

Research ethics

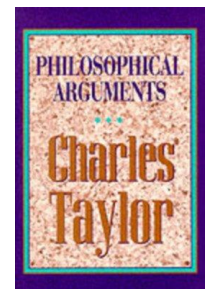
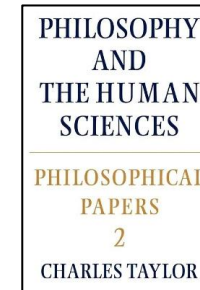
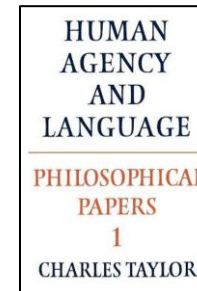
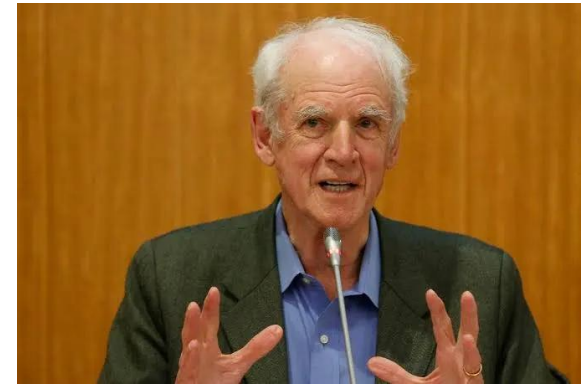
- How and why are research ethical norms morally binding?
- What makes a social theory right?

Rune Nydal

Programme for Applied Ethics, IFR, NTNU
Chairing NTNU's research integrity committee.

What is it for a (social) theory to be right?

Charles Taylor:
Social theory as practice 1985



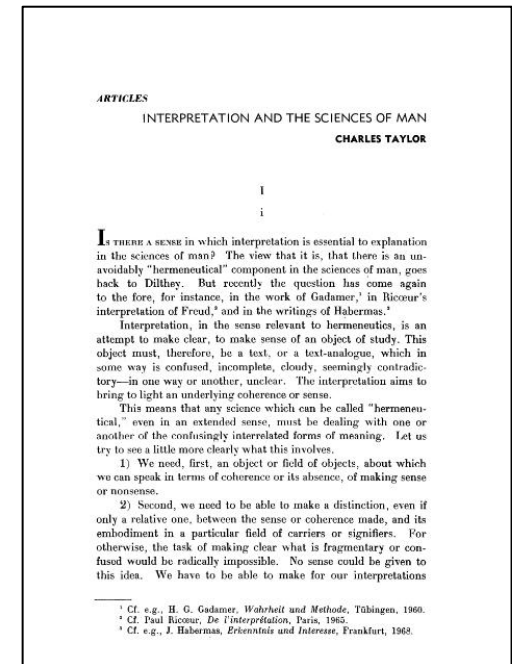
Background - “positivismestriden”

Interpretation and the science of man 1971

How the social sciences and humanities differ from the natural sciences

- Humans as self-interpreting animals
- Explaining non-humans vs understanding humans
- Seeking universal laws vs idiosyncratic historic understanding

The natural science model



Interpretation and the science of man
Charles Taylor 1971

Fifteen years later

Social theory as practice

When do we know we got it right? Taylor propose to shift our attention from

- the content of theories (and how they relate to the world) towards
- “the practice of theorising”

Taylor’s suggestion comes with a promise:

- we “may gain a great deal by examining our theorizing about social matters as practice”

Science; a practice of theorising

- Aim to explain or understand a phenomena; what is really going on

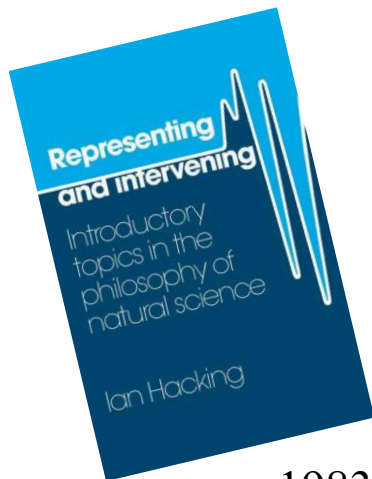
“What is it for a theory to be right?”

- Level 1: A practical methodological question we may ask at work in our practices of theorising: How do we know we got it right?
- Level 2 (philosophy of science): A theoretical question we may typically ask when, or if, we run into difficulties in our practices of theorising. Theorising the practices of theorising may hopefully create ‘clairvoyance’, clarity on what is going on when we theorise. Like when we seek to sort out controversies on the “scope and validity of theories”

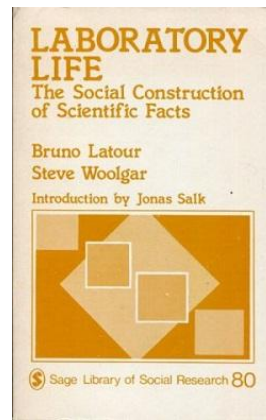
Sidenote; Taylors paper in context

Natural theory as practice

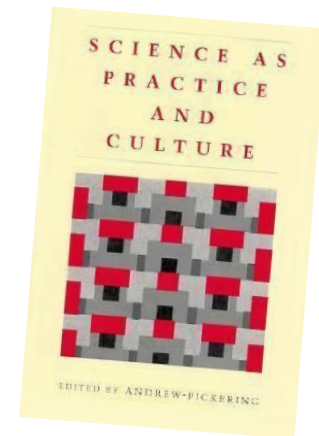
- Heated debates on similar proposal to shift attention from “content of theories” to “practices of theorising” in studying natural sciences (perhaps especially heated at the time this paper was published)
 - Context of discovery vs context of justification



1983



1979



1992

Social theory as practice

Taylor's invitation comes with a claim and a diagnosis;

- there is a widespread lack of self-understanding among practitioners at Level 1.
- we will understand this if we shift our Level 2 attention away from truth conditions of the contents of theories to how truths are established in practices of theorising
 - “The activities of searching for, creating, espousing and rejecting theories are too little understood, and that they are far from being unproblematic, as we often assume in our concerns to focus on the *content* of our theories”

Natural science model

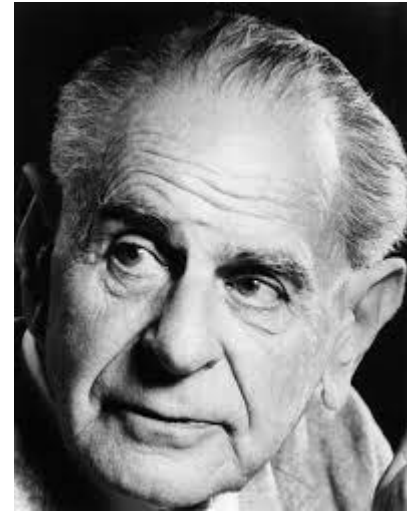
“We *think* we know the activity of exploring nature”

- The natural science model may tell a “tolerably clear story” of what is going on in the natural sciences – but it is a “disastrous” imaginary for the social sciences.
- At stake: the understanding of the point and purpose of theorising: a correct representation of the phenomena one aim to understand.

Popper's natural science model

Science allow us to let our theories die instead of us

“But have we not destroyed the environment with our natural science? No! We have made great mistakes. It is indeed impossible to foresee all the unintended consequences of our actions. Here science is our greatest hope: its method is the correction of error”



In search of a better world, 1992: viii

The point and purpose of theorising.

