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MINDFULNESS - AN IMPORTANT PART OF WHAT WE WANT TO BRING ACROSS IN ETHICS TRAINING

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Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to contribute to this workshop on ethics in research training. My background is Scandinavian literature and cross-disciplinary research education in ethics here in Norway, in which I was involved for 15 years. Since 2006 I teach ethics, literature and leadership at the Diakonhjemmet University College.

In my talk I will mainly address the question: What should the aim of the study of ethics in research training be? First, however, I will give a brief report on ethics in the research training of literary scholars and the humanities in general in Norway.

Ethics training in the humanities

The ethics training in PhD-education at most Norwegian universities and university colleges in the field of literature and the humanities in general is included in a compulsory 10 ECTS credits course on the theory of science, i.e. time spent on ethics training is approximately 3-5 credits (2-3 weeks of work).

Most universities and university colleges have their own curriculum and way of teaching ethics. In general the focus seems to be mainly on research ethics, i.e. on research ethical guidelines and general principles, but some also teach ethical theories and include normative aspects of theory of science.

A brief telephone inquiry indicates that the reason for including ethics in the compulsory theory of science module is mainly practical; it ensures that ethics also becomes a compulsory topic in research education. Scholarly arguments are also mentioned, for example the need to conceptualize ethics within a broader framework of the theory of science, and to avoid that ethics is reduced to rules and protection against malpractice.

The teaching/training varies from a series of lectures to a full week seminar on the theory of science (including ethics). Normally writing an essay is part of the training. Ethics, however, is not always a compulsory part of the essay topic. In some PhD-programs the essay might be theoretical or practical, in others the student is expected to write an essay on ethical aspects of his/her own PhD-project.

The general experience seems to be that the combination of theory of science and ethics training is mutually fruitful.

Then I turn to the main question of my talk.

What should be the aim of the study of ethics in research training?

My suggestion is stated in the title of my talk: *mindfulness*. Before I explain what I mean by mindfulness and why I think it is important, I will briefly sketch two other main goals (which I assume most of us agree upon):

1. To develop *sound moral judgement* and prevent malpractice, i.e. developing knowledge of good practice, ethical guidelines, codes of conduct, legislation, and the most urgent and frequent occurring moral dilemmas, challenges and temptations in the actual field, to stimulate high moral standards and counteract misconduct.
2. To develop *moral reasoning skills*, including the knowledge of ethical theories and their basic concepts, distinctions and arguments, and practical training in the analysis of actual moral dilemmas in the field/casuistry to stimulate sound moral judgement.

Moral reasoning skills and knowledge of ethical theories might be beneficial not only for research ethical reasons, but also for one's scholarly analytical skills in general. That is the ability to recognize, analyze and discuss moral aspects of the research material one is dealing with, like literary texts for a literary scholar or empirical data for a social scientist.

In my experience, however, something more is needed than preventing malpractice and promoting moral reasoning skills.

Recognizing moral challenges

A frequent moral challenge, perhaps the most frequent one, is *the moral challenge we do not recognize as such* (before it is too late), perhaps due to personal lack of awareness and attention, perhaps due to unsound attitudes or habits in our research environment and organizational culture, perhaps due to the lack of foresight and moral imagination, and perhaps for other reasons.

An example: I guess most of us, if we think back and contemplate our own careers as researchers (or our working lives or personal lives), will perhaps see that moral blunders we made were *not* made due to lack of knowledge of ethics, but because of *blindness* towards what was at stake.

Perhaps this is a special challenge for young researchers, often exploring complex phenomena with future, normative implications, trying to develop something new, it be ideas, methods, theories, technologies, crossing borders of tradition, disciplines, cultures and/or mentalities.

Recognizing moral challenges when moving around within *the complexity of the new and unknown* presupposes moral sensitivity, imagination and intuition. These are *not* primarily skills of knowledge, analysis and logic, but *rather* a question of awareness, attitude and creativity, *qualities of character*.

