

Teaching Research Ethics using Virtue Ethics

A Short Teaching Guide



Temperance/Moderation

Courage/Fortitude

Prudence/Wisdom

Justice

Contents:

- ∞ Sample handout for introducing students to ethics
- ∞ List of assignment/activity ideas for the classroom
- ∞ Bibliography of useful sources

For further resources, including Powerpoint slides, full assignment instructions, and sample student papers, please visit:

<https://gesellequalsgazelle.wordpress.com/teaching-resources/>

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Virtues (& Vices)

The Classic Virtues

Four Cardinal Virtues:

Wisdom
Courage
Moderation
Justice

Three Theological Virtues:

Faith
Hope
Love



Seven Capital Vices

Pride
Envy
Anger
Sloth
Avarice
Gluttony
Lust



Intellectual Virtues

Creative	Curious	Humble
Meticulous	Brave	Tenacious
Open-minded	Fair	Generous
Patient	Honest	Careful
Independent	Imaginative	Empathetic

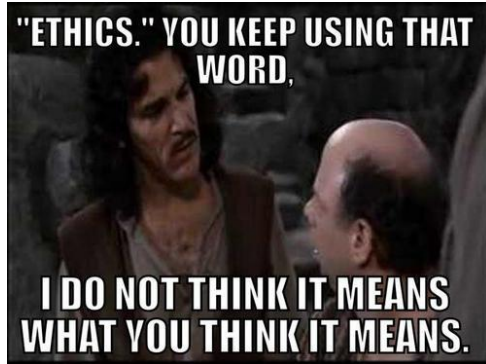
Even More Virtues!

Compassionate	Truthful	Persevering	Righteous
Selfless	Charitable	Temperate	Kind
Longsuffering	Loyal	Pious	Consistent
Chaste	Frugal	Sober	Pure
Prudent	Gracious	Thrifty	Self-Controlled
Gallant	Modest	Steadfast	Unselfish

Twenty-Five Easy* Ways to Become More** Ethical

* That do not involve giving away all your possessions, moving to another country, or radically changing your life.

** Your mileage may vary.



Story

1. Develop your memories.
2. Read narratives – including fiction, and books more than 50 years old.
3. Study the history of your family and community.
4. Learn the stories of someone else's family and community.
5. Compare new situations to what's happened before.
6. Imagine what an ethical person would do in your place.

Community

7. Build friendships.
8. Watch and listen to people carefully.
9. Live with someone. Get along with them.
10. Accept some criticism, even from strangers.
11. Ask people for advice. Implement it.
12. Find someone ethical. See what they do. Imitate them.

Theory

13. Read actual published books on ethics, including some more than 500 years old.
14. Discuss ethics in real life, not just on Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit.
15. Study with professors of good character.
16. Beware of neuroscientists and other amateur philosophers.
17. Seek to expand your ethical vocabulary, not reduce it.
18. Be practical: focus on your own actions and intentions.

Body

19. Develop ethical habits before you need them.
20. Learn how your body affects your decisions.
21. Dialogue with your emotions, rather than indulging or suppressing them.
22. Structure your life so bad choices are more difficult, and good choices less difficult.
23. Have children.
24. Sleep on it.
25. Act in the way you mean to go on.

Classroom Assignment & Activity Ideas

The following ideas have been grouped according to teaching objective, however many probably achieve multiple teaching outcomes and could also be tweaked to achieve a different outcome.

Taking Others' Perspectives.

These activities help students to on take the experiences of others, particularly those who have been harmed by science.

Listening to survivors of eugenics. Eugenics is a great instance of how psychology has been unethical in the past, and there are still a number of survivors of eugenics alive. The website <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/> contains a wide variety of resources. Since they have interviews with people who were sterilized, students can be assigned to listen to one of the stories and to reflect on the interview.

Example Instructions

Go to <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/> and click on 'Our Stories' to watch interviews with sterilization survivors. Watch Leilani's Story and any others that look interesting to you.

