

MCB 580  
Research Ethics and Responsibilities  
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SESSION OUTLINE

**WHAT ETHICS IS NOT.**

1. Whatever religious authorities say.
2. Whatever legal authorities say.
3. Whatever public opinion is.
4. Whatever activist groups say.
5. Whatever professional organizations say.

**TYPICAL ESCAPES FROM HARD THINKING IN ETHICS**

1. *Absolutism*: things that are right or wrong are always right or wrong; circumstances make no difference.
2. *Relativism*: what is right or wrong depends completely on how you feel about the matter; what is right for one person could be wrong for another in exactly the same situation.

**SOME STYLES OF REASONING IN ETHICS**

*Rule theories* (non consequentialist, deontological): Certain things ought (or ought not) to be done regardless of their consequences.

--It is often an aspect of considering oneself a member of a *profession* that one ascribes to certain moral and ethical *rules*. Lawyers, counselors and others claim they are obliged by the rule that *whatever a client tells them is privileged and may not be revealed*.

*Contractualism*: an act is wrong if it violates those constraints which any rational person, considering the matter in a way which favors no one's particular interests, would agree should be imposed.

*Result theories* (consequentialist, teleological): An action is determined to be right or wrong by whether its results or consequences are good or bad.

*Utilitarianism*: one should do what will bring about the greatest welfare of all concerned.

## THEORIES OF JUSTICE

*Structural theories* (end-result theories): A distribution of worthwhile things is fair (just) if the end-result matches some specified structural pattern.

*Procedural theories* (historical theories): A distribution of worthwhile things is fair (just) if it has been attained by acceptable procedures.

--Within business and the professions, as elsewhere, issues of justice most vividly appear as matters of *resource allocation*: given that staff, time and money are limited, how is their use on behalf of those involved to be distributed in the fairest manner?

## ETHICS AS LAW VS ETHICS AS VIRTUE.

### Distinctive features of law:\*

- *Laws are meant to be enforced.*  
Those who see moral precepts as a set of laws are anxious to set up institutional machinery that will force others to follow these precepts.
- *Laws claim to be universal.*  
This leads us to seek to interpret laws in a way that will exempt us. When ethical principles are treated as statutes, humans become concerned to show that these rules do not apply to them.
- *Laws claim to be impartial.*  
When transferred to the moral realm, this insistence on impartiality condemns the preferences we show to our family, our colleagues, our friends and our countrymen as biases.

On such an approach, our aim is to be blameless rather than productive.

### Features of ethics as virtue:

- *The central concern is what kind of life shall we live.*  
We each get one human life; the goal is to lead ours as successfully as we can.
- *Principles are treated as values rather than as regulations.*  
We seek to influence our choices in life by the values we think will develop us as humans rather than regulate our lives by rules we think of as alien.
- *How can we follow principles that have exceptions?*  
Principles can have legitimate exceptions without being destroyed.

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\* See Peter Stein and John Shand. *Legal Values in Western Society*. Edinburgh, 1974, p.54

## QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: I do not expect you to take a great deal of time with this, but it will be used as the basis for our discussions together. I invite you to add comments to any of the questions.

1. It is all right to say, "\$100,000 represents my top offer for this property," when indeed it does not.

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. It is all right to say, "\$100,000 is what you owe us for our services," when indeed it is not.

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. If the government has fixed the highway speed at 55 mph, it is wrong (immoral, unethical) to drive at 60 mph on the highway.

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. If the government has fixed the emission rate for a chemical from your laboratory at 55 parts per billion, it would be wrong for you to increase the emission rate to 60 ppb.