The natural science model

- A doctor may research what is going on in a living body that become sick
- Understanding of ‘underlying mechanisms’ may in turn guide her medical practice

Tempting analogy to the science of man

- An economist may research what is going on when inflation takes place
- Understanding underlying mechanisms may in turn guide policy decisions

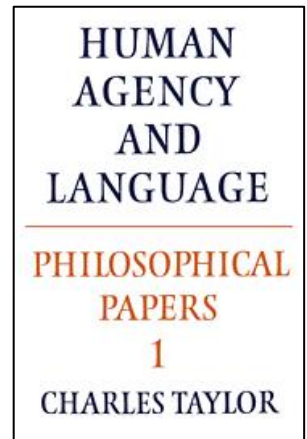
Claim: The practice of theorising and the (other) practice the theory is informing is not independent in the social science (as appears to be the case in the natural sciences)

The social science and the relation between theory and practice

- Social theories are not about an “independent object” that can be validated by “comparing with facts”
- The object of a social theory is a human practice, “accepting a theory can itself transform what the theory bears on”
- So -
 - what is it for a social theory to be right if social theories “transforms its own object”?
 - how can we test and validate if we got it right?

Taylor's philosophical anthropology

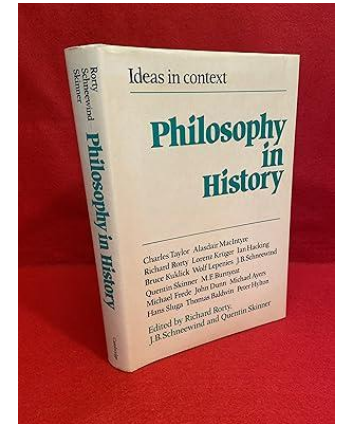
- Self-interpreting vs self-evaluating animals
- Self – interpreting animals:
 - beliefs, opinions: intentionality
- Self – evaluating animals:
 - commitments, identities, constitutive norms
- First and second order desires
- Weak and strong evaluations.
- Social theories as theories of “shared goods”



“What is human agency?” Taylor 1985

Shared goods

“The good, the value embodied in a practice, its point or purpose, may not be formulated. The people engaged in the practice have to have some sense of the good or the purpose, and this emerges, for instance, in the ‘fouls’ they call on each other when they deviate (or the ‘fairs’ they call when people do well). But they may have no way of saying what this good consists in. “



Taylor
Philosophy and
its history
(1984:22):

Rorty et al (eds)

What is it for a social theory to be right?

We cannot just reply that it is right when it corresponds to the facts it is about. Because, to oversimplify slightly, political theories are about our practices (as well as the institutions and relations in which these practices are carried on), and their rise and adoption can alter these practices. They are not about a domain of facts independent of, or resistant to, the development of theory. **Put testily, our social theories can be validated, because they can be tested in practice. If theory can transform practice, then it can be tested in the quality of the practice it informs. What makes a theory right is that it brings practice out in the clear; that its adoption makes possible what is in some sense a more effective practice.**

(Charles Taylor. Social theory as practice, 1985: 104)

Social theories as a practice of articulation

- The target of investigation for a social scientist is a practice that is already understood by practitioners, maintained and sustained considering the good, the point and purpose of the practice.
- “A social theory arises when we try to formulate explicitly what we are doing, describe the activity which is central to a practice, and articulate the norm which are essential to it”.

The norms of the practice studied

- Articulating the norms of the practice “brings the practice out in the clear”
- It may of course fail to do so (and then it is not a valid theory)
- A valid theory may help practitioners to have a better understanding of why they do what they do.
- A valid theory may be trivial and not worthy of being published
- A valid theory may, when accepted, lead to improvements and lead to “in some sense a more effective practice”
-

2. Theorising research as “research ethics”

Understanding research as norm-driven social activity

- The target of investigation for a *philosopher of science* is a practice that is already understood by practitioners, maintained and sustained considering the good, the point and purpose of the practice.
- A *philosophy of science* arises when we try describe the activity which is central to *research activity* and articulate the norm which are essential to it”.

(Taylor’s two quotes, replacing *social scientist* by *philosopher of science* and *social theory* by *philosophy of science*)

Ethos of science

“A note on science and democracy”, “Science and democratic social structure”, “The normative structure of science” (1942-96)

Institutional *imperatives* ensuring reliable knowledge production and democratic ideals.

