

Beyond Following Rules:
Teaching Research Ethics in the Age of the Hoffman Report

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Abstract

The Hoffman Report scandal demonstrates that ethics is not objective and ahistorical, contradicting the comforting progressive story about ethics many students receive. This modern day failure illustrates some of the weaknesses of the current ethics code: it is rule-based, emphasizes punishments for noncompliance, and assumes a rational actor who can make tricky ethical decisions using a cost-benefit analysis. This rational emphasis translates into pedagogy: the cure for unethical behavior is more education. Yet such approach seems unlikely to foster ethical behavior in the real world, either for students or for mature scientists. This paper argues for an alternative ethical system and a different way of teaching ethical behavior. Virtue ethics emphasizes the development of ethical habits and traits through regular practice and reflection. We show how virtue ethics complements a feminist approach to science, in which scientists are encouraged to reflect on their own biases, rather than attempting to achieve an impossible objectivity. Our paper concludes with pedagogical suggestions for teaching ethical behavior as a practical and intelligent skill.

Keywords: ethics; teaching; research ethics; feminism; humanism

Teaching Research Ethics in the Age of the Hoffman Report

In 2015 the Hoffman Report revealed how APA leadership had used the PENS Report¹ to give ethical cover to those engaging in “enhanced interrogation techniques” —a move apparently motivated by the APA’s desire to strengthen their relationship with the Department of Defense (DoD). The ramifications of the Hoffman Report are still being negotiated today, with responses ranging from the formation of an ethics code task force to renewed debates over psychologists’ presence in Guantanamo interrogation rooms. The APA’s approach to ethics does not fare well in the Hoffman Report, which describes those who approved the PENS guidelines, despite the conflict of interest at its heart (psychologists were to ensure interrogations were safe, legal, ethical, *and effective*), as “either naïve or intentionally disingenuous” (Hoffman et al., 2015, p. 27). Concerning the PENS process the Hoffman Report notes the dominant motives of “helping DoD, managing its PR, and maximizing the growth of the profession” (Hoffman et al., 2015, p. 11) and ultimately concludes that there was a “subordination of ethics analysis”—PENS-related decisions “were not based in any meaningful way on ethics analysis” (p. 15).

How do we teach research ethics in this environment, with the reputation of the discipline besmirched by scandal? Can we presume to teach our students ethics when we ought to be questioning our own complicity in torture? We argue that this is, counterintuitively, an exciting time to teach ethics in psychology. Recent events open up new possibilities for thinking and talking about ethics, provided we are willing to be candid about the worst failings of our institutions and involve students in our search for a way forward.

¹ The Presidential Task Force on Ethics and National Security (PENS) was convened in 2005 to address the issue of psychologists’ involvement in interrogation. This group reported that such consultation was compatible with the APA Ethics Code provided psychologists avoided torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and if they ensured that interrogation methods were safe, legal, ethical, and effective. These broad guidelines were quickly adopted by the APA Board as official APA policy.

The findings of the Hoffman Report are helpful in several ways. First, they puncture the myth that psychology's ethical violations are relics of the distant past, the actions of unenlightened people in an era of underdeveloped ethics rules. Second, they illustrate how ethics codes are not objective and ahistorical, but always products of a particular time and place, and as such always subject to various ignoble pressures. Finally, they remind us that significant ethical violations are not a strange aberration within the history of psychology but a reoccurring and serious problem.

These facts should prompt reflection on the way we teach ethics to our students. Too often research ethics is taught as hoop-jumping, with students required to memorize ethics code rules to complete an online tutorial or classroom test,² which seems unlikely to foster ethical behavior in the real world. This paper promotes a different ethical system, virtue ethics, which emphasizes the development of ethical habits and personality traits through regular practice and self-reflection.

Ours is an interdisciplinary project that draws on recent developments in the fields of medical ethics and philosophy for this alternative approach to research ethics. Our paper reviews the history of psychology's approach to ethics, introduces virtue ethics to address psychology's ethical problems, and addresses potential objections to virtue ethics. We conclude with practical teaching suggestions generated by this approach.

² The literature on ethics pedagogy in psychology is limited. Korn (1984) states there is minimal coverage of research ethics in Introductory Psychology or Social Psychology textbooks. Despite APA recommendations that it be integrated into courses throughout the major (APA, 2013), Ruiz and Warchal's review of scholarly publications on teaching ethics in psychology found "little evidence to support that ethics is being taught in any systematic fashion" (2014, p. 121), and You, Ruiz, and Warchal (2018) found that ethics is not a focus in undergraduate syllabi. The work of Adair, Lindsay, and Carlopio (1983) and Bachiochi et al. (2011) suggests that the class time devoted to ethics varies by instructor, and tends to emphasize adherence to the APA code.

The Historical Context for Psychology's Ethical Failures

Psychology textbooks often frame research ethics in a progress narrative. For example Beth Morling's popular text (2018) starts by describing the Tuskegee Syphilis and Milgram experiments, and then transitions to the Belmont Report³ and the contemporary APA ethics code. This implies a happy story—problem: unethical studies, solution: ethics guidelines.⁴ However the history of the ethics code is not quite so benign. Understanding the circumstances and process that led to its creation helps explain why the APA continues to struggle with ethics today and why other approaches to ethics should be considered.

The APA's decision to create a research ethics code arose not out of a pure desire for ethical clarity, nor out of horror at revelations of Nazi research, but in order to avoid governmental regulation. Laura Stark's (2010) excellent history of the APA's 1973 research ethics code charts this development. Concern about government regulation was prompted by the 1966 announcement of new federal rules that required human subjects researchers to receive approval from a review committee. Psychologists were worried that the growing emphasis on informed consent might rule out the use of deception, especially since Milgram's experiments had become so famous—bringing the use of deception in research into public awareness. In response, the APA leadership appointed a committee to create ethics guidelines for research, which they hoped would “establish satisfactory regulations of our own, and to try to guide the

³ In the Belmont Report (Belmont, 1979), the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research established three core ethical principles to govern human subjects research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

⁴ The most recent edition of the Morling text was published in 2018, three years after the Hoffman Report, yet contains no mention of the scandal. It will be a project for future historians to document how many textbook authors choose to complicate the progress narrative by discussing the discipline's recent history.

formation of federal regulations” (N. Miller to N. Hobbs, April 27, 1966, Stark, 2010, p. 443). It was named the Cook Committee after its leader, Stuart Cook.⁵

Not only was the decision to make the ethics code motivated by specific and contentious objectives, but the method for constructing the code was unusual. The Cook Committee created the code by surveying APA members on their ethical opinions and dilemmas. The survey method appealed to APA leadership because it appeared objective—they perceived it as an empirical approach. All told, an impressive 19,000 members were invited to participate and were asked to “describe one or more incidents involving research with humans in which, at some stage, there arose an ethical issue” (Stark, 2010, p. 348). The responses, which totaled 5,000 incidents, were then sorted by the Cook Committee members into categories, such as deception, stress, or invasion of privacy. The men of the committee were expected to interpret common events and personal accounts as moral lessons, leading to a set of ethical guidelines. This “critical incident technique” was likely inspired by Cook and Hobbs’ experience in WWII aviation psychology—the use of specific ethics problems was analogous to troubleshooting after engine failure (Stark, 2010; see also Flanagan, 1954).

