

Research Methods

Research & Ethics

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- What are Ethics and Morality?
- What is it to act professionally?
- Is acting legally different from acting ethically?
- Three main moral bases of professionalism & ethics
 - Natural Law
 - Utilitarian
 - Kantian
- Professionalism and ethics: two key historical events
 - The Oath of Hippocrates
 - The Nuremberg Code
- Ethical codes of practice: some examples
 - Medical Ethical codes (BMA; AMA)
 - The ESRC Research Ethics Framework (REF)

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Some General Ethical Questions to Ponder

- 1) Is voluntary euthanasia for the elderly a good thing?**
- 2) Does the State have the right to execute convicted murderers?**
- 3) Should a child suffering from leukaemia receive a bone marrow transplant when the risk of surviving is very small?**
- 4) Should students who plagiarize be expelled from LSBU?**
- 5) Should experimental data collected in a holocaust be used to advance medical research?**
- 6) Should bullying be tolerated in an organization?**

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What are Ethics and Morality?

- Ethics is a branch of philosophy that attempts to find reasons for the rights and wrongs of human motives, behaviours and actions.
- Morality describes the relative views held by individuals and groups about the rights and wrongs of human motives, behaviours and actions.

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What are the meanings of **Epistemology** and **Ontology**?

- **What is Epistemology**

“The conventional belief systems and wisdom within a domain about how knowledge comes about, is to be conceptualized, interpreted and processed”

- **What is an ontology**

“The formal representation of a set of concepts within a domain and the relationships between those concepts. It is used to reason about the properties of that domain, and may be used to define that domain”

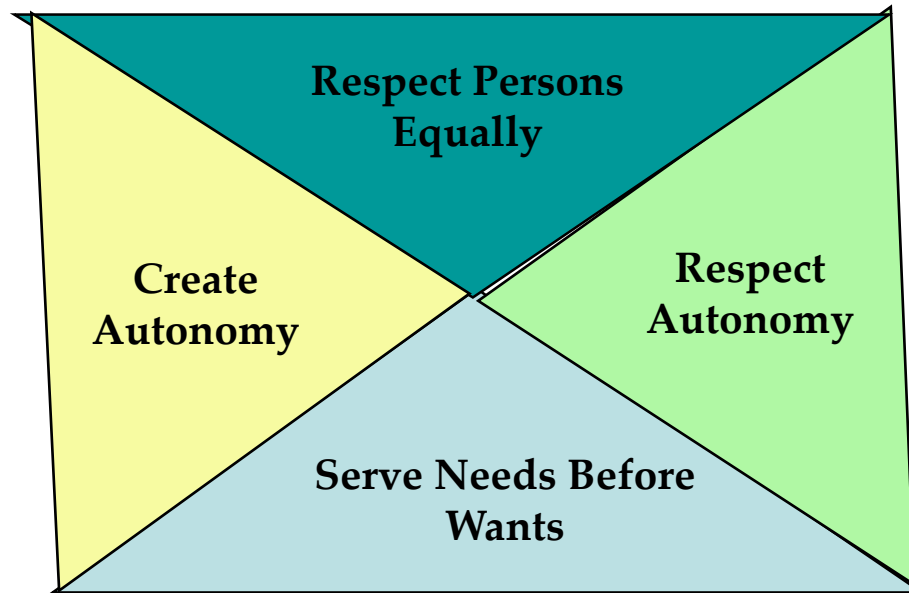
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What is it to act professionally?

- Acting professionally or professionalism refers to a collective set of obligations entered into by an individual (or group), which require actions and behaviours in accordance with an agreed set of standards
- Note: professional action does not necessarily require individual motives that are honourable !

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What is it to act professionally? – The Ethical Grid



Adapted from
Seedhouse (1995)

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Is acting legally different from acting ethically?

- Legality and morality is a tangled web
- Some types of human conduct can be harmful, but not illegal
- Most legal actions will often be moral too
- Most illegal actions will often be immoral

Note: The distinction is by no means watertight. There are six different permutations!