Take some time to imagine how Leilani feels about her sterilization and how it has affected her life. Write a short paragraph on your reaction to her experiences.

Direct link: <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/our-stories/leilani>

Learning about Henrietta Lacks. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* tells the story of the African American woman whose cells medical researchers used for without permission or compensation. This nonfiction book highlights the impact of this on the Lack's family, whose poverty and health struggles contrasts strongly with the profits made by the HeLa cell line. Assigning *The Immortal Life* and then having a debate, discussion or paper assignment can help students take more seriously the significant harms done by well-meaning researchers, even doing something seemingly small. *NB:* This book was recently adapted into a film starring Oprah, so the film version could be substituted or used to supplement the book.

Experiencing "enhanced interrogation" in graphic novel form. Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón have adapted the 2014 the Senate Intelligence Committee report on "enhanced interrogation techniques" into graphic novel form. Although disturbing, the pictorial depiction of these events bring home the awfulness of psychology's collusion with the Department of Defense. Assigning this the novel or excerpts would help students to really wrestle with the Hoffman report and could lead into a discussion of how to avoid such ethical failures in the future.

Gaining Historical Perspective.

These activities give students historical perspective on psychology's ethical problems and help them become more critical of certain modern psychological norms.

The history of infant pain experimentation. The article *The Infancy of Infant Pain Research: The Experimental Origins of Infant Pain Denial* begins with how up until the 1980s babies were routinely operated on without anesthesia because they were believed to not feel pain. The article follows the shocking history of infant pain experiments (in which tears or kicking were dismissed as “reflex responding”) and gives some reasons for the persistence of such a belief. Since one of the reasons is blind faith in null hypothesis testing, this paper can work to spark a discussion of the pitfalls of certain scientific methods and the role of culture in ethical blindness.

The history of CIA Psychology post WWII. The article *Science in Dachau's Shadow: Hebb, Beecher, and the Development of the CIA Psychological Torture and Modern Medical Ethics* is a useful introduction to multiple historic ethics failures. This article sets up a class discussion of the APA's current ethical situation nicely because, although written well before the Hoffman Report, it shows how psychology's collaboration with US military and intelligence to produce interrogation methods is nothing new. The article documents how US and Canadian researchers were inspired by Nazi research programs and methods, and used illegal drugs and other substances on unsuspecting subjects, with a number of striking examples.

Awareness of Injustice.

These assignments help introduce students to the systematic injustice experienced by groups psychologists might use as research participants or attempt to help.

Deep listening and facilitated dialogue experiences with community partners. Two professors at Duquesne University describe a variety of methods that they attempted to use to teach virtue in their article *Can virtue be learned? An exploration of student learning experiences in ethics courses and their implications for influencing moral character*. One of the most effective methods they found was creating opportunities for students to learn about a nearby disenfranchised community that Duquesne students perceived as dangerous. Students received “a tour of the Hill that was facilitated by a community member, had a classroom visit from a community leader, returned to the Hill for an extended class session featuring a panel presentation by community leaders” and “were given a rubric to facilitate deep listening.” Immersive learning with a local community can be valuable for helping students take seriously how research in psychology needs to take into account cultural differences, injustice, and a community's own experience and knowledge.

Experiencing structural inequality. The Action in Teaching website has instructions for a rigged version of Monopoly that helps students get a taste of what intergroup structural inequalities are like, and how they persist even when the group is given more resources. This could be an excellent way to spark a discussion of how social science research can contribute to inequalities even when researchers have good intentions.

<http://www.actionteaching.org/award/intergroup-monopoly>

Changing Behavior.

These assignments challenge students to reflect on their own virtues and vices and attempt to actually work to become more virtuous.

Habit audit and behavior change assignment. In this assignment students are asked to do a “habit audit” in which they observe and record their behavior for a week—how did they use their free time? What did they do automatically? Based on this and a prior reflection on their own character, they choose a particular virtue they wish to strengthen in themselves and record how they will do so over the course of two weeks. They then turn in a brief report on how successful they were in this effort.

Life motto assignment. In this assignment students are asked to select a life motto from a list of life mottos like “Live to be missed”, “Practice what you preach”, “Strive for perfection” and then reflect on this motto (see box below). Alternately students were told to ask a family member or friend if they have a life motto and ask them how the motto might challenge them to change how they live.

Example Instructions

This assignment helps you think about on living reflectively—Please choose a motto from the page of mottoes and then experiment: think about what it would be like to have such a motto as your own. Answer these questions:

1. In what way would this motto challenge you? What would you have to change about your life?
2. Do you think there are any ways you might challenge this motto? For instance, when might you find it inadequate? Would you *dislike* the kind of person the motto is encouraging you to be?

Ethical Thinking.

These assignments challenge students to think carefully and critically about ethics.

Reflections on the Hoffman Report. *The International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytical Studies* dedicated a recent issue to reflections on the APA scandal. The contributors represented various perspectives on the scandal such as a long-time APA leader reflecting on the institutional culture, a psychologist who protested APA’s involvement at Guantanamo on why they were willing to take a stand, a member of The Psychological Ethics and National Security task force recounting how her good intentions for being on the task force were thwarted, and a psychologist’s account of interviewing a detainee who experienced torture at Guantanamo. These fairly short articles could be assigned to students in preparation for a paper or discussion on why the ethical failure came about (what particular vices were involved) and what sort of characteristics (virtues) were necessary to resist conforming to a corrupt culture.

Reflections on rules about sex with patients. The article *From seduction to sexism: Feminists challenge the ethics of therapist-client sexual relations in 1970s America* documents the multi-decade failure of psychologists to prohibit therapists having sex with patients and feminist psychologists' attempts to introduce such rules. This article could prompt a paper or class discussion on ethical blindness due to cultural norms. See also this clip interview with Rachel Hair Mustin on her experience on this topic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nILYg0i4Yug>

Screwtape Letters final paper. This assignment takes its inspiration from C. S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, in which one demon gives instructions to another on the fine art of temptation. In this assignment students write a series of letters which a senior 'science demon' gives advice to a junior science demon on tempting a young psychologist to conduct bad research and explain the advice in footnotes that refer to course readings and discussions on good and bad research. Although ethics is included in this assignment, it is meant to emphasize how virtues/vices affect every aspect of research, so the six letters are written to give advice throughout the research process, as follows:

1. A Baby Researcher — Becoming a Researcher
2. A Great Idea for A Study! — Literature Review and Initial Choices
3. A Grand Design — The Design of the Experiment
4. Oops! — A Problem Mid-Research
5. “Interesting...” — Interpreting the Results
6. Now what? — Planning the Next Step

This assignment can be used to test students on their knowledge of research design as well as ethics and can be used as a final course paper.

Example Letter

My dear Whirligig-Popper,

I was pleased to learn from your letter that your patient is overwhelmed by the prospect of recruiting so many subjects for her research. Exploit this. Subtly suggest to her that there's nothing wrong with recruiting the people who are easiest to find—her friends!¹

[rest of letter omitted for sake of space]

Keep up the good work, someone who is this easily discouraged so early in the process should be easy to keep from good research. If only all psychologists were this lazy!

Your affectionate 5th cousin,

Kuhn-Hufflegump

¹ This is an example of convenience sampling (a biased sampling technique), and will be a real problem if the patient's friend group differs significantly from the population of interest. If the friends are very different from the average person or the population of interest, then this will create external validity problems (Morling, 2015, p. 186)

Bibliography of Useful Sources

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Stark, L. (2012). *Behind closed doors: IRBs and the making of ethical research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Virtue Ethics Sources

Annas, J. (2011). *Intelligent virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Humility, Curiosity, Charity, Courage, and Grace:

<http://dailynous.com/2017/05/12/humility-curiosity-charity-courage-grace/>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Virtue Ethics:

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/virtue/>

“Learning to Think”—A Virtue Approach:

<http://dailynous.com/2015/06/18/learning-to-think-a-virtue-approach/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Virtue Ethics:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>