However, in spite of the apparently objective apparatus of surveying, there was in fact significant latitude for the committee members to insert their own beliefs as they determined what any given incident exemplified. Cook had decided that the survey would not be a vote with majority opinions winning the day, but raw data to be interpreted by the committee. Moreover, the five men on the committee had been handpicked by Cook and APA leadership, excluding

⁵ Cook had served under the incoming APA President, Nicholas Hobbs, on the committee that had developed the previous (and first) APA ethics code. This 1953 code had regulated only the ethical behavior of therapists, and also arose from less than pure motives—the APA leadership’s concern to police professional borders by differentiating between its members and other counselors (Stark, 2010). Cook was qualified to lead the 1966 effort because he was familiar with the method used for the 1953 code—Hobbs informed Cook that his committee would be “collecting critical incidents as we did before” (Stark, 2010, p. 345).

both gadflies who had previously raised ethical concerns and experimenters with questionable practices, such as Milgram.

Despite their confidence in the method of moving from cases to principles, the committee ran into problems when they addressed the thorniest issue—the use of deception in research. In 1970 the Cook Committee met for a writing retreat to unify the ethics code. Each member had independently prepared a draft for the category they had been assigned and they were now perplexed to find that their sections contradicted each other. For example, four members had written about deception in their assigned categories, but came to conflicting conclusions. To resolve this, they decided to write an introduction to the code instructing psychologists how to make difficult ethical decisions, in which they recommended that psychologists conduct a cost-benefit analysis. While members of the committee had concerns about the damage deception could do both to subjects and to the moral character of experimenters, they nonetheless decided that such concerns could not trump a utilitarian calculus. One member articulated his view of the matter as follows: “there are certain studies which might involve some unethical aspect, but which must be done. What you’re doing can be wrong, but not doing it can be wronger” (Stark, 2010, p. 356). Thus, the preliminary report concluded, more or less, that “deception was unethical but it must be done” (Stark, 2010, p. 358). This report, which Cook framed as simply “playing midwife to the profession” (Stark, 2010, p. 358), was not well received. There was significant backlash by APA members, particularly around the contradictory recommendations on deception.

No Unified Theory of Ethics

Given the problems with the Cook Committee’s approach to ethics, it is unsurprising they came to contentious and contradictory conclusions. First, members on the committee had no

unified view of ethics—their emphasis on an “empirical approach” masked their underlying competing views of ethics. Contemporary philosophers distinguish three main systems of ethics: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Consequentialism evaluates actions solely in terms of their consequences or potential benefits and harms, bypassing questions about the intentions of agents. In contrast, deontology tests actions against universal principles that can guide agents in multiple situations. Finally, virtue ethics evaluates actions by whether they reflect positive character traits, virtues, which are seen as essential for reliable moral agents. Both deontological and consequentialist approaches were represented on the committee, but neither approach was assigned a primary role in giving a moral framework for the code.⁶ Moreover virtue ethics was never considered, meaning inchoate concerns about the character of scientists were left unexamined.

The Cook Committee’s lack of awareness of these ethical traditions can be seen in the contradictory ethical intuitions articulated by individual committee members. Gregory Kimble initially wrote “I specifically do not think there is any ‘right’ categorization that would seem to imply the existence of a prior set of ethical premises from which our principles derive deductively” (Stark, 2010, p. 355). However, he would later reflect “I am impressed by the extent to which I find myself thinking of exploitation as just plain wrong whereas deception is wrong because of its consequences” (Stark, 2010, p. 356), and suggested that the committee consider reorganizing the ethics code based on whether an action was prohibited by absolute principles versus by its adverse consequences. This naïve mixing of both deontological and

⁶ Nor was either ethical theory allowed to inform the methodology of the committee. Perhaps a deontological committee would have begun with universal ethical principles, such as respect for persons, which ought to be upheld, and only then considered specific practices, evaluating them to see whether they were consistent with the principles. In contrast, a consequentialist committee might have first articulated the outcomes that make actions good or bad, and then explored which research practices produce or reduce these consequences.

consequentialist perspectives on ethics—the two best known (and importantly, conflicting) approaches to ethics—indicates a basic unfamiliarity with the field.

Delusions of “Objective” and “Empirical” Codes

But an even bigger problem, as Stark articulates, was that the Cook Committee’s methodology “implied that professional psychologists already possessed sound moral judgements that simply needed to be written down” (2010, p. 344). The committee assumed that both the ethical dilemmas submitted to them and their own ethical intuitions were objective because of the “empirical” method used to collect their “data.”⁷ In doing so they failed to consider factors such as how members of a culture may become accustomed to wrong behavior through social norms, until they no longer feel discomfort engaging in unethical behavior or even recognize it as an ethical problem. The 1953 APA ethics code for counselors provides a perfect example of this: the code made no mention of sexual relations between counselors and their patients, and the practice remained accepted by many and even defended as potentially beneficial to the therapeutic process well into the 1970s. Sex between counselors and patients was not explicitly prohibited until 1977, after years of lobbying by feminist psychologists made visible an ethical problem previously invisible to generations of male psychologists (Kim & Rutherford, 2015).

Treating Ethics as a Rational Problem

Finally, the Cook Committee’s approach to ethics assumed a rational, highly cognitive actor. Stark notes that views of human nature are implied in ethics codes, and records how critics

⁷ Interestingly, the term “data” shows up in discussions about psychologists’ involvement in Guantanamo, as when then APA President-Elect Gerald Koocher responded to criticism of the APA leadership on the Council of Representatives listserv by asking if a critical delegate would “give suggestions for how APA might obtain the data needed to investigate?” (Hoffman et al., 2015, p. 216). Discussing the abuses as though they were elusive psychological phenomenon that defied empirical research allowed Koocher to deflect criticism.

of the code such as Diana Baumrind pushed for a view of a “fragile self” which opposed the “resilient self” which eventually prevailed in the 1973 code. But both views of the self share the assumption that ethical decisions happen primarily rationally—a person knows the ethics codes and therefore makes a decision to abide by it. If unethical behavior happens, the cure is simply further education. This rationalistic emphasis is common in psychological theorizing—a relevant example is Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, in which “moral reasoning” stands in for the entirety of moral development. The limitations of such a cognitive approach to ethics are clear: questions of motive, such as whether agents act out of self-interest or genuine moral feeling, are ignored, as is the potential role of self-deception in justifying transgressions of ethical rules ‘for the greater good’, and the potential impact of emotions or other less rational factors in behavior (see Rogerson, Gottlieb, Handelsman, Knapp, & Younggren, 2011; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). In other words, by emphasizing a cognitive approach to ethics, the 1973 ethics code and subsequent APA codes have (ironically) ignored the psychological processes involved in ethical behavior. While they have confidently laid out rules to be followed, they have given little attention to what might actually help psychologists act ethically.

None of these defects appear to have occurred to the Cook Committee, although they had ample time to reflect once their draft was published in the July 1971 issue of the *APA Monitor* and public criticism began. In response, the APA Board of Scientific Affairs sent the Cook Committee back to work on a rewrite. Tired of the process, and distressed by the APA membership’s passionate disagreement with their proposal, the committee hurriedly revised the ethics code, with special attention given to the section on deception (Stark, 2010). Although the public outcry had identified a vocal group of psychologists who had expressed concerns about the risks and morality of lying to research subjects, those who articulated a view of their subjects

as rational, strong, and not easily traumatized—perhaps even expecting to be deceived—won the day. In the final draft deception was not described as unethical, and the inconsistent ethical reasoning in the first draft was excised or smoothed out. Deception was now allowable “when the methodological requirements of a study necessitate” it (Stark, 2010, p. 365), provided the subjects were debriefed afterward.

Diana Baumrind’s Alternate Approach

This conclusion may seem inevitable, given how entrenched the use of deception in experimental practice ultimately became. But as the Cook Committee considered how to respond to the critical reception of their initial draft, there was a moment of opportunity. The alternative conception of research ethics offered by Diana Baumrind, one of the gadflies not invited to join the Cook Committee, sketches an intriguing image of what might have been. Baumrind, a humanistic clinician and researcher, was the most outspoken critic of the code. For over thirty years, beginning with her 1964 criticism of the Milgram experiment, she offered the discipline’s most substantial and coherent critique of its ethics code and practices (Baumrind, 1964, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1978, 1979, 1985, 1990, 1992).

From a leftist, secular Jewish background, Baumrind was sensitive to the needs of vulnerable people and aware of the psychologist’s potential complicity in systems of power (Vande Kemp, 1999). Her ethical writing emphasizes the social contract implicit in the researcher/subject relationship, highlighting what psychologists often neglect: what researchers owe to subjects. Baumrind argued that experimenters are indebted to subjects for their services and must justify the “posture of trust and obedience” (1964, p. 421) they ask their subjects to assume. In addition to more obvious physical harms, Baumrind took seriously the potential loss of dignity that resulted from experiments that “manipulate, embarrass, and discomfort” (1964, p.

422). Baumrind's emphasis on the reciprocity of the researcher-subject relationship prompted some innovative proposals, such as the participation of potential subjects in Institutional Review Boards (IRB), and the consideration of the common good of society in scientists' ethical decision-making.

In several respects Baumrind's criticisms of the code overlaps with our critique. She notes the contradictory ethical traditions reflected in the 1971 draft (Baumrind, 1972); she worries that experimenters using a cost-benefit analysis will deem their own research indispensable (Baumrind, 1971) and she expresses concern that researchers' character will be compromised (Baumrind, 1985). But she goes further, arguing that the Cook Committee had not, in fact, produced an ethics code.

Baumrind held that the committee's unwillingness to provide a clear framework for ethical decision-making and their waffling on deception meant they had failed in their task. In the APA code "the experimenter is not obliged morally to bring his behavior into conformity with clearly stated principles of conduct" (Baumrind, 1972 p. 1083). Baumrind's objection was that the cost-benefit analysis structure pitted the moral obligation of protecting subjects against the moral obligation of scientists to gain knowledge, and that rather than argue that the former ought to overrule the latter, the code justified the violations of the duty to subjects in the name of science. Baumrind rejected the assumption of the code that psychological research "entails some compromise of ethical ideals" (1971, p. 887). If there was no ethical means to conduct an experiment, Baumrind argued, then one ought abandon the project, or consider other methods of answering the question, such as naturalistic observation.

In retrospect, many of Baumrind's criticisms of the code feel prophetic, such as her proclamation that ethical violations "are no more justifiable in the name of science than in the

name of patriotism, national defense, or social change” (1971, p. 893). Indeed her 1985 retrospective documents the harms to subjects, the profession, and society that she believes result from the regular use of deception, such as an increase in subject suspiciousness, undercutting researchers’ commitment to truth, and “undermining confidence in the scientific enterprise” (1985, p. 169). Baumrind’s critiques offer a unique moral vision that is worth mining for fresh insights in post-Hoffman reevaluations of ethics. Baumrind’s writings highlight the fact that psychology’s methodologies were not set in stone. In the 1970s the discipline might have prioritized ethics and reshaped itself, perhaps becoming less dependent on the laboratory experiment as the primary means of establishing fact. More recent criticisms of the field’s overreliance on experimental outcomes as a proxy for human behavior (Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007) and obsession with explanation while neglecting basic description (Rozin, 2009) show how psychologists may have benefited from being nudged towards other methodologies by a stricter ethics code. Ethical caution and a vision of societal good broader than experimenter priorities might have meant a new model for psychology, much like the changes in experimental model earlier in psychology’s history (see Danziger, 1990).

Modern Consequences of the 1973 Ethics Code

We can see the legacy of the Cook Committee’s reliance on cost-benefit analysis in the way that research ethics is taught today. For example, the value of beneficence, featured in both the Belmont Report and in the APA ethics code, is often taught in terms of cost-benefit analysis. Experiments that are low risk/low benefit or high risk/high benefit are said to require difficult decisions, while all others allow easy decisions. This rational calculus assumes an objective, informed, and unbiased actor, overlooking the fact that career pressures (in combination with

other self-serving biases) encourage psychologists to consider their own research valuable and to minimize the risk to participants.⁸

The events documented in the Hoffman Report demonstrate the weaknesses of cost-benefit decision making. Military psychologists faced a situation where lending their expertise in interrogations appeared to be beneficial to society, and the cost of saying no appeared to be the imminent threat of terrorist attacks. Indeed, in 2006 Stephen Behnke, then Director of Ethics of the APA, explained to a reporter that “psychologists helping military interrogators made a valuable contribution because it was part of the effort to combat terrorism” (Lewis, 2006). The Hoffman Report documents such a view among APA members: “that harm to one individual (a detainee) must be weighed against the benefits to third parties (the public) that would result if, for instance, information from the detainee stopped a terrorist attack” (Hoffman et al., 2015, p. 70). At Guantanamo Bay risks to participants were high, but the “participants” were unsympathetic—bad men, who, due to the gravity of their alleged crimes, seemed quite resilient.⁹ Euphemisms such as “enhanced interrogation techniques” allowed interrogators and psychologists to minimize harm they caused and the professional benefit to psychologists willing to collaborate with the Department of Defense further skewed the analysis (for the history of American psychology’s entanglement with the military and intelligence communities see McCoy, 2006, 2007; Solovey & Cravens, 2012; Summers, 2008; Wolfe, 2018). Thus participating in torture became justifiable via a self-serving cost-benefit analysis.

⁸ These biases are supposed to be mitigated by the IRBs, but as Stark (2012) reminds us, IRBs are human and therefore fallible.

