Values, Ethics, and Research: Commerce, Politics, Integrity, and Culture

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Normative dilemmas in research

- The dilemma of commercializing scientific inquiry
- The dilemma of the politics of knowledge production
- The dilemma of success and integrity in research
- The dilemma of the culturality of knowledge
The commercialization of scientific inquiry (I)

- The crass falsification of research for economic gain remains rare, but illicit economic pressure on researchers continues to threaten the integrity of research.
- More innocuous, but problematic nonetheless: The invocation of scientific procedures for product legitimacy.
- Outside research funding risks distorting institutional research agendas.
The danger of compromising institutional agendas is inversely related to the institution’s prestige and quality.

An aggravating factor is growing institutional pressure on its members to secure outside funding.
The commercialization of scientific inquiry (III)

- Critical safeguards against a further erosion of ethical standards through economic pressures include
  - An adequate material base for scholarly research in higher education,
  - instituting and maintaining solid measures of quality control, and
  - transparent rules for the protection of intellectual property.
The politics of knowledge (I)

- Knowledge is being produced, disseminated, and used under intensely political conditions.
- A central dimension of the politics of knowledge is the relationship of reciprocal legitimation between knowledge and power.
- This relationship operates at the national level, but also in the international system.
The politics of knowledge (II)

- Instructive cases in point for the normative dilemmas of the politics of knowledge are
  - The relationship between research and national security in the U.S.,
  - the controversy over the teaching of evolution theory in American schools, and
  - the politicization of biological and anthropological research (e.g., the “sociobiology controversy” and the “Yanomami affair”)
Success vs. integrity in research (I)

- Growing competitive pressures for recognition in research make “shortcuts” increasingly tempting.
- Spectacular exceptions notwithstanding, existing review procedures seem to work to avoid gross misdeeds.
- Less egregious, but serious research misconduct appears to be on the rise.
Success vs. integrity in research (II)

- A non-negligible part of such misconduct is due to outside pressure.
- Another important factor are perceived injustices in the recognition of scientific work and the distribution of rewards.
- There are encouraging signs that this situation is receiving increasing attention.
Research ethics and knowledge cultures (I)

- The “culturality of knowledge” (Böhme and Scherpe) is an important dimension of the ethics of research.
- Therefore, the recognition and understanding of different knowledge cultures is an increasingly salient norm in the world of research.
- Since gender and cultural differences bear on the construction of knowledge, the universality of knowledge claims is to be handled cautiously.
Research ethics and knowledge cultures (II)

- Particularly susceptible to culturally specific frames of conceptual reference is research on issues such as
  - development
  - modernization
  - costs and benefits of technological change
  - fertility and population control
  - migration and labor markets
  - childcare and disease prevention.
Research ethics and knowledge cultures (III)

- While the pursuit of generalizeable knowledge claims remains one of the important goals of scientific inquiry, the recognition of culturally specific ways of knowing appears both prudent and just.
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A Mertonian Postscript: “The ethos of modern science” (I)

- **“Universalism”**
  - “the conflicting imperatives of scientific universalism and of ethnocentric particularism”

- **“Communism”**
  - “the status of scientific knowledge as common property”

- **“Disinterestedness”**
  - “the translation of the norm of disinterestedness into practice is effectively supported by the ultimate accountability of scientists to their compeers”
A Mertonian Postscript: “The ethos of modern science” (II)

- “Organized Skepticism”
  - “skepticism threatens the current distribution of power”
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