part in a research project. Respect for this right forms the basis for attempting to ensure that informed *consent* is achieved.

Beneficence: We ought to 'be good'.

- This principles involved the obligation to take positive steps to help others. It provides an important justification and goal for researchers. Society funds academic research partly on the basis of (i) furthering basic scientific knowledge, but also (ii) in the hope that the knowledge and understanding gained will ultimately be of a wider benefit.

Non-maleficence: We ought not to cause harm.

- This principle is concerned with the obligation not to inflict harm or expose people to unnecessary risks. It e.g. implies that we should not involve people in experiments where effects on physical or emotional well-being are likely.

Justice: We ought to ensure fair entitlement to resources.

- People should be treated fairly and resources (e.g. research resources) should be distributed fairly.

5: Four Ethical Rules:

Rules are seen as necessary for the development of trust between researchers and study participants. Like principles, however, they are not absolute.

Veracity: Concerns telling the truth.

- Researchers have an obligation to provide accurate information about the nature of a study when enlisting potential participants.
- Researchers have an obligation to report the results of their research truthfully, without tampering with the data or bring selective in what they report.

Privacy: Concern respect for limited access to another person.

- Research participants grant access to some of their thoughts, feelings, behaviour, perhaps body, but NOT unlimited access. Participants can deny such access.

Confidentiality: Concerns the right to control information about oneself.

- A researcher shall not disclose information about what has been learned about certain persons, firms etc. without their agreements.

Fidelity. Concerns promise keeping.

- Researchers make a number of implicit promises when they conduct a study, especially to be careful with information.

6: Analysing ethical dilemmas: An example of an analytical framework

A person refuses to let you use his blood in research for HIV/AIDS (somehow especially his blood is critical for the discovery of a cure)

Alternative ethical analysis for the HIV dilemma

<p>A justification for conducting a further analysis of the blood sample</p>	<p>A justification for NOT conducting a further analysis of the blood sample</p>
<p><u>Theory</u>: Consequentialist: We ought to maximise the common good</p>	<p><u>Theory</u>: Deontological: We ought to respect the individual rights.</p>
<p><u>Principle</u>: Beneficence: We ought to do good for others.</p>	<p><u>Principle</u>: Autonomy: Everyone has the right to decide what happens to their bodily tissue.</p>
<p><u>Rule</u>: Fidelity. The researcher has promised, implicitly at least, to conduct research for the benefit of society.</p>	<p><u>Rule</u>: Privacy. Everyone has the right to control access to information about themselves.</p>
<p><u>Action</u>: Perform the additional test on the blood in a search for a cure for AIDS</p>	<p><u>Action</u>: Do not perform the additional tests on his blood, perhaps missing an opportunity in the search for a cure for AIDS</p>

7: Widening the moral communication beyond human subjects

- Actions may affect nature
- Actions may affect animals
- Actions may affect those long away in space
- Actions may affect those long away in time
- ... other ...

We are responsible for non-human subjects / issues too.

8: The levels at which ethical decisions are taken

- The individual
- The shop / firm
- The ethic council - e.g. ethic Institutional Review Boards (IRB)
- International conventions
- Role of Government and public regulation: The government constitute a particular ethical position and looks at how legal concepts applied to various stages of the research process
- Law and justice etc ... the entire subject is embedded in law and justice

9: Research and power

Why should we be concerned about ethical and legal issues ? Because research has a lot to do with power.

- Research can both empower people to control their own destinies, - but it can also potentially dis-empower people if it is used in a way to control their destinies in a way in which they cannot influence.

Also, - Social and scientific research including data exercises have often major influence on social issues, business decisions and government policies which is affecting people's life.

→ Researchers and practitioners have a significant responsibility to see that such research is accurate, meaningful, and are presented in a way that they contribute to good decision making.

→ The study and application of social and scientific research can never be separated from ethical issues since it has the potential to alter the persons about whom the research is conducted and their relationships with other persons.

→ The discussion of *norms, values and purpose* (ethical issues) often is omitted from much social research, especially those who work in a positivistic framework

→

We will now address relevant and associated issues more systematically:

9.1 Confidentiality:

Confidentiality is protected by the Data Protection Act 1984; but much confidentiality has a social context which goes beyond the social context.

- Professional cultures of the same background (whether it is practitioners or researchers) are often groups in which it is permissible to share information with others.
- The research is discussed (shared in an inappropriate way) among researchers or people in relevant agencies who are in the same profession.

It is important to be clear about

- who will have access to confidential information
- how it will be kept secure
- how it will be disposed of when the research is finished
- and to tell respondents what your intentions with the research are

9.2: Fabricated (fraud, simulated, untrue) research

The most extreme form of abuse of power that can be performed by researchers is data fraud.

This includes:

- Manufacturing of results where a study reported was never conducted.
- Massaging the data/results by removing or ignoring data which do not fit the hypothesis that the research is attempted to confirm
- Plagiarism, where another's words and ideas are appropriated as the researchers own work
- Data and numbers can be manipulated.

Reasons for doing this is that

- students and researchers feel pressure to arrive at interesting results,
- it is easier to publish interesting results,
- positive conclusions are also easier to publish than negative,
- it is also easier to pass a PhD with positive conclusions (you have something to say),
- temptation to massage data for career reasons (a way to make a difference).

9.3: Accountability

Since research may involve exercise of power (real consequences for people), it is relevant to ask to whom are we accountable ?

- those individuals we use in research,
- the research subject (it has to advance),
- the funder (facilitator) of the research project,
- the firm we work for,
- our selves,
- the society,
- the research community,
- or other ...

In this context the control of the research is central.

