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Ethics in Science and Science Journalism

In science ethics it has been common to distinguish between the moral values in science and the moral values of science for society. This leads to a discussion of how scientists should behave in accordance with scientific standards on the one hand and how the behaviour of scientists affects society on the other hand. In advance then it has to be stated what science is, what ethics is, and how both are interrelated. In contrast to this traditional distinction I shall propose that the moral values in science are the moral values of a free, democratic society. So the conception of science ethics comes down to the conception of ethics in general. The distinction becomes futile because, as I will argue, the basic principles of science are identical with the basic principles of ethics.

The basic values of science have been coined by Robert K. Merton as universalism, communism, disinterestedness and organized skepticism. These values can be justified by principles for practice such as objectivity and freedom. From the justified values in turn are virtues derivable that constitute the moral core of a modern republic. The altruistic unbiased use of power ensures freedom in society - and so does the altruistic unbiased use of scientific methods.

Historically from the renaissance onwards runs the tendency to displace arbitrary rule, religious fanaticism, and political intrigues which lead to bondage by the rule of reason which leads to freedom. The rule of reason is, of course, a rational one: Every citizen is able to understand and to agree in the political measures to be taken. That reason shall rule to the benefit of the common welfare is the bottom line of the social contract that founds any liberal state. But if freedom is to be achieved rationally, science comes in because rationality lies within the domain of science - which then was still united with the humanities.

After having spread out the scientific stance in the social contract of our society I will consider its compliance. This has to be done against the historical background that society has been industrialized and science has become a profitable profession. Science no longer appears as an ideal ethical end but it has become a real social institution, too. As part of society science itself must be justified ethically. Having

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identified the basic principles of ethics as scientific ones the justification becomes a reflexive move. Justifying scientific research according to scientific principles reveals a conflict of interest concerning freedom: Scientists have a vested interest in scientific freedom. But from the freedom of science does not necessarily follow the freedom of society. This meant to confuse the principle with the institution.

I will argue with Immanuel Kant that freedom is a prerequisite for reason. And I take it that the root of freedom is the freedom of argument which in turn is the freedom of scientific debates that constitute rationality. That at least means the stated identity of the scientific and the ethical principles. But that does not mean that only scientists contribute to social freedom. A principle does not imply its application. Rather the freedom of argument has to be extended from the scientists to the public. The application of the principles, including the freedom of research, is justified fore publico. The public interest inherent in the social contract limits the freedom for each individual in society, also for the scientists. The scientists care for the rationality of the public interest. And they are supported by science journalists who shape the public interest by disseminating scientific debates.

Science journalists, who are as members of the same society committed to the same ethics as the scientists, keep an eye on whether scientists abide to the social contract. The stark outrage of the press in case of scientific misconduct indicates that fraud in science is more than a moral affair; it breaches the centre of our moral self-image. It is not so much the public trust in science but rationality itself that is abolished by the fabrication and misrepresenting of data, leaving room for irrational forces in society. Each threat for objectivity is a threat for society's foundation, for social freedom.

With the fast and unsurpassable success of the sciences in society, establishing unprecedented health, wealth and freedom, they institutