

# **Q&A: In your view, what are the moral boundaries for ethical scientific research? Are the things that shouldn't be tested at all, or just techniques that shouldn't be used?**

A question that professional ethicists have struggle answering. This is very much my \$0.02 worth.

1) There is a moral boundary. There are things that are wrong and things that are right and scientific research, like most fields of human endeavour is able to cross that line.

2) How do we discern the moral boundary? From a Christian point of view, the line is drawn along the question of whether something is inherently sinful. Two aspects to this:

a) Inherency: I wouldn't see something as unethical/sinful just because it could (or perhaps has) been done sinfully/unethically.

b) Sinfulness: In Christian terms, broadly speaking, sin speaks of rebellion against God our Creator. The concept has the sense of "usurping" the role of God in some sense.

In terms of scientific research this is often (and sometimes simplistically) couched in terms of taking control over "life and death", or "playing God" (in somewhat more sensationalist terms). So, for instance, the right to take another person's life can be seen as a divine right. To destroy human life in

the pursuit of scientific research (or any other endeavour) is therefore sinful. Any scientific research that inherently involves the destruction of human life is therefore clearly on the other side of the moral boundary.

Perhaps a more general way of looking at this is in terms of “the right to exploit.” In the Christian worldview humanity has the right to exploit the earth and all that grows in it. (This exploitation is clearly coupled with a sense of caring for, stewarding, tending creation, so I’m not talking about something inherently destructive). This means that there is room (although not carte blanche) for research involving experimentation on animals. But in other areas (the exploitation of humans – physically (including death), emotionally, psychologically, spiritually etc.) that right to exploit does not exist and is rightly called abuse.

3) Utilitarianism is not the place to begin. The question “are the means justifiable at all?” is the place to begin. This is inherently an epistemological question (what is right and wrong) and requires an agreed upon moral framework. This is where the conflict often lies.

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