10. Teaching ethics in Science

The teaching of ethics in science is almost non-existing - however, it seems as awareness of the importance of such has been increasing.

That is,

- first science was taught more 'pure' in the traditional form of biology, chemistry and physics
- Now taught science it is more applied: e.g. 'environmental chemistry': Hence, the way science is taught today it is more embedded in a social context ..

→ An increasing number of people has argued that ethics, too, needs to be added to science and science education - however, this is still controversial ...

10.1. Arguments AGAINST teaching ethics in science:

Two schools of arguments:

School one: The nature of science argument.

David Hume (1711-1776) and his followers: There is no logical connection between what is and what ought to be.

- Science concern itself with matters of fact, with what is, whereas ethics concern itself with what ought to be.
- The two disciplines of science and ethics occupy separate spheres of knowledge, they have different core concepts (space, time, energy, versus good, rights, ought), they have different procedural ground rules and different tests for truth.

School two: The consequences of teaching ethics in science argument.

The consequences of teaching ethics in science argument is a *pragmatic argument*

.. might go something like follows: If such teaching was required it would/might

- reduce the time available to teach science
- lead to lower quality teaching (less time plus science teachers would teach outside their core-competencies)
- lead to lower levels of professional satisfaction amongst science teachers
- fewer science graduates want to enter science teaching - and we already got a shortage of science teachers

Also teachers have experience that the students treat the whole subject (fact based stuff) as they treat the ethical issues associated with the subject (e.g. nuclear physics is associated with their attitude to nuclear weapons and nuclear energy..)

10.2. Arguments IN FAVOUR of the teaching of ethics in science:

Also here there are two families of arguments.

School one: The nature of science argument.

Argument about the source and purpose of scientific knowledge:

We cannot separate science from values and ethical considerations. - that is

- Both scientists and those who fund science carry out the science with respect to some purpose. Purposes can be judged normatively,- that is, they may be good or bad.

Also, the separation of science from values in general - and ethical considerations in particular - is relatively recent and associated with Western culture.

School two: The consequences of teaching ethics in science argument.

These arguments stems from a consideration of what school and university students would prefer science lessons to consist of.

- At the start of the twenty first century for many students it is the ethical issues raised by science that seem to be lacking from their science lessons.

10.3 Resolution of the arguments for and against the teaching of ethics in science:

- **What might be the aims of ethics in science ?**
- **How should ethics in science be taught ?**

Aims regarding teaching ethics in science (Reiss 1999):

- Heighten the *ethical sensitivity* of participants (e.g. in chemistry - make exercises about what happens to any heavy metal ions which are poured down the laboratory sinks)
- Increase *ethical knowledge* (might help students to distinguish between legal and moral rights and to understand something of the connections between rights and duties)
- Improve *ethical judgement* (a student shall learn the general principles concerning how to solve an ethics case)
- Teaching ethics might make students *better people* (moral education is about teaching people to 'be good' - case of course need to be taken between moral education and moral indoctrination)

Teaching methods regarding teaching ethics in science (Reiss 1999):

- Obviously, these aim cannot all expect equally to be met by one teaching method.
- Nor can a teacher use only one assessment instrument to monitor the extent to which each of these aims be being realised.

11. Ethical dilemmas to consult after the break

Discuss and analyse ethical dilemmas (see next page) using the below framework.

In your analysis apply the two ethical theories

- Consequentialist: We ought to maximise the common good
- Deontological: We ought to respect the individual rights.

As appropriate, apply also the
four ethical principles

- Autonomy: We ought to respect the right to self-determination.
- Beneficence: We ought to 'be good'.
- Non-maleficence: We ought not to cause harm.
- Justice: We ought to ensure fair entitlement to resources.

and four ethical rules

- Veracity: Concerns telling the truth.
- Privacy: Concern respect for limited access to another person.
- Confidentiality: Concerns the right to control information about oneself.
- Fidelity. Concerns promise keeping.

FRAMEWORK

Alternative ethical analysis for various dilemmas

A justification for	A justification for
<u>Theory: Consequentialist:</u>	<u>Theory: Deontological:</u>
<u>Principles:</u>	<u>Principles:</u>
<u>Rules:</u>	<u>Rules:</u>
<u>Action:</u>	<u>Action:</u>

Ethical dilemmas / Topics for discussion:

- Gene therapy (Dilemma: looking for treatment versus ‘messing with our genes (playing god)’)
- Animal testing (Dilemma: looking for knowledge concerning treatment, effects of smoking and make-up etc. for ‘better’ human life versus making animals suffer)
- Genetic modification of crops (Dilemma: making better quality crops and more of it - especially suitable to grow in the third world - versus ‘messing with nature (playing god)’)
- Killing of UK farm animals as well as wild animals in Cornwall with the foot and mouth disease (Dilemma: Protecting UK export and farming communities versus killing domestic and wild animals)
- Killing of elephants in Africa (Dilemma: Farmer’s killing elephants in Botswana when they trespass their land and drink their water for domestic use and their fields versus protecting the elephant species).
- Operation on face of child with dislocated ‘freak’ face . (Dilemma: Doctors can help her breathe as well as help her look more normal versus letting the parents denying such treatment – perhaps for religious reasons).
- ‘Smoking in public places’ (Dilemma
- You can also find some dilemmas yourself for discussion and analysis
- **See also page 68 in Burton: 3 social science interview dilemmas**

12. Conclusion

This lecture has provided an awareness of a variety of ethical issues in social research.

As you can see we are dealing with very complex issues and that there are often no easy solutions.

I hope that this lecture has assisted you with

- a state of mind (e.g. awareness regarding ethical issues in power of research) and
- a framework for solving ethical dilemmas

which you can apply within your research or at your work place.