

Cardiff School of Social Sciences Social Theory Forum

Theorising the Ethical

23rd March, 2010

3-5.45pm

Committee Room 1, The Glamorgan Building

5.45 - finish and go for a drink in the Cardiff Institute of Arts (Park Place).

Ruth Chadwick

(ESRC Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics, Cardiff School of English, Communication & Philosophy, Cardiff Law School)

What is 'applied' in applied ethics?

One view of applied ethics is that it involves the application of ethical theory to a problem. This view is open to a number of criticisms. This paper will briefly outline these, and will discuss what the role of ethical theory can and should be, with particular reference to current uses and abuses of ethics, e.g., as applied to the governance of research.

Maria Puig de la Bellacasa

(Cardiff University School of Social Science)

Ethical Doings in Naturecultures

What new forms of ethical engagement are emerging in the world of naturecultures? In this paper I take the example of the ethics of the permaculture movement and put it in dialogue with other discussions regarding the politics of 'bios' and of naturecultures. If we are living in a naturecultural world, and if politics and ethics conflate in biopolitics, the permaculture movement is an example of an alter-biopolitical intervention. It works within bios with an ethics of collective empowerment that puts caring at the heart of its search of alternatives for hopeful flourishing for all beings. I read these discussions in the light of feminist care ethics and in particular through its vision on everyday ethos transformation and ethical obligation.

Choon Key Chekar

(ESRC Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics, and Cardiff School of English, Communication & Philosophy)

Questioning the Way ELSI Work Does 'Gender': Division of Labour?

During the last few decades dramatic improvements in the advancement of women and gender equality have occurred throughout society, and the field of science and technology is not an exception. Improved awareness of gender equality has changed not only the contents of science but also the way we do science: there has been an increased emphasis on tackling gender imbalance in both science laboratories and research ethics committees. However, interviews with key members of the European Commission funded research consortium, including members of the BBMRI (Biobanking and Biomolecular Resources Research Infrastructure), pointed towards the fact that there remains a certain amount of ignorance about gender issues, whether they are immediately apparent or potential ones. There was a tendency to dismiss the impact of gender

issues by regarding them as being a 'separate box' instead of an integral 'perspective' – even within the ELSI work. This paper suggests that if gender issues are commonly relegated to being a 'must-do' task within high profile and multinational research enterprises, this might have an unintentional negative impact: gender issues are further marginalised and undermined – however legitimate and present they actually are – when they are represented by simple 'box-ticking' exercises which are undertaken by allocated members to 'deal with'.

Nicky Priaulx
(Cardiff Law School)

On the Perils of being Disciplined (or, the Value of Thinking Ethically)

Using a number of case examples, the discussant seeks to provide a tentative account as to the value of ethical appraisal as a necessary technique for challenging and/or displacing our methodological biases and assumptions. The aim is to encourage discussion as to whether her observations as to the critical necessity of ethical evaluation, may have broader application to other fields of research and practice. To serve as an illustration of the perils of not deploying broader ethical thinking, she focuses in particular upon law (and surprisingly perhaps) bioethics; here she explores a range of legalistic approaches to specific dilemmas arising in the field of reproduction. For the discussant, a focus on specific problems such as disputes arising over the fate of IVF embryos, or indeed the framing of 'abortion' in the context of debates leading up to the enactment of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, speedily illustrate the potentially pernicious effect of looking exclusively through a legal(istic) lens. As she argues, such a lens can have a problematic effect on the definition of 'problems' and their corresponding 'solutions'; whether through the definition of problems as essentially 'legal' ones, or in a skewed understanding as to what human interests are at stake (contestation, rights, winners and losers). As such, "solutions" can often turn out to be partial and limited in application. Instead, the author argues that if we hope to find solutions which further societal interests, embracing an ethical approach in order to understand problems is critical. In the context of the legal arena such an approach encourages situating problems in their broader social context to encourage a more critical evaluation of the promise and limits of the law (the identification of the points at which regulatory approaches may be of promise or indeed of extremely limited value), and an earnest search for effective solutions.

Rebecca Boden, Debbie Epstein & Joanna Latimer
(Cardiff School of Management, UWIC ; Cardiff University School of Social Science)

How is the ethical being (to be) done by critical social science research?

We offer some theoretical reflections on our paper Accounting for Ethos or Programs for Conduct? The Brave New World of Research Ethics Committees*. In particular, we press our theoretical take on how to ensure that research is ethical in the production and consumption of critical social science. **The Sociological Review*, Volume 57, Number 4, November 2009, pp. 727-749(23).

John Lovering
(School of City and Regional Planning)

Nature, ontology, ethics: How to escape from constructivist circularity and authoritarianism.