

TOK Essay - Title 6

If we conclude that there is some knowledge we should not pursue on ethical grounds, how can we determine the boundaries of acceptable investigation within an area of knowledge? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.

Word Count – 1580 words

The phrase “Ethics is kenning the distinction between what you have a right to do and what is right to do.” – Potter Stewart makes us better understand what is ethics. The study and examination of moral principles and issues are commonly referred to as ethics. The concept of ethics is quite prodigious and the code of conduct changes over time by the people who are working in the particular area of that knowledge or outside that area of knowledge.¹ The moral foundation for doing or not doing anything to avoid real-world harm such as physical or mental violence, prejudice, etc are the boundaries that are specified under the phrase ethical ground or the code of conduct. The limitations of the allowable study are the constraints placed on the methods of acquiring information and the sorts of issues that can be investigated.

While conducting my Physics Extended Essay experiments, I never read the conclusion presented by other researchers before conducting my experiment. This prevented me from forming preconceived notions and helped me to prevent falsifying or manipulating the data of my experiment. Overall it helped me avoid breaking any code of conduct. The title argues that on ethical considerations, certain information should not be explored, and how we might define the bounds of permissible study. By researching in the fields of Natural Sciences and Human Sciences, I discovered that some knowledge should not be researched if the theory violates some ethical laws.

Some Natural Science experiments are carried out on uncertain ethical grounds. Trying to stay within the boundaries of ethical laws is what we are always trying to achieve when we dwell into new areas of science.²

¹ Theory of knowledge - course companion

² Theory of knowledge - course companion

Organism cloning is the process of generating a new multicellular organism that is genetically similar to an existing one. Scientists have made significant advances in cloning, including the asexual reproduction of sheep and cows. There is a lot of ethical controversy about whether or not cloning should be employed. This is mostly since a lot of waste is produced. Dolly the sheep had 277 failed attempts and 276 eggs were wasted.³ Also, cloning pets would make them a commodity that can be bought by money, this will increase the number of stray pets and will create a disbalance in the ecosystem. Furthermore cloned animals like Dolly only have a shorter life span. Animal cloning brings pain to animals and is a door to human cloning which has a high ethical value. Cloning could make us play like a God, which will give us the power to decide who will live and die. In the long run, this could also lead to the formation of designer babies whose embryos are modified and manipulated. After the cloning of Dolly, the sheep took place we all got to know about the life span, disease and other real-world problems related to cloning. This demonstrates that if we had not attempted cloning, we would not have been able to distinguish the risks and consequences of organism cloning. After seeing all this, the experts in this area of knowledge set the ethical boundaries. The boundaries were set by looking at the suffering both mental and physical, economic & ecological balance, future potential and all the other things. The United Nations came up with the Declaration on Human Cloning in 2005.⁴ The proclamation is ambiguously worded, forbidding "any types of

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloning>

⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12289616/#:~:text=After%20defining%20%22artificial%20insemination%20of,for%20the%20purpose%20of%20procreation.>

human cloning that are incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life." ⁵

J. Robert Oppenheimer⁶ was a theoretical physicist from the United States. He is widely regarded as the "Father of the Atomic Bomb" for his participation in the Manhattan Project, the World War II effort that produced the first nuclear weapons. Nuclear energy is both a curse and a blessing, where it could be used for the greater good, like nuclear power plants, as well as nuclear warheads. It is a controversial topic of research and has a very thin boundary between what is correct and what is incorrect. Miners of uranium were poorly compensated, and they are rarely informed of the dangers. Nuclear ethics assumes that the very real risks of human extinction, mass human death, or massive environmental harm posed by nuclear weapons are serious ethical or moral issues. It assumes, for example, that human extinction, mass human destruction, and environmental degradation are all moral problems. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is the world's focal point for nuclear cooperation, promoting the safe, secure, and peaceful use of nuclear technologies. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has established a Code of Ethics for Nuclear Operating Organizations. The risk of the consequences and the threat to life created by nuclear bombs is what led them to set the boundaries in this case.

The boundaries of ethics can't be predefined in new experiments and research because of a lack of expertise in that field, the only way we can define this ethical ground or code of conduct is by performing and experimenting with that knowledge.

⁵ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/pdfs/issues/policy-advocacy/upload/ethicscode.pdf>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._Robert_Oppenheimer

There are certain circumstances when there are no ethical restrictions yet the study is sometimes severe; to control this, we have the Royal Society, World Health Organization, and many more who create the ethical groundwork for the research. Many issues are approached using moral and universal law arguments, utilitarian cost-benefit calculations, concerns about unforeseen side effects, comparisons to any alternative, and best and worst-case scenarios.

History is the study of the past and the body of information that arises from that study, rather than the past or anything that has happened.⁷ Historians create a historical past comprised of historical facts that differ from the past itself. A variety of issues occur as a result of historians' role as interpreters of historical traces rather than time travellers. The study of a location's or culture's History can be done by historians or organisations who live in that region or place with the people who live there and study them.

Japanese History textbook disputes is about a History textbooks used in Japan's secondary education which is approved by the government. The disputes revolve mostly around the character of Japan's military aggressiveness in the First Sino-Japanese War, Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, the Second Sino-Japanese War, and World War II is minimised or whitewashed in the textbook. The textbook, which was authorised by the Ministry of Education in 2001, sparked outrage in Japan, China, and Korea. A considerable number of Japanese historians and educators objected to the New History Textbook's content and handling of Japanese wartime

⁷ Theory of knowledge - course companion

operations.⁸ This demonstrates that Japan's Ministry of Education attempted to censor knowledge to distort the country's favourable image in the eyes of future generations. Censorship of historical knowledge is an immoral practice because everyone has the right to information. The effect of this can be seen in the long run and could lead to bias in the students which in future will be reflected in their lifestyles. In this case, ethical boundaries are set because of power.

Following the 1922 discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings in Luxor, Egypt, the "mummy's curse" gained worldwide fame. When Howard Carter uncovered a little hole to gaze inside the tomb at treasures that had been concealed for 3,000 years, he also sparked a worldwide interest in ancient Egypt. Lord Carnarvon, the person who sponsored the expedition died of blood poisoning. Just six of the 26 persons who were there when the tomb was uncovered died within a decade.⁹ When these mummies are uncovered, they can transmit new sorts of viruses, germs, and illnesses. Uncovering these mummies can lead to the spread of diseases and viruses that we caught in that place for years. Also, opening these mummies will destroy the History of that place which is buried in that ground for years. But if we don't unearth them we will not be able to know about the History and the past of that place. In this case, the experts did a cost-benefit analysis where they came up with the boundaries of ethics and later decided to open the tomb.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_history_textbook_controversies#:~:text=The%20textbook%20downplays%20or%20whitewashes,in%20Japan%2C%20China%20and%20Korea

⁹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/curse-of-the-mummy>

The ethical boundaries in History are related that one should not plagiarise, falsify and make the people remember the trauma they have suffered in the past.¹⁰ The American Historical Association (AHA) is the oldest and largest professional association of historians in the United States and the world. They are in charge of overseeing all research, but because different countries have varied rules and punishment levels, it is simpler for persons or research inside the community to manipulate their work.

After witnessing several examples, I could that there are different set boundaries for different fields of study. In Natural Science, the boundaries are decided based upon effect of the research on the environment, economy and living beings, but in History, the boundaries are set on to effect they have on the people studying and there are no concrete boundaries of ethics in the field of study. Ethical boundaries are defined or reframed when we encounter actual conflicts between professional work and social, sexual, religious or business relationships. So to conclude that without trying things out or experimenting, we cannot determine if something is ethical or not. So, there should be a basic structure of the ethical code of conduct that cannot be changed or manipulated, and then researchers should conduct their research without violating the main structure; because if we don't study something because it is unethical, we will never know the truth or the History of it is.

¹⁰ <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2010/ethics-for-historians-the-perspective-of-one-undergraduate-class>

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