⁹ In other contexts prisoners have been recognized as vulnerable: Rutherford (2006) documents governmental concern in the 1970s that prisoners be protected from behavior modification. See Schoen’s (2017) account of evaluating a detainee at Guantanamo Bay for a sense of the psychological toll of “enhanced interrogation.”

In January 2020 James Mitchell, former APA member and one of the architects of Guantanamo’s “enhanced interrogation” techniques, testified: “I felt my moral obligation to protect American lives outweighed the temporary discomfort of terrorists who had taken up arms against America” (Borger, 2020). We believe there is a clear connection between such gross ethical failures and the piecemeal and confused ethical approach used to develop the initial APA research ethics code. Without addressing this foundational problem, without choosing a better approach to ethics, we will fail again, adding further instances to the long list of ethical failures our students learn. We need a code that encourages ethical behavior, not only stricter rules; a code that goes beyond emphasizing ethical reasoning to acknowledge the judgement-deforming pressures of difficult situations.

One barrier to critical reflection on psychology’s approach to ethics is a continued insistence on the objectivity of the ethics code. As we have seen, psychologists tasked with developing ethics codes fall back on the language most familiar to them—that of data and evidence—without noticing that ethics is a different subject, less reducible to empirical analysis. Given this history, psychologists may be tempted to respond to the Hoffman Report by doubling down on the idea of the objectivity of the ethics code and conceptualizing the distorting influence of the Department of Defense as bias—a failure of the objective ideal. However, this response will leave the ethics code as vulnerable to manipulation as ever. Ethical codes’ traditional presentation as ahistorical, ‘objective’ documents without authors or origins contributes to the illusion that the code is value-free and not open to critique (Stark, 2015). We argue a better approach to ethics acknowledges the commitments and allegiances of the individuals who created it.

Psychology and the Problem of Moral Language

Given psychology's roots in philosophy, it may seem surprising that the Cook Committee did not turn to philosophy when dealing with ethics. Such a move could have avoided some of the confusions about ethical systems and provided a framework for interpreting the survey results.¹⁰ However, in addition to psychology's historic interest in distancing itself from philosophy, psychology has also had a strong aversion to moral language (Fuller, 2006; Morawski, 1982; Richards, 1995). One can see the trend away from moral language in early 20th century changes in vocabulary such as the substitution of "personality" for "character" (Nicholson, 2003) and the gradual erasure of character in mental testing (Pettit, 2013). Gordon Allport captures this attitude in his 1921 definition of character as "personality evaluated according to prevailing standards of conduct" (Allport & Vernon, 1930, p. 443), something he judged did not belong in psychology and ought to be excluded from the study of personality.

This reticence to use moral language can also be seen in the modern APA ethics code where, rather than a typical list of 'shoulds' and 'should nots', almost all the statements are in the form 'psychologists *verb*,' such as "psychologists clarify," "psychologists refrain," "psychologists discuss," and "psychologists maintain" (APA, 2017).¹¹ These statements are clearly not a description of what all psychologists do, but function as a set of prescriptive

¹⁰ The originator of the critical incident technique, John Flanagan, defined it as a "set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (1954, p. 327). In our view the critical incident method could be used carefully to identify the issues that an ethics code must address; however the Cook Committee used it uncritically.

¹¹ Ethical Standards 1.03, 2.06, 4.03, and 6.02 respectively. Even the prohibition of torture takes this form: "Psychologists do not participate in, facilitate, assist, or otherwise engage in torture" (Ethical Standards 3.04(b)). This language could be read as a statement about group membership: if psychologists do not participate in torture, then those who assisted at Guantanamo Bay are not psychologists. However, we doubt that the writers intended to eliminate bad practitioners by definition alone; rather, they hoped to create a standard usable to identify and censure bad psychologists.

standards—they are, in fact, ethical claims. Yet instead of acknowledging and committing to a particular approach to ethics, the authors’ discomfort with ethical theory prompted them to adopt language that would disguise the nature of their ethical commitments.

Nevertheless, other parts of the code reveal an assumption that ethics is a system of rules, obligations, and punishments. The introduction of the code describes its ethical standards as “enforceable rules,” says the “APA may impose sanctions” for violations of the standards, and states psychologists “must consider” the code and “must meet” its standard of conduct when it exceeds the law (APA, 2017, p. 1-2). The Principles and Standards also contain many ‘do not’s’ and the occasional ‘should’ or ‘must’, along with references to obligations and sanctions.

Several philosophers have been critical of understanding ethics in terms of obligations and punishments. Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) argues that these notions are a holdover from religious approaches to ethics, which understood ethics in terms of fulfilling laws given by a divine lawmaker. Of course, in recent years the influence of religion on ethics in the Western world has waned, but according to Anscombe, if a legal conception of ethics is “dominant for many centuries, and then is given up” it not surprising that “the concept of ‘obligation,’ of being bound or required as by a law, should remain though they had lost their root” (1958, p. 6).

One problem with retaining this approach to ethics is that absent an all-seeing deity, it may be more rational to be unethical. As the philosopher Candace Vogler (2008) highlights, although physical force, the fear of punishment, and the love of reward are effective means of motivating action, it’s hard to see how force, fear, and self-interest alone can suffice to keep the members of large social organizations—such as the American Psychological Association—always acting well. Yes, the APA code mentions sanctions and a procedure for making complaints, but while a medieval preacher could say God sees and will punish every sin, the

APA cannot claim anything close to the same perfect knowledge and justice. For that reason, there is always a significant chance that a psychologist who violates the APA's ethical standards will go undetected and unpunished, a chance that unethical psychologists may take when they see an opportunity to advance their interests.

An Alternative: Virtue Ethics

Despite early psychology's connection to Christian moral education, modern psychologists are wary of dispensing explicit moral instruction. In fact, its previous connection with moral and religious questions likely helped make the discipline averse to discussing such issues. Dill (1982) suggests that increased secularization is responsible for the academy's neglect of moral instruction, and psychologists' anxiety about being considered legitimate scientists has made them even more reluctant to engage in explicit moral instruction.¹²

Yet moral instruction need not be based on religious ideas. For example, the feminist critique of scientific objectivity offers a helpful model for instructing psychology students in ethics. Feminist psychologists have objected to the traditional emphasis on objectivity, arguing that personal biases or perspectives are impossible to escape and influence every aspect of research (Riger, 1992; Sherif, 1979; Weisstein, 1971). Instead of pursuing unattainable objectivity, feminist psychologists prescribe reflexivity (Morawski, 2014), becoming aware of and reflecting on one's biases, surely a perspective better suited for spotting ethical dilemmas than mere rule-following.

¹² The religious associations of character, moral language, and philosophy (especially Anglo-American moral philosophy) made the concepts suspect once the first, more religiously-oriented generation of psychologists died out. Another association which may have biased psychologists against discussions of character traits is their family resemblance to phrenological faculties, which may have raised worries about committing the "faculty fallacy" (Kosits, 2004). In any event, the concern with embracing character research seems to be the risk of appearing unscientific by adopting religious or pseudoscientific categories or terminology.

An allied approach is virtue ethics, which has enjoyed a recent revival of interest after being long overshadowed by consequentialist and deontological approaches. This recovery and revision of an ancient understanding of ethics found unexpected resonance with feminist philosophers who were interested in Carol Gilligan's 'care ethics' (Gilligan, 1982). Many feminists found an approach focused on the moral importance of character traits more aligned with their interests than what they saw as the overly masculine, legislative approach of deontology and consequentialism (See Pettifor (1996) for a feminist argument for virtue ethics in psychology). Like feminist approaches to psychology, virtue ethics prescribes intensive self-reflection, rather than false claims of objectivity.

Virtue ethics complements feminist critiques of science by explaining how ethical skills can be taught and learned. In contrast to deontological and consequentialist views, which focus on specific actions or dilemmas, virtue ethics focuses instead on the character of the moral actor, their development of virtue, and its ongoing implications for the virtuous person. Instead of "Should one lie?" virtue ethics asks "What does it mean to be an honest person and how can honesty be cultivated?" Since virtue ethics shifts the focus to the moral actor rather than the ethical incident, ethics is then considered within the broader context of time and experience, where moral actors are growing or diminishing in their ability to be virtuous.

To become virtuous – to acquire reliable and characteristic good traits – virtue ethicists prescribe self-reflection and habituation. Reflection or self-examination, as in the Socratic injunction "know thyself," is critical to understanding one's positive and negative moral tendencies and in what circumstances one is likely to fail. Habituation, or practice, is the mechanism for becoming more virtuous: the more one practices the behaviors associated with that virtue, the easier it becomes to act virtuously. Virtue ethicists often compare becoming

virtuous to playing a sport or an instrument; although intellectual knowledge and the instruction of experts can accelerate learning, it is the hours of practice that are decisive in becoming skillful. Therefore, the practice of virtue in everyday, low-stakes situations is seen as vital to enable doing the right thing when it matters, in a situation where it is tempting to do wrong or difficult to know what is right.

While much of this falls outside of current psychological literature,¹³ the importance of action and practice on behavior is compatible with the current literature on habit (e.g. Verplanken & Aarts, 1999; Wood, 2017). Yet virtue ethicists would argue virtues are not rote habits, but skills that must be developed individually and over time. While children and students can practice simple rules such as “Don’t lie,” being honest in complex situations requires considerable practical experience. In contrast to the more rationalist theories of moral development, expertise in virtue demands personal as well as intellectual understanding. For example, because ‘telling the truth’ can be used as an excuse for both hurtful tactlessness and self-serving evasiveness, true honesty requires regular reflection on your actions and reasons for them.

Virtue ethics’ discussion of moral character also differs from psychology’s preferred paradigm of personality, in which traits are often seen as morally neutral and inborn. Unlike personality traits, virtue ethicists hold that agents have a degree of control over their character—although they may have been born with particular tendencies, they are able to work to change their initial traits, strengthening virtues and counteracting vices. Despite this flexibility, virtues and vices are understood to be predictable; they are considered a persistent feature of a person. That is, to have the virtue of generosity requires not only the occasional generous feeling or

¹³ An exception is clinical psychology, where family therapists have discussed the role of virtues in therapy (Doherty & Boss, 1991), and some have adopted virtue ethics for therapeutic purposes (Bland, 2010; Slife, 2012).

generous action, but having a *reliable disposition* to have generous feelings and do generous actions. Virtue ethicists would say that a person with the virtue of honesty will be honest not only when it suits them or others are watching, but reliably, not because they were born honest but because they have learned to appreciate and practice honesty for its own sake.

Thus, the practice of virtue is a social and creative activity (Annas, 2011; Homiak, 2016; Hursthouse, 1999). While it may be tempting to import psychological language of reinforcement and reflex to describe the actions of a mature, virtuous person, this is to underestimate the complexity of social life, and the creativity necessary to act well in countless unique circumstances. Although students initially learn virtues, like other skills, through imitation of their teachers, as they progress they can exercise virtues in new ways, new situations, or even at a level of excellence beyond the ability of their teachers. For example, we do not admire those who give gifts thoughtlessly, without consideration for what others require or appreciate, or those who are easily duped, open to exploitation by con artists. Therefore, to describe someone as truly generous is to say that they give the right gifts, at the right times, to the right people, for the right reasons, and in the right way. As Julia Annas puts it, virtues “enable us to respond in creative and imaginative ways to new challenges” (2011, p. 15). In other words, virtues are neither random whims nor mindless conditioning, but intelligent, learned skills.¹⁴

¹⁴ Drawing on studies in social psychology, some philosophers have argued that behavior is much more variable across situations than should be expected if agents have reliable virtues (Doris, 2002; Harman, 2009). However, virtue ethicists have replied that studies of children and students are not representative of mature moral agents, and furthermore that the key roles of moral reasoning and personal reflection in virtue means that intelligent variations in behavior across situations should be expected (Annas, 2005; Croom, 2014). On the other hand, virtue ethics’ emphasis on reasoning and reflection can lead to charges that it is just as rationalistic as consequentialist or deontological frameworks, and perhaps more paralyzing, because it disavows simple rules and metrics in favor of evaluating reasons for action. However, the developmental nature of virtue allows children and learners to begin with simple heuristics – such as “don’t lie” – and yet progress to a more sophisticated understanding through practical experience and personal reflection, forms of cognition potentially more accessible than the weighing of outcomes for society. As Annas acknowledges, her emphasis on the intelligence of the virtues appears to exclude people with intellectual impairments such as Down Syndrome from being virtuous (2011, p. 32). Bowie-Sexton Purcell (2013) and Reinders (2008) discuss making virtue ethics more inclusive of people with disabilities, but more work in this area is needed.

Objections to Virtue Ethics

Since virtue ethics is unfamiliar to many psychologists, we here address a few objections to the approach. First, the language of virtue and vice may seem incompatible with psychological vocabulary because of its moral pronouncements. However, virtue language also has affinities with psychological discussions of happiness and positive psychology (e.g. Baumeister & Exline, 1999; McCullough & Snyder, 2000). By calling something a virtue, whether it is honesty, loyalty, kindness, or justice, one implies that it is a good trait, a trait you would want for yourself or your children. Most virtue ethicists argue for a strong connection between virtue and flourishing, because as much as we might focus on the external features of a good life (prosperity, a rewarding job, and a good reputation) those things will never make us happy if our inner character is vicious (suspicious, miserly, cowardly, or foolish). Thus the path to happiness requires us to gain those virtues to make the best of our life, and we may even prefer a life of virtue in rags than vice in riches. In other words, virtue ethicists take the saying ‘virtue is its own reward’ seriously. Although they think virtue may correlate with external rewards—for example, being honest often results in a reputation for honesty—they argue that the value of virtue exceeds any utility in securing external benefits, because the virtues are attractive, beautiful, desirable traits in themselves. Therefore, virtue ethicists approach moral questions in different terms from obligations and punishments. Even if there is a way to cheat without being caught, and no omniscient deity to judge our ethical lapses, the virtuous person has reasons to be honest.¹⁵

¹⁵ Compared to the detailed prohibitions and punishments of an ethics code, the promotion of honesty can seem naïve and vague. A good supplement to virtue ethics may be to encourage psychologists to publically commit to model behaviour, similar to how physicians used to take the Hippocratic Oath. Research shows reduced student dishonesty when a student honor code is adopted (Kura, Shamsudina, Chauhan, 2014; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2002), supporting Knapp, Gottlieb, and Handelsman’s (2018) argument that a more aspirational “positive” approach to ethics (rather than the current “floor” model) could result in increased moral sensitivity, higher standards for conduct, and increased motivation for ethical behavior.

A second concern with virtue ethics is whether it is fundamentally conservative, and therefore ill-suited to address social pressures such as corruption, racism, and sexism. Annas (2011) acknowledges that while learning virtues such as honesty and justice should help individuals gain a critical perspective on their peers and teachers, often the pressure to keep in line with one's community is stronger than the demands of virtue. Still, virtue's emphasis on social and developmental features makes these failures easier to diagnose than in an ethical system predicated on simple obedience. Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) explores how racism is inculcated through both the circulation of purported 'facts' about the threats and limitations of different races as well as the conditioning of a wide variety of emotional responses, including fear, hatred, contempt, anger, and suspicion. She argues that this complex mix of cognitive and affective factors means racism cannot be cured by didactic education alone; positive examples and practical experience are also required—the same conditions conducive to the development of virtue. Therefore, while historical forms of virtue ethics are not particularly progressive, especially as initially formulated by Aristotle, contemporary virtue ethicists have argued that the system is flexible enough to redress social issues. Learning a virtue such as bravery makes you part of a specialized community of the brave, a resource that might help the psychologist who would resist institutional or cultural pressures and take a stand against unethical behavior.

A third concern about virtue ethics is moral pluralism. Specifically, the unapologetic use of virtue-language may leave readers asking: "But what if there is disagreement over what counts as virtue? What if talk about 'the virtuous person' risks assuming that there is only one way to be virtuous?" Such persons may worry that a virtue ethical approach is untenable for a profession committed to diversity. Fortunately, virtue ethics is not incompatible with pluralism. While some virtue ethicists (Aristotle) have assumed a wealthy, male, militaristic, and intellectualized version

of the virtuous person, others such as David Hume have explicitly rejected exclusionary accounts of virtue ethics.

Hume sought to combine traditional ethics with the “new scientific approach” of Sir Isaac Newton, which led him to theorize about the psychological mechanisms of association and sympathy and explore their systematic patterns of bias. Hume’s “Newtonian” approach also led him to consider social behaviors and ethical judgments from other cultures and historical periods. This empirical information Hume considered vital in order to understand the role culture plays in virtue and to make sure his conception of particular virtues was not too narrow.

Due to these multicultural commitments, Hume concluded our view of virtue should take into account two kinds of pluralism (Abramson, 1999; Gill, 2011). First, there is a shallow pluralism that occurs when multiple cultures have different understandings of the same virtue. For instance, we have culturally informed views of what counts as honesty: what you think of as a polite fiction might be seen as an outright lie by someone in a different culture. A second and deeper pluralism occurs when cultures disagree over the relative importance of different virtues. For instance, one culture might think justice is more important than benevolence, or that kindness is more important than honesty. Neither of these pluralisms threaten the reality or the desirability of virtue, they merely imply that moral values are developed in culturally specific ways and must be appreciated with cultural sensitivity. Since the discipline of psychology is one such culture-specific group, we may make claims about the virtues necessary to be a good psychologist without denigrating other disciplines or other contexts which require different virtues.

What Virtues?

What virtues should guide research ethics in psychology? Since virtues are general purpose dispositions towards the good, all of them can be applied to every activity. However, Roberts and Wood (2007) argue that there are virtues of particular relevance when agents pursue intellectual goods: courage, caution, autonomy, humility, generosity, and practical wisdom. We can also identify the specific virtues prized in scientific psychology. Tjeltveit (2003) notes that for all psychology's aversion to talk of virtue, the virtues psychologists are committed to become clear in discussions about hiring decisions, promotions, and the evaluation of particular research programs or traditions.¹⁶ For example, Gewirth claims science requires such traits as "honesty, truthfulness ... and willingness to subject one's ideas to public scrutiny, to follow the evidence where it may lead, and to subordinate one's own selfish desires to impartial acceptance of the facts" (1978, p. 359).

This approach to psychology emphasizes disinterestedness in scientific reasoning; the requirement for scientists to detach themselves from their own desires or background to unflinchingly pursue the truth. Other groups within psychology might reject or modify this ideal, emphasizing instead or in addition goods such as empathy towards clients, inclusivity of diverse perspectives, openness to the involvement of participants in shaping research, or sensitivity to the possible societal harms of research. As Tjeltveit observes, one of the difficulties in codifying the implicit values of psychologists is the diversity within the discipline and therefore the varying views on basic concepts such as human nature or what makes for human flourishing.

¹⁶ Tjeltveit argues virtues are not absent from psychology, but merely forced underground by the perception that they are unseemly for the scientist (itself a view that prioritizes certain virtues). For a thorough analysis of the ideal of value-free science see Douglas (2009).

Still, any particular subfield or school of psychology does have a normative set of virtues that are expected; training in such a subfield is an attempt to inculcate in students these virtues. A virtue ethics approach to psychology, then, would recommend making explicit these virtues and producing context-specific ethical training.¹⁷ Similar to Hume's observations on shallow and deep pluralism, subfields might be able to agree on a particular virtue being important, but disagree on how that ought to impact research or how it ranks relative to other virtues. As with different cultures, this does not present a problem for virtue ethics, but rather confirms that the wise practice of virtue is always context-sensitive.

One virtue that deserves particular consideration, given our disciplinary history, is humility. Roberts and Wood (2007) identify intellectual humility as the virtue opposed to intellectual vanity, domination, and arrogance. These latter three are *intellectual vices* when they lead agents to prioritize maintaining their own reputation, influence, and views over the honest exploration of potentially confounding knowledge. In contrast intellectual humility is a “low dispositional concern for the kind of self-importance that accrues to persons who are viewed by their intellectual communities as talented, accomplished, and skilled” (Roberts & Wood, 2007, p. 250). This lack of concern for importance enables humble individuals to be more open to consideration of others' perspectives, even when they challenge their own or are espoused by people who have less status, authority, or education. As Roberts and Wood put it, “In face of reality's capacity to surprise even the smartest of us, a certain skepticism about one's entitlement to disregard the views of minorities, of the unorthodox, and of the young may be a significant

¹⁷ We share Green's (2015) skepticism that unification of the psychology is imminent and thus we believe that ethical training should be tailored to particular sub-fields or subject matter (especially at the graduate level). Happily, adopting a virtue ethics framework in teaching allows for flexibility in the particular virtues emphasized.

asset” (2007, p. 253). In other words, intellectual humility is necessary because access to the truth is not reliably correlated with high self-regard (see Teo, 2019 on epistemic modesty).

Intellectual humility has several applications to psychological research. One arena for humility is experimental design and oversight. Psychologists often regard applying for IRB approval as a pointless bureaucratic exercise. However, the true value of these consultations depends not only on the expertise of the IRB, but also the willingness of the researcher to reflect on the feedback they receive, rather than doing the minimum necessary to get their application passed. In other words, to fully benefit from collaborative processes, researchers must be humble enough to receive correction well. A second application of humility is when researchers engage with research participants. All too often psychologists perceive participants as means to an end, not as conversational partners in the research process (Morawski, 2015). Good subjects are compliant, quiet, and produce usable data; they don’t talk back. While psychology education may emphasize the importance of careful observation in data collection or listening to clients in therapy, it tends to devalue the voices of research participants. To listen to and empathize with participants requires not only skills of attention but also the virtue of humility, the willingness to consider others’ life experiences and perspectives regardless of their perceived status.

A greater valuing of the insights of research participants has been incorporated into various qualitative methods and approaches, such as Participatory Action Research and Community Psychology.¹⁸ In fact, many of qualitative research’s core practices imply humility. For example, the rejection of experimenter objectivity as a realistic ideal comes from approaching the scientific method with a humble view of human nature—gone is the mythic

¹⁸ Banks et al. (2013) argue that current principle-based and regulatory-based ethics codes are a poor match for the specific challenges of participatory research and point to a guide (CSJCA & NCCPE, 2012) created to compensate for these inadequacies.

scientist able to perform superhuman feats of objectivity, cutting himself off from all personal feeling and commitments. Similarly, the weight given to participants' voices shows humility about sources of knowledge—rather than residing solely in traditional sites of authority such as the disciplinary consensus or the researcher's mind, it is also to be found by seeking out the people one wishes to understand, no matter how powerless or disenfranchised they are. Virtues often work in concert, and thus intellectual humility works together with an appreciation of diversity to help psychologists seek truth in the different perspectives of others.

But qualitative methods do not have a monopoly on humility: the recent reforms in response to the Reproducibility Crisis also center on humility. Consider the Center for Open Science, where openness is a governing value associated with good science and scientific progress (Nosek, 2017; Nosek & Bar-Anan, 2012). This virtue of openness encourages the practice of other virtues. The sharing of data and code facilitates a collaborative, generous approach to science, rather than a closed, competitive system where researchers hoard everything from data to experimental procedures. The encouragement to be open with ideas and share research plans earlier in the process requires both experimenter courage and humility—it is vulnerable to be open and to invite feedback earlier in the research process, rather than present a final, polished product to the world. These reforms demystify the research process: the scientist as expert who produces groundbreaking (and headline-worthy) findings through her sheer experimental genius gives way to the scholar who perseveres in following a rigorous process in conversation with a larger community. The former model encouraged vices such as pride, selfishness, greed, and vainglory, while the embrace of open science recognizes that these vices were not solely due to the failings of individual scientists but also problems with the structure of science, which was incentivizing vice (taking the form of practices such as HARKing and p-

hacking). Whether the Replication Crisis reformers use virtue language or not, their actions show that they recognize the morally deforming nature of the discipline and have therefore introduced changes that incentivize virtue, in the process helping scientists resist temptation.

As we consider what virtues psychology should cultivate, we should review the vices exposed by the Hoffman Report. Others have analyzed the failure in psychological terms and organizational dynamics (Gómez, Smith, Gobin, Tang, & Freyd, 2016; Handelsman, 2017; Kleinberg, 2016; LoCicero et al. 2016; Welch, 2017), but a virtue ethics perspective also exposes institutional vices which help to explain the APA's actions. For example, a collective lack of humility helps to explain the APA's dismissive and hostile response to even friendly critics (for such experiences see Aalbers & Teo, 2017; Bernstein, 2017; Thomas, 2017). Certainly the APA's change from what Pope (2016) has called "professional ethics"—an ethics focused on the public interest—toward a "guild ethics" that prioritizes members' interests demonstrates selfishness and perhaps even greed (given the interest in shielding the organization from liability).¹⁹ Eidelson and Arrigo (2015) name the APA's desire for "unbridled growth" as the causal factor in its ethical failure: "The APA got into this mess by holding a deeply flawed assumption: that psychology should embrace every opportunity to expand its sphere of influence" (p. 3). In virtue terms this expansionist view of psychology suggests gluttony—an out of control appetite for power and influence.²⁰ Eidelson and Arrigo's suggestion that the "bounds of our professional ethics and expertise must limit our horizon" is a counter-cultural articulation of virtues of temperance, judgment, and selflessness. Baumrind's emphasis on seeking the

¹⁹ According to the Hoffman Report, then Director of the APA Ethics Office, Stephen Behnke, stated that the role of his office was "not protection of the public" (Hoffman et al., 2015, p. 475). Bersoff (1994) discusses the avoidance of liability as a motive in the 1992 revision of the ethics code.

²⁰ Former APA insider Bryant Welch (2017) identifies "malignant organizational grandiosity" (p. 118) as a contributor to ethical compromise.

common good and reciprocity rather than disciplinary interests is also relevant—we need a reorientation of the APA’s governing values, a moral culture change (Gómez et al., 2016 provides concrete suggestions on this front).

However, as discussed in the previous section, enduring traits such as the virtue of humility or the vice of arrogance are developed through years of practice, meaning that for best results humility must be inculcated prior to the stage of striking a committee. In other words, developing a culture of humility in the APA is not only the task of leaders or board members but everyone who teaches students of psychology, from their first exposure to the field onwards. Intellectual humility is also the virtue required to engage in constructive dialogue about moral values. That is, if psychologists disagree about research ethics or its proper application in psychology, any hope of reaching agreement would require, at minimum, the careful work of listening and attempting to sympathetically understand different ethical perspectives.²¹ And again, such work requires humility to be successful. Thus, while we recognize that endorsing humility as a key intellectual virtue for psychologists may be contentious, we believe it is entailed by any proposal that acknowledges and seeks positive engagement with moral diversity, not just our own.²²

Implications for Teaching

How do the above insights impact teaching? In this section we suggest what a virtue ethics-influenced research methods course might look like. A teaching guide with further resources and more detailed suggestions is available at <https://bit.ly/2LUoCer>; the assignments

²¹ Although O’Doherty and Burgress (2013) do not use the term, the importance and correct application of intellectual humility is a clear consideration in their work on public ethical deliberation.

²² To be clear, commending humility as a virtue does not require adopting Aristotelian virtue ethics. Just as Mill and Kant had a place for virtue in their consequentialist and deontological moral frameworks, a variety of contemporary ethical systems may be able to incorporate the concept of intellectual virtues.

we outline below have been used at Crandall University, in the first semester of a year-long research methods course.²³ Key objectives of this approach are to make students self-aware and critical of their own biases and moral vulnerabilities as they begin their first experience as researchers, as well as to see ethics as something vital to the entire research process, not simply something to be navigated in relation to the ethical use of subjects. This approach works best if integrated into the course as a whole, so that throughout the course students are asked to reflect on their own biases and to notice the assumptions of the researchers they learn about. The many ethical failures of psychology as well as recent methodological criticisms of the field, such as the WEIRDness of many experimental subjects (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), allow for discussions of the ways in which psychologists may contribute to the victimization of the populations they wish to help.

In order for the students to be able to reflect on their own character, they first need an introduction to the vocabulary of virtue. Using a handout with traditional virtues and vices which features some intellectual virtues (such as humility, curiosity, tenacity, independence) usually sparks productive discussion. While students may initially struggle with the archaic vocabulary and find it difficult to understand why virtue plays an important role in research, a discussion of the impact of vices on the scientific process, including imagining what Donald Trump would be like as a scientist, clarifies things.²⁴ In addition to these reoccurring discussion themes, specific homework assignments help students develop virtue ethical language and perspectives. For example, early on in the semester a “Reflexivity” homework assignment asks students to reflect

²³ We did not track the outcomes of this approach, but some (e.g. Agnew Cochran & Fozard Weaver, 2017) have attempted to measure the inculcation of virtue in an ethics class.

²⁴ This example uses a meme depicting an academic paper ostensibly written by a scientist Donald Trump. It depicts how Trump’s vices might manifest themselves in the scientific realm—he rambles rather than giving evidence, has a vague methods section, and only cites himself.

on their background, and the various beliefs and personal factors that might influence them as they conduct research or apply research findings.

Another possible assignment is a “Habit Audit” in which students observe and record their behavior for a week—How did they use their free time? What did they do automatically? Based on this and reflection on their own character, they choose a particular virtue they wish to strengthen and record how they will do so. They then turn in a brief report on how successful they were in this effort. At Crandall, students decided to work on such things as being brave (by speaking up in class), forgiving (by forgiving a family member who had wronged them), and being more diligent (by separating themselves from their cell phone while studying). Some students demonstrated insight into how these practices might impact their future careers, for example, a student who decided to work on sympathy and unselfishness wrote: “I think my personal relationships as well as my (someday) clients would benefit.” Although a single assignment may not produce permanent transformation, it introduces students to the idea that they could work at becoming more virtuous.

These assignments also help students prepare for the end of semester paper, which depends on them being able to depict virtues and vices in psychological research, both in terms of scientist’s behavior and in the methodological decisions made. This paper assignment follows Nisbett (1990) in appropriating C. S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters* to discuss good research in psychology. While in Lewis’ original book one demon tutors another in the art of temptation, Nisbett’s demon “Slump”, in service to the “Anti-Muse”, tempts his assigned psychologist to do uninspired, conventional research. In our assignment, students write a series of letters in which a senior “science demon” gives advice to a junior demon on tempting a new graduate student in

psychology to conduct bad research. Students explain their science demon's advice in footnotes that refer to course readings and class discussions on good and bad research.

Although ethics is one area that students are asked to touch on, the assignment is intentionally broad, in order to emphasize how virtue and vice affect every aspect of research. Therefore the letters are written to give advice throughout the research process during such stages as literature review, experiment design, a problem encountered in research, interpreting the results, and next steps once the study is completed. As the student example below shows, students can integrate discussions of vices with more conventional methodological problems:

My dear Hubbleglub,

It is reassuring to know that our patient is not handling the pressures of starting grad school well. This can be used to your strength. ... This habit of laziness will hopefully lead into his research if you are proficient in your methods. This will happen by making him change his hypothesis after he does his research because it is your goal to make sure he does not care about development in the early stages of his research – it should be based on sand and not a solid foundation. Without the solid foundation he will not have clearly defined his variables either, and this will lead to the exact type of research we want.

In addition to testing more conventional instruction in research methods, this assignment can be used to test student comprehension of the problems made evident by the Replication Crisis and addressed by the Open Science movement and other reforms.²⁵

The format of fictional letters, which students tend to enjoy, also has the advantage of allowing students to creatively engage with different ethical scenarios. Creating the fictional graduate student's struggles challenges them to think about all the possible ways in which vices

²⁵ Chopik, Bremner, Defever & Kelle (2018) provides one approach to teaching the Replication Crisis.

could hijack the research process, without feeling defensive or demoralized because their own research ideas are being scrutinized. The task of creating a research project where everything goes wrong allows students to develop a concrete understanding of the more abstract ideas presented in class. For example, students are able to articulate the ethical failures that result from a lack of reflexivity, as another student example shows:

It is important that you keep him [the grad student] completely unaware of his biases. See to it that he only accepts research that complements his hypothesis and matches his worldview. Draw his attention to what kinds of research findings celebrities in the media are endorsing rather than what actual researchers are saying.

Thus, rather than drilling students on the APA ethics code, this approach makes students more aware of their own preexisting assumptions, values, and blind spots, and invites them to regular reflection on how such factors might make them vulnerable to particular ethical lapses. Rather than teaching students blind obedience to ethical codes, this approach highlights the failings of the field and suggests practices that will help budding psychologists guard against ethical offences even in the event of a compromised APA ethics code.

Conclusion

In 2018 the APA announced that “Starting immediately, complaints will be accepted against APA member psychologists only if there is no alternative forum to hear the complaint” (Pope, 2018). This move means that military, governmental, or commercial organizations would oversee complaints about psychologists, holding them to their own ethical standards, rather than the APA’s. This abdication of ethical responsibility, presumably meant to shield the APA from ethics-related litigation, was protested by 14 former chairs of the Ethics Committee (2000-2017)

and went against the 2017 recommendations of the Commission on Ethics Processes (a group created following the Hoffman Report).

This move, along with recent attempts to undo the prohibitions against psychologists being involved in interrogations and to remove the Hoffman Report from the APA website, unfortunately demonstrates that at least some APA members have learned the wrong lesson from the Hoffman Report. Rather than engaging in rigorous self-assessment and recommitting themselves to the pursuit of ethics, the APA seems to believe they can address ethical failings by distancing themselves from the process entirely. The outsourcing of ethics complaints reveals the extent to which the APA sees ethics as a purely regulatory issue, demonstrating their more limited understanding of ethics as rules and obligations. There seems to be no recognition that ethical issues permeate all of psychological work, and can be neglected or avoided only at great professional and moral peril.

These failures of leadership are discouraging; however, it continues to be possible to recast psychology's relationship with ethics, and to experiment with new ways of engaging with ethical questions. This vacuum of leadership also underscores the urgency of the educational task—if the APA is no longer providing a workable ethical framework, it is up to educators in the discipline to provide their students with the tools and understanding to strengthen their character, to ready them to act with integrity. Teaching virtue ethics can also help guard against future morally problematic changes to the ethics code; after all, a virtuous psychologist will continue to act ethically, no matter the gaping loopholes in their professional ethical code.

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