In lack of a better concept, I have called these qualities of character *mindfulness*. As you see from the title of my talk, I propose considering *mindfulness* as an aim of the study of ethics, as something we want to bring about in research training.

The concept of *mindfulness* is borrowed from different sources. It was introduced into organization studies in the eighties, and developed by Karl Weick (Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan) and his associates as a concept for organizational attention and ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity and high risk (Weick et al. 1999, Weick and Sutcliffe 2006, Weick and Sutcliffe 2007).

The concept is also applied within medicine and psychology, introduced by Jon Kabat-Zinn (University of Massachusetts Medical School) as a concept for a mental attitude of openness and awareness, which is considered (and has been proved) helpful to

reduce stress, pain and illness (Kabat-Zinn 1990, Baer 2003, Hayes et al. 2004, Hayes 2006).

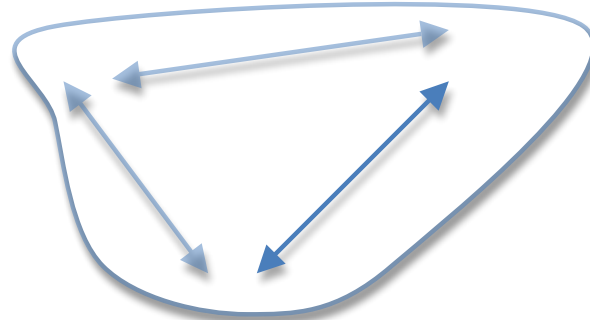
Mindfulness, as it might be relevant to ethics and research training, might be considered the ability 1) to become aware that something of moral value is at stake, 2) to recognize moral issues as they may emerge in the outskirts of the mind (perhaps initially as vague perceptions or intuitions of future challenges), and 3) to bring such moral phenomena into the centre of attention, phenomena which easily might be overlooked.

Sound moral judgement

Ethical guidelines, codes of conduct, legislation, etc.

Moral reasoning skills

Ethical theories, concepts, arguments, etc



Mindfulness

Moral awareness, imagination, relatedness, etc

Mindfulness in research training. How could it be carried out?

Perhaps this – mindfulness – is a too idealistic, non-realistic aim of the study of ethics in research training, considering the limited time for this. The time might be needed for the study of research ethics in a more strict sense.

However, if we should – in spite of this – consider mindfulness as an aim (which I think we should), how could this be carried out?

As far as I know, there is limited research to draw on. Within organizational studies leadership and individual capacities are considered central to creating a mindful organizational culture, and recruitment an essential factor of success in this respect. How to train such capacities has – as far as I know – not been the object of any research. Within medicine mindfulness is trained using techniques inspired by Eastern meditation and Zen philosophy. Although this seems invoke relaxation responses in patients, helpful in reducing stress and pain, this approach may not be exactly what we need in our context.

There might be a series of ways of doing this; innovative approaches which are not yet well known. My suggestion is to consider works of literature as a source of experience and insight to stimulate moral mindfulness (Eide 2001, Eide 2009). In my experience working with great literature may bring people in contact with their own moral intuitions and (perhaps hidden) values, and create various associative and creative (and often surprising new) points of departure for recognizing moral issues. This may enrich the study of ethics based on casuistry (in different forms) or discussions of guidelines, principles, concepts and theories.

This is not a new idea. At Harvard Business School the course "The moral leader" has been taught on the basis of literature for more than 20 years now (Badaracco 2006, Sucher 2007a, Sucher 2007b). At Chicago Law School the philosopher and classic

Martha Nussbaum has been teaching future lawyers ethics by reading drama and modern novels (Nussbaum 1995), and has argued that ethics needs literature, because "moral attention and moral vision finds in novels its most appropriate articulation" (Nussbaum 1990: 148).

According to my experience the added value of using literature as additional material for studying ethics, is that it challenges and actualizes the students' moral conceptions and intuitions, which I think represents a sort of mindfulness which might be needed not only for lawyers and leaders, but also for researchers confronted with questions of complexity, truth and future implications.

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