1. **C**ommunism (sharing)
 2. **U**niversalism (objectivity)
 3. **D**isinterestedness (truth-orientation)
 4. **O**rganized **S**cepticism (criticism)
- (**O**riginality, **S**cepticism & **H**umility)
CUDOS(H)



Robert Merton

Reconstructing the Ethos of science

Kalleberg:

- It is a distraction to focus on technical/cognitive vs moral/social – or empirical vs rational.
- We need to Understand Merton's norms as a *reconstruction* of the ethos of science; 'a set of cultural values and mores governing the activities termed scientific' (1968b: 605).



Ragnvald Kalleberg

JCS Journal of Classical Sociology
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A Reconstruction of the Ethos of Science

RAGNVALD KALLEBERG University of Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT Merton's early analysis of the ethos of science has gained increased relevance because recent developments – such as commercialization of research – have undermined basic norms, like impartiality. It is desirable to uphold the institutional realism in Merton's sociology of science in order to grasp contemporary challenges. But central elements in his analytical approach have also to be revised or rejected, especially his nomological conception of explanations, non-cognitivism in normative issues, and failure adequately to conceptualize *Homo sociologicus* as a reasoner. Reasoners present and discuss cognitive claims, related both to descriptive and normative validity. Merton's analysis of an ethos of science should be evaluated as a reconstructive type of empirical analysis where the goal is insight and adequate identification of phenomena. Several critics denying the existence of Mertonian norms tacitly presuppose the validity of the norms, thereby entangling themselves in self-defeating contradictions. As an unintended consequence, these critics confirm the existence of a fundamental ethos of science.

KEYWORDS argumentative influence, norms of science, performative contradiction, rationality (descriptive and normative), reasoner, speech act, tacit presupposition

Robert Merton described and analyzed institutional norms of science in several contributions, starting in the mid-1930s with his doctoral dissertation and ending seven decades later with the afterword to the book on serendipity. He claimed that there is an ethos of science, 'a set of cultural values and mores governing the activities termed scientific' (1968b: 605). But was there, and is there, such an ethos of science actually influencing the behavior of scientists? Harriet Zuckerman notes that such 'seemingly innocent questions have been controversial for decades' (1988: 514). In an introduction to science studies, David Hess articulates some widely held criticisms within this interdisciplinary field, claiming that 'subsequent research failed to confirm the existence of Mertonian norms' (1997: 56-7).

Example: What qualifies to be one of the authors on a scientific papers?

ALL authors should meet four criteria

I: give substantial contributions

- to conception or design, *or*
- the acquisition, analysis or interpretation of data

II: contribute to text

- participating in writing *or*
- critical revision of article

III: approve final version

IV: be accountable for all aspects of the paper

- be able to identify other co-authors contribution and
- have confidence in the integrity of their contribution

Vancouver guidelines as reconstructions

- To engage in the discussion on what qualifies as a co-author, you need to understand what is at stake in the discussion when claims are made like ‘this is not a valid co-author’ or ‘that looks unfair’.
- The point is not if you can make a correct evaluation or not – it is a matter of researcher's self-understanding of their own practice, an awareness of what scientific authorship is about and why it matters for the scientific community.

Research as norm driven activity

Research ethics in Norway

«Forskning er i dag en profesjonell virksomhet på like linje med mange andre. Forskningens form kan variere sterkt avhengig av emneområdet, sammenheng, målretting og annet. Men forskning innen de fleste disipliner skjer i tråd med bevisste eller ubevisste forskningsnormer. **Slike normer bidrar til å definere og regulere forskningen innen vedkommende disiplin og disiplinens forpliktelser ovenfor den videre omverden eller samfunnet.**»



Report 1981



Tranøy 1987

Tranøy's influence on research ethics in Norway

- Research is a professional activity interacting with other professionals.
- The form research takes vary greatly depending on the subject area, context and objectives.
- Research within a discipline occurs in accordance with conscious or unconscious research norms defining good research practice.
- Such norms help define and regulate research within a discipline, as well as proper relationships to other professionals.



