Recognition of the precarious academic self

Notes toward a performative virtue approach in professional RI training and its practical implications

Armin Schmolmueller
To make a virtue of necessity
Method: Literature review

Preliminary results

- Education regarding **virtues** and **research integrity**
- Different research fields, such as psychology, philosophy, and social sciences
- No references on the slides, but as a commented bibliography for each topic
Virtue-ethics approach to RI training

What would the virtuous researcher do?

- Complement norm- or compliance-based training
- Emphasis on internal values and virtuous characteristics of researchers
- Cultivation of epistemic and ethical scientific virtues
Possible reservations among participants

• Implicit questioning not only of scientific but also moral integrity?
• Systemic issues - Emphasis on individual responsibility misguided?
• How to implement in everyday practice?
Issues RI training may take into account
Conflicting imperatives

Act in self-interest

Act in common interest
Cognitive or moral dissonance

Behavior

Values
Dissonance reduction strategies

- Change behavior
- Change attitudes, values or beliefs
- Justify behavior
Self-justification strategies

- Denial of responsibility
- Adding consonant cognitions in accordance with behavior
- Self-affirmation
- Trivialization
- Distracting and forgetting
| Don’t hate the player, hate the game! | All the others are doing it too. | If it wasn’t for me getting the funding of the project, they would not even be here. | Grow up, it’s time to get acquainted with the real world. | Note to myself: I like birds. |
Ideas for virtue-based RI training

- Tune in with our built-in alert system.
- Learn about and from the mistakes we make.
- Maybe, at least sometimes, act as if we have nothing to lose but our integrity.
- Find pleasure in trying not to get cynical.
Ideas for virtue-based RI training

Tune in with our built-in alert system

Learn about and from the mistakes we make.

Maybe, at least sometimes, act as if we have nothing to lose but our integrity.

Find pleasure in trying not to get cynical.
To make a virtue of necessity

Thank you
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References

Virtue-ethics approach to RI training

Virtue-ethics

The notion of virtue ethics in this presentation is primarily informed by


Among others, the following contributions added significantly to the understanding of virtue ethics in educational settings:


Virtue-ethics approach to RI training

Virtue-ethics

Among others, the following contributions added significantly to the understanding of virtue ethics in educational settings:


Virtue-ethics approach to research integrity training

The account of a virtue-ethics approach to research integrity trainings is informed by Pennock & O’Rourke (2017). Along with their account of scientific virtues, it is acknowledged that they are regarded as both epistemic and ethical.


References

Virtue-ethics approach to RI training

Virtue-ethics approach to research integrity training

Further accounts of research integrity trainings based on virtue-ethics, see for example:


References

Virtue-ethics approach to RI training

Educational approaches based on virtue-ethics in general

Examples of more general accounts on educational approaches based on virtue-ethics:


Managerial imperatives vs. imperatives striving towards an ideal of science:

Felt (2017), among others, point out that due to more managerial imperatives, the focus in academia shifts from a „logic of discovery to one of delivery“ (p.53)


For a discussion and problematization of academics‘ struggle to strive after the ideal academic self while occupied with managerial tasks and careerism, see for example:


Managerial imperatives vs. imperatives striving towards an ideal of science:

For a discussion of the effects of the primacy of quantitative assessments of research(ers’) practices in an emerging audit culture, see for example:


For a discussion of the “perverse incentives” in current research culture, see for example:

Goods of efficiency vs. Goods of excellence:

It is important to note that MacIntyre (2013, p. 187ff) recognizes that both goods of efficiency and goods of excellence are good things to have and both necessary goods. Consequently, no one could possibly want research to be inefficient.


