
The Philosophical Underpinnings of Research with Human Participants

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The Context

1. History of abuse

- *Nazi 'experiments' – no consent; poor documentation; serious harm – death
 - *Tuskegee syphilis 'experiment' (1932-1972)
 - * Halushka – inadequate disclosure,
unacceptable risk
 - * Leon Festinger – deception, damage
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Context ctd.

2. Unjust practices: benefits and burdens?

- * coronary heart disease, breast cancer,
- * migraines and aspirin
- * sickle cell, lupus

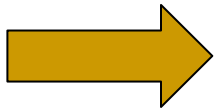
White male participants only;

But: * prisoners, institutionalised, children,
women...

Context ctd.

3. Research isn't therapy

- aim – to expand knowledge
- Primary beneficiary – not participant
- Degree of certainty?



Use of humans is a privilege/researcher as petitioner

The Philosophical Basis of the Codes

Two Central ideas:

- Respect for persons and proportional benefit

Two ethical theories:

- Kantian ethics and consequentialist ethics
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Kantian ethics: Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804)



Kantian ethics

- a) Human dignity (worth)
 - Is unconditional
 - Derives from capacity for rational self-legislation (autonomy)
 - Respect and equal moral status
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The Categorical Imperative

- i) *Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.*
 - ii) *Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or the person of another, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.*
 - iii) *Act always so as to respect the autonomy of human beings.*
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Ethical Implications of the C.I.

Respect:

- subject, not objects (participants)
- no merely instrumental use of humans
- Free and informed consent!

Moral Equality:

- No discrimination in recruitment
 - Protection of the vulnerable
 - Equal distribution of benefits and burdens
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Kant and the TriCouncil Policy Statement

- i.5 – guiding ethical principles
 - i.7, 1.5 – ‘subject’-centred perspective
 - Definition of minimal risk
 - 2.1 - free and informed consent
 - 2.6 - right to withdraw
 - 5.1, 5.3 - inclusive approach
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Consequentialist Ethics

(Good, but not good enough)

An action is right if it maximises the good consequences (benefits) and minimises the bad consequences (harms)

- harm/benefit analysis to justify risk

- Research design, monitoring, dissemination

(but: harm to minority? Serious harm? Who benefits?)

Proportionality is not enough

Kant and Consequentialism

- Kantian ethics acts as a constraint on the pursuit of social good.
 - Kantian respect for human dignity is “the cardinal principle of modern research ethics”(TCPS).
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