Report 1981



Tranøy 1987

Theorising research as “research ethics”

- norms essential to research practice

”Research” – “ethics”

- Research: Activity that aim to produce new knowledge and apply knowledge in practical applications
- Ethics: Specifies the way researchers ought to conduct themselves when pursuing research
- “The term research ethics refers to a wide variety of values, norms, and institutional arrangements that help *constitute* and *regulate* scientific activities”



Kristin Shrader-Frechette. Textbook in research ethics
Guidelines: The National committee for science and technology

Standards for good research practice

- Three domains

1. Quality
 - Standards for high quality research practice
2. Protection
 - Standards for how to protect human participants and animals
3. Social responsibility
 - Standards regulating expert's role in a democracy

Different institutional arrangements support each domain

1. Quality

Example; Plagiarism

A domain of self-regulation rooted in generally accepted standards for good research practice



UA – 7.5 2025

2. Protection

Example: privacy

This domain is also regulated
by legislation and public
administrative
bodies
(like SIKT)



The National Audit Office
UA 17.1 2024

3. Social responsibility

Example: Responsible Collaborative relationships

This domain includes national advisory boards to help clarify and stimulate debate (like NENT)



UA 16 September 2025

Considering the ethics of three different aspects of research action

1. Quality
 - The reliability of the end **product** of research
2. Protection
 - The acceptability of the research **process**
3. Social responsibility
 - Taking responsibility for the uptake and **consequences** of research

Different institutional arrangements support each domain

Topic 1. Quality standards

Topic 1 is often called “research integrity”



[https://undsci.berkeley.edu/article/%3C?%20echo%20\\$baseURL;%20?%3E/socialsideofscience_06](https://undsci.berkeley.edu/article/%3C?%20echo%20$baseURL;%20?%3E/socialsideofscience_06)

- *A domain of self-regulation*

Domain of self-regulation

Research is a collective activity

- Researchers do not only make claims on behalf of themselves, but a ‘we’
- The researchers are part of an international collective that
 - Have developed effective forms of self-criticism.
 - Over time have developed norms that safeguard the production of reliable knowledge (good research practice).
 - Socialise researchers to know, value and follow these norms.
 - Constantly adjust norms for good research practice to changing conditions for research.

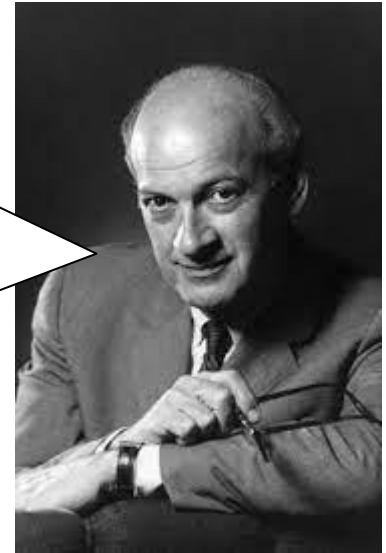
1980

Congressional
hearing in US

<https://youtu.be/tktkwABvf6k>

The problem is greatly
exaggerated by the press

When there is fraud, it
occurs in a system that
operates in an effective self-
correcting manner



President of National
Academy of Science;
Philip Handler



Congressman Al Gore

I cannot avoid the conclusion
that one reason for the
persistence of this type of
problem is the reluctance of
people high in the science
field to take these matters
very seriously

A few rotten apples or tip of the iceberg?

Leading scientist (Handler):
Trust us, we have high degree
of integrity and efficient ways
to eliminate the few rotten
apples.



Politician (Gore):
How do we know you are not
sweeping cases under the carpet?
We will ask you to formulate
clear procedures for how you
will handle misconduct.



Norway: Lawmaker's requirements for training and institutional research integrity committees



2006

Scandal at Rikshospitalet

Kunnskapsminister Øystein Djupedal:

"Etikk bør undervises på alle nivåer ved universiteter og høyskoler, og forskningsetikk må inngå i all forskeropplæring. Etisk bevissthet må skjerpes både hos den enkelte forsker og på institusjonsnivå"



2015

Kunnskapsminister Torbjørn Røe Isaksen:

Internasjonal konkurranse og krav til publisering gjør at noen forskere føler seg fristet til å bevege seg over i etiske gråsoner.

Universiteter må ha egne utvalg for å stoppe juks og slepphendt forskning

The act on ethics and integrity of research 2017

(A revision of the 2007 act)



 Mer

 RSS-feed

 Lenker

 European Legislation Identifier (BETA)

 Eksamen

Lov om organisering av forskningsetisk arbeid (forskningsetikkloven)

Innholdsfortegnelse

Lovens forskrifter

Lov om organisering av forskningsetisk arbeid (forskningsetikkloven)

Dato	LOV-2017-04-28-23
Departement	Kunnskapsdepartementet
Sist endret	
Publisert	
Ikrafttredelse	01.05.2017
Endrer	LOV-2006-06-30-56
Kunngjort	28.04.2017
Korttittel	Forskningsetikkloven

§ 1. Formål

Loven skal bidra til at forskning i offentlig og privat regi skjer i henhold til anerkjente forskningsetiske normer.

§ 2. Virkeområde

Loven gjelder forskere og forskning i Norge. På Svalbard og Jan Mayen gjelder loven dersom forskningen drives av forskere ansatt av norsk arbeidsgiver eller dersom en vesentlig del av midlene kommer fra Norge.

Granskingsutvalget kan videre uttale seg om forskning i utlandet dersom forskningen drives av forsker ansatt av norsk

§ 5 Training: everyone should be familiar with the norms and standards of the profession

§ 6 Establish local ethical committee to investigate misconduct (redelighetsutvalg)

§ 6 Local committee

NTNU Research integrity committee since 2014

NTNU Policy:

- Cases should be reported to the head of department and handled at the “lowest possible level” as part of self-regulating practices

2024 revision of NTNU guidelines

- The research integrity committee (RIC) shall review the faculties decision on all *serious* cases
- RIC publish written statemen after the case is closed (RIC web-page)
- RIC shall be informed by the faculty's decision on less serious cases

FORSKNINGSETISK UTVALG

Etterlyser bedre oversikt over hva som foregår av forskningsjuks ved NTNU

- Vi er ikke fornøyde med rapporteringen fra fakultetene. Det er viktig at vi vet hva som oppstår av forskningsetiske spørsmål på NTNU, sier Thor Bjørn Arlov, sekretær for Forskningsetisk utvalg.



Rikerevisjonen sa i 2021 at universitetenes systemer for å fange opp forskningsjuks, er for dårlige.

Saker om forskningsjuks skal i utgangspunktet behandles ved det enkelte

Recent cases at NTNU involving high publication rate

FORSKERFORUM

Nyheter Reportasje Meninger Dokumentasjoner



Norges mest publiserende forsker drev systematisk gjenbruk av tekst

En granskingen har avdekket systematisk gjenbruk av tekst og duplikatpublisering hos NTNU-forsker.



NTNU har nå konkludert i granskingen av tidligere NTNU-forsker Filippo Berto. Foto: NTB

2025

Systematic duplication of papers

BAKSIDEN AV ÅPEN PUBLISERING

Forsker skal ha misbrukt støtteordning: Kostet NTNU en halv million

Postdoktoren «Fatima» klarte ikke å publisere egen forskning. Likevel publiserte hun titalls artikler for NTNUs regning – uten at noen visste det.



«Fatima» to tidligere ledere mener det er viktig at saken kommer fram i lyset. De opplevde hendelsen som et enormt tillitsbrudd. Foto: Thor Nielsen



Marthe Kristine Nes Bjerva
Journalist

Publisert 15.01.2025 - 11:32 Sist oppdatert 26.02.2025 - 07:00

2025

Authorship offered in exchange for NTNU payment of APC charges

Topic 2: Protecting research participants

- Topic 2 is often called “research ethics”



When scientists need to seek ethical approval prior to research

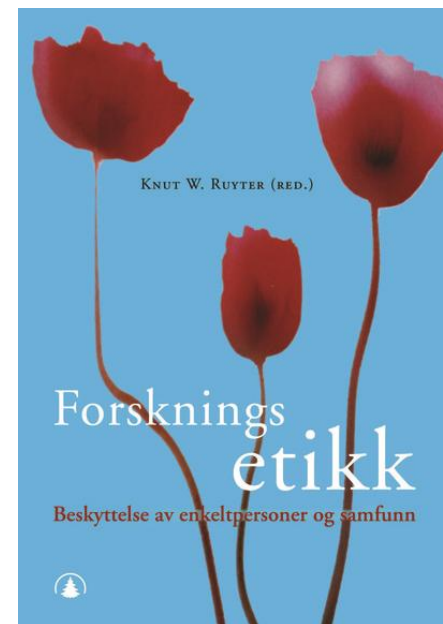
- *A domain not only regulated by scientists themselves*

Telling title: Research ethics as «protection of individuals and society»

Guiding principles

- Informed consent
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Balancing risk and utility
- Independent ethical committees

(Introduction to this book in the preparation readings)



”Forskningsetikk
- Beskyttelse av
enkeltpersoner og
samfunn” (Ruyter:
Forskningsetikk 2003)

“The term research ethics [forskningsetikk] refers to a wide variety of values, norms, and institutional arrangements that **help constitute and regulate** scientific activities” (FEK)

Regulative
rules:
(‘external norms’)



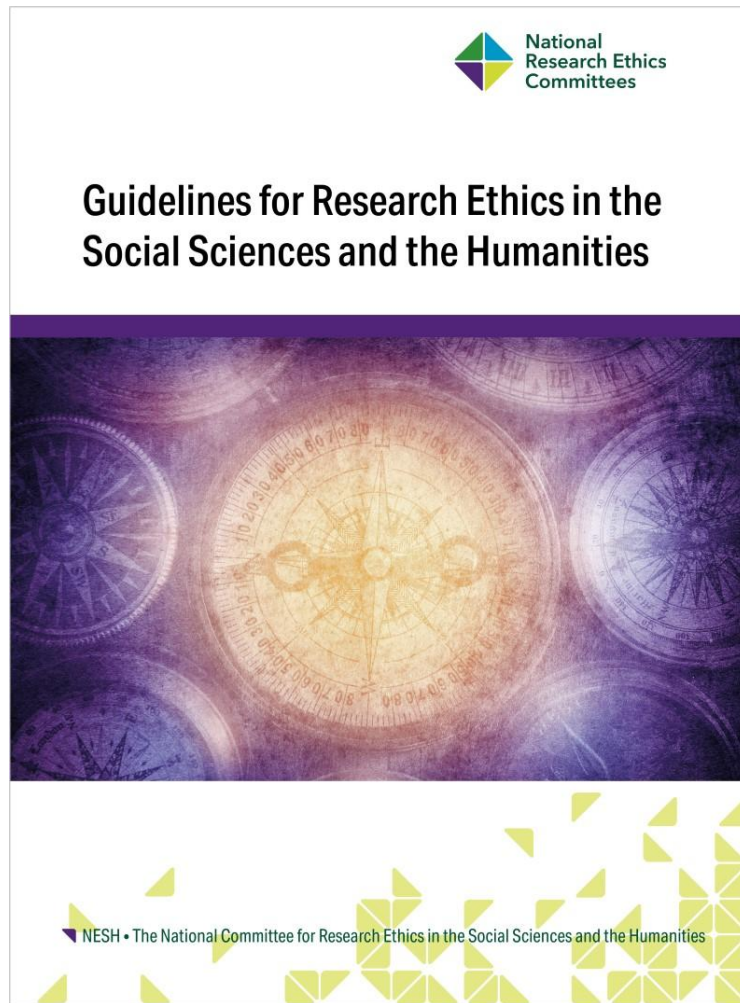
Constitutive
rules:
(‘internal norms’)



