Debate 1 Writeup – Brennan Giles

Ethics plays a huge role in the effort to improve Public Health. In order to improve medicine it takes an in depth analysis of human functioning whether that be physical or social, and often times getting that level of detail requires ethically challenging research.

Excellent points for Pro:

My side took the Pro position which asserted that Laud Humphreys research was valid despite being ethically challenging. One of our main points was that for centuries humans have used ethically challenging research in order to save millions of lives. An extreme example of this would be how during WW2, thousands of prisoners were killed during savage experiments conducted by Nazi scientists in a very ethically violating way. Despite this, their research was fundamental to modern medicine and the majority of these researchers and their work were forgiven by the end of the war. It was through their horrific experiments that we transformed the medical system into the reliably effective one we enjoy today. After the opposing side admitted this to be true, I pointed out that Laud’s research was no different and by comparison extremely understandable; No one was hurt, killed, or even arrested because of his research and as a result his findings had the potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives. Since HIV is spread “socially” moreso than the vast majority of diseases, understanding how social interaction influenced disease transfer was key to defeating HIV.

The opposition side hinted at but did not directly contend the most important argument they could make, which was that the ends can never justify the means. This is true; making the argument of the ends justify the means is a slippery slope situation many modern governments use even today to oppress their citizens. As a result the research probably should never have been accepted and even shunned by the scientific community. Because of the loose, barely scientific nature of the research I am not sure how useful it could have proved in the end anyways.

Debating this issue made me appreciate the scientific method more because it safeguards against ethical violations such as this, but at the same time I wonder how much we could accomplish if we were able to turn off our morality for a day and conduct some controversial experiments. I certainly understand the issue more as a result of this debate and I am interested to learn more about how the scientific community at the time addressed these very same issues while the actual disease still ran rampant in their communities.