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. You have been the scientific consultant for a just completed, and still confidential, audit of a local grain firm. Your report will show the firm seriously overextended and in danger of having to declare bankruptcy. At a family dinner your aunt comments that her family plans to deliver several loads of grain to that firm's elevators in the coming week. You tell her not to do so. Unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. You and a colleague work in the same general area, often collaborating. You have developed the tradition that you include one another as author on each of your publications, even when there has been no specific contribution to that particular publication. Your argument is that you generally support one another, it helps the publication record of both of you, and does no harm. Unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. You are reviewing a grant proposal that describes a new technique that you recognize would solve a problem that one of your colleagues has been wrestling with. Because reviews of grant proposals are to be held in strict confidence, you say nothing to your colleague. Did you do the right thing?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. A colleague, who is a foreign national, tells you that when he publishes an article in English, he also translates the article into his native language and publishes it in a journal in his home country. He notes that this disseminates his results more widely and also lengthens his list of publications. Should you report him as behaving unethically?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

9. You have recently completed a very successful experimental project. Your results have been verified by other laboratories; your research is well-known and praised. It has even brought you some financial success. But recently, when you sought to replicate your earlier experiments, your results were nowhere near as significant as your earlier results. One of your mentors tells you that your real mistake was to try to replicate your earlier results. That, he said, just sets you up for disappointment. He suggests you forget about your more recent results. Don't try to publish them but go on to new research projects. Are you being advised to do something unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. Your lab contributes to several different environmental groups. Besides general reasons of environmental concerns, an important factor in your decision was your knowledge that increased activities by these groups will lead to calls for more testing in areas where your lab is a recognized authority. Unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. Your lab has been asked to identify whether any mutagens are present in a pesticide used on a certain vegetable. You expect you will find trace amounts. You are convinced by Bruce Ames' research that there are enormously more mutagens in the vegetable itself than in the pesticide. You also know that, because of your lab's high reputation, your report will be picked up by the media and almost surely be misinterpreted so as to lead to calls for changes in agriculture which you think will be harmful to both farmers and consumers. You go ahead with the report as requested. Unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

12. Is it wrong to intentionally carry out an action that you know for certain will ultimately bring about the death of another, presumably innocent, human being?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. A fellow researcher has a copy-protected commercial software package on his office machine. He has been able to make a copy of it to put on a machine at home where he often does work on his research projects. While the shrink-wrap on the software says one needs to purchase a new copy for each machine, he argues that he is the only one who uses the program and since he cannot bilocate, he never uses two copies of it at the same time. He claims there is nothing unethical about what he is doing. Agree?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

14. A public group has asked you to send someone from your lab to speak to them about genetically modified food. You have one researcher who is convinced that there is no more danger from genetically modified foods than there is from hybridized crops. Another of your researchers is equally convinced that there are numerous possible side-effects from such modifications that need to be investigated before allowing such crops into production. You feel strongly about the matter and send the researcher who favors your view to give the talk. Unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

15. A researcher shows the results of an analysis your lab is doing for a private firm. The results show high levels of mutagenic contaminants in a new product. The ranges of contamination are within allowed government limits, but you think those limits have been set too high and this is a product where people would not expect such contamination might be present. Your researcher wants permission to notify consumer groups since the product is already being sold. You give him permission. Did you do the right thing?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

16. A researcher refuses to work on a research project in your lab. He cites as his reason his moral opposition to the possible use of this technology in military operations. Is he behaving unethically?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

17. A researcher has been found to be altering data on a research project in order to assure its failure. He cites as his reason his moral opposition to the possible use of this technology in military operations. Is he behaving unethically?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

18. One of your researchers wants to conduct clinical trials on humans of a procedure he has developed. He has discovered that, because of fears of malpractice suits, not even Lloyds would ensure tests performed in the U. S. He has obtained an invitation from the Government of Mexico to perform the tests there. You approve the plan. Unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

19. The new field of pharmacogenomics is producing ethnically and racially targeted pharmaceuticals. To do this successfully they seek to produce “ethnic estimations of ethnic affiliations using allele frequencies.” Is such research unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

20. Pollen from a genetically modified grass was found 21 kilometers (13 miles) from where it was planted in an experimental plot, scientists reported, raising fears of transgenic crossbreeding. Monsanto and Scotts created a creeping bentgrass for use on golf courses and await a green light from US authorities for its sale. Environmental groups oppose use of the seed, whose modified genes can breed with local creeping bentgrass, making it resistant to the herbicide RoundUp. Are such experiments unethical?

YES                      NO                      Other \_\_\_\_\_