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Legality and morality - six important distinctions

1. Legal and moral (L-M)
2. Legal and immoral (L-I)
3. Illegal and immoral (I-I)
4. Illegal and moral (I-M)
5. Legal and amoral (L-A)
6. Illegal and amoral (I-A)

Activity: Try your hand at working out the following.....

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Legality v morality – what do you think?

1. Donating a pint of blood without knowing you have hepatitis C
2. Punishing a child by beating it
3. Sending a convicted murderer to the electric chair
4. Killing another through self-defence
5. Robbing the rich to give to the poor
6. Killing another through act of sympathy
7. Committing suicide
8. Splitting the atom or discovering penicillin
9. Eating a neighbour's apples that land in your garden

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The moral bases of professionalism and ethics

Natural Law Ethics (Thomas Aquinas, 13th Century)

- the starting point is the nature and purpose of the world and those living in it
- it asks about the purpose of every action or object
- morality is fulfilling the natural purpose
- immorality is preventing the natural purpose or course
- it works from principles to application

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The moral bases of professionalism and ethics

Utilitarian Ethics (John Stuart Mill, 1806-1873)

- actions are unimportant: what matters are results
- starts from the pain or pleasure present in individual situations
- ends with the wider pain or pleasure involved in applying general rules, or the preferences of the people
- morality is more pleasure than pain
- immorality is more pain than pleasure

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The moral bases of professionalism and ethics

Kantian Ethics (Emmanuel Kant, 1724-1804)

- before acting, ask: ‘what rule would I follow if I take this course or action?’ (maxim)
- Am I willing that this rule should be followed by everyone all the time and in all places? (universal law)
- if the maxim can be universalised, then it is moral
- if the maxim cannot be universalised, then it is immoral

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Professionalism and ethics: two key historical influences

The Nuremberg Code – Directives for Human Experimentation

- ☐ A duty on the experimenter to obtain consent
- ☐ Experiments must yield 'fruitful results' for good of society
- ☐ Experiments justifiable if based on animals
- ☐ Experiments avoid necessary physical/mental suffering and injury
- ☐ No known lethal or disabling procedures
- ☐ Experiments that do not risk death or disability
- ☐ Humanitarian importance with proper preparation
- ☐ Experiments conducted by qualified experts
- ☐ The right of the human subject to end the experiment at will
- ☐ Preparedness of the scientist to end the experiment at any stage

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Ethical codes of practice: some examples

Principles of medical ethics (BMC; AMC)

- Dedicated to competent, compassionate and ethical care
- Integrity in upholding professional standards
- Respecting and challenging the law in the interests of patients
- Respecting rights and confidences of patients and other professionals
- Committed engage in continual professional development
- With few exceptions freedom to serve in the interests of patients
- Contributing to activities that enhance the community
- Regarding responsibility to the patient as paramount
- Not denying access of any patient to medical care

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Ethical codes of practice: The ESRC Research Ethics Framework (REF)

- Six Important Principles –

1. Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure **integrity and quality**
2. Research staff and subjects must be **informed fully** about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved. Some variation is allowed in very specific and exceptional research contexts for which detailed guidance is provided in the policy Guidelines
3. The **confidentiality** of information supplied by research subjects and the **anonymity** of respondents must be respected
4. Research participants must participate in a **voluntary** way, **free from any coercion**
5. **Harm** to research participants **must be avoided**
6. The **independence** of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit

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Conclusions

- Ethical reasoning is as old as time, but even more relevant today
- To act legally is not the same as to act morally
- Seedhouse's framework provides a useful basis for assessing ones professional-ethical behaviour
- Moral or ethical thinking can be based on at least three ethical premises
- It is possible to act professionally even if you don't agree
- Codes of conduct are based on ethical principles
- Integrity, respect for others, a duty to develop, and beneficence are key themes that run through all professional codes of conduct