Nonetheless, Hicks and Stapleford (2016, p. 485) stress the ethical differences between the two goods in the realm of scientific practices. Moreover, they outline that striving for the goods of excellence in research means appropriate engagement in the respective communal practice (e.g. of sociology):

Contradictions immanent to the scientific endeavor vs. transgressions of research integrity

On the immanent contradictions of the scientific endeavor, see for example:


For a discussion on research integrity in the light of the immanent uncertainties of the scientific endeavor, for example when struggling with the meaning of data, see for example:

References

Possible reservations among participants

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Research integrity issues due to systemic circumstances

On possible reservations of researchers against emphasizing the individual responsibility, see for example:


On possible reservations of researchers as autonomous adults to moral education, see for example:

References

Possible reservations among participants

Research integrity issues due to systemic circumstances

On a systemic perspective of scientific work that may be integrated in research integrity training, see for example:

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Cognitive dissonance theory was initiated by Festinger (1957):


Cognitive dissonance theory was selected for this presentation to simplify the argument. Arguably, there are more up-to-date accounts and models that have significantly improved our understanding on the psychological and neuronal foundations of cognitive dissonance theory and its successors. For a recent discussion, see for example:


Cognitive Dissonance Theory in ethics education

Cognitive Dissonance theory states that people perceive a psychological discomfort that comes from the feeling that one's personal values remain unfulfilled, compare for:


Arguably, researchers cannot not value the ideal of science without compromising the role of being a researcher, compare for example:

Cognitive Dissonance Theory in ethics education

Building upon negative emotions in training can have adverse effects. For a discussion on possible positive effects of negative emotions, see for example:

https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2018.1534089
Are scientists primarily good or bad?

Aiming to address cognitive dissonance in training presumes that researchers cannot not relate to the values the scientific endeavor relies upon. The question of whether it is right to assume that people are inherently good or bad is a philosophical question that is by far beyond the scope of this presentation. It is argued, though, that researchers cannot not value the ideal of science without compromising the role of being a researcher, compare for example:


Whether it should be assumed that individuals need rules and punishments in order to act ethically or not is inspired by Crosan et al. (2013; in particular p. 570f)

References

Self-justifying strategies

*Cognitive Dissonance Theory in ethics education*

By applying self-justifying strategies to reduce the discomfort of moral or cognitive dissonance, we may develop an ignorance towards our own unethical behavior, see for example:


About the ignorance towards our own ignorance, compare for example:

**Virtue-based orientation**

In their virtue-based model of ethical decision-making, Crossan et al. (2013) outline how a “virtue-based orientation” (p. 573) may be a means of resilience for individuals who are trying to navigate between high situational pressures and demands for ethical behavior. It may be beneficial to keep this account on virtue-ethics in mind. See:

Integrity Training based on Cognitive dissonance

An example for the use cognitive dissonance theory as a basis for integrity training (in this case, for police officers):


There may be a significant overlap between the notion of cognitive dissonance (and the implications drawn) in this presentation and what Bernstein (2016; see p. 19ff) in reference to Lear (2011) refers to as “ironic disruptions”:


Reduction of the influence of cognitive biases and self-justifying strategies in ethical-decision making among researchers:

Medeiros et al. (2014), among others, give an overview of cognitive biases prevalent among university staff and Mecca et al. (2016) give valuable insights on the efficacy of a training intervention based on the finding of Medeiros et al. (2014):


Reduction of the influence of cognitive biases and self-justifying strategies in ethical-decision making:

Among others, Cassam (2019) recently introduced an account on how epistemic vices may influence unethical decision-making. Moreover, he gives an overview on how these vices may be corrected (above all, chapter 8 “Self-improvement“, p. 167-187):

On finding pleasure in not getting cynical:

On humor as a means of cultivating moral virtues, see for example:

Further aspects that may be taken account in virtue-ethics training:

**Self-determination theory (SDT) may be an adequate motivational framework for trainings aiming to foster the cultivation of scientific virtues.** On the correlation between the SDT and virtue-ethics, see for example:


**On the necessity, that not only individuals but also organizations need to be virtuous for individuals to act as their best ethical self, see for example:**