Three regulative committees/bodies

1. REC – Human participants (medical and health research)
 - Privacy
 - Informed consent
2. Sikt – (Data protection services for research in general)
 - Privacy
 - Informed consent
3. Norwegian food safety authorities - Animal research
 - Animal welfare

NESH



A guide to internet research ethics



NESH • The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities

Right to privacy in the public domain?



Nissenbaum's analysis: The problem of privacy in the public sphere has not appeared in a compelling form before new technological medias/platforms became part of everyday life.

Some traditional objections to the right of protection of privacy in the public domain

- Rights of someone is the limitation of freedom of others. Cannot control information about yourself available in the public domain
- Public persons less protected than persons that have no public role
- Public domain & ideal of open access to information for democratic control.
- Need to distinguish between non-sensitive and sensitive information (that which under no circumstance concerns the public)

Helen Nissenbaum “Privacy as Contextual Integrity»

Privacy in public?

- the age of information technology.

Social media

Is everything publically available on net free to use for research purposes?

It is willingly shared and made publicly available



Guidelines for protection of research participants privacy in public.

Consider

- “Expected publicity”
- “Contextual integrity”
 - Reuse data in another context than it was shared require informed consent



NESH 2018

Topic 3: Social responsibility



Borderlines of science and politics

Science as a new social institution

Illustration: Rector's speech to new students, UiO - 1952

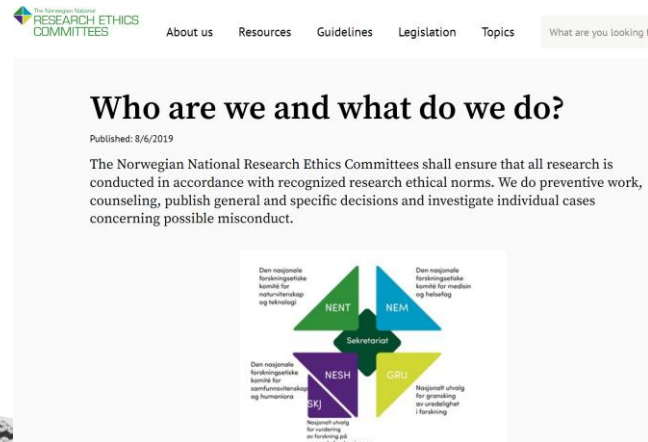
- The scientist is knowledge driven. “He does not patent his discoveries, exploit them for financial gain. He only demands a reasonable compensation, ensuring the opportunity for concentration, the inner calmness which conditions his research”.

Otto Lous Mohr (1952)

- Vitenskapsmannen drives mot kunnskap: “Han patenterer ikke sine oppdagelser, utnytter dem ikke til økonomisk vinning. Han krever bare en rimelig godtgjørelse som sikrer ham anledning til konsentrasjon, den indre ro som er en nødvendig betingelse for hans forskning”.

Hviid-Nielsen. ”Juks, uredelighet og god forskning”

Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, The Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board & The Norwegian Board of Technology





Projects

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) implies that societal actors (researchers, citizens, policy makers, business, third sector organisations, etc.) work together during the whole research and innovation process in order to better align both the process and its outcomes with the values, needs and expectations of society.

Theorising research as “research ethics”

- Complex story of what, how and why norms are morally binding

Taylor:

“A social theory arises when we try to formulate explicitly what we are doing, describe the activity which is central to a practice, and articulate the norm which are essential to it”.

A theory of science arises when we try to formulate explicitly what we are doing, describe the activity which is central to a practice, and articulate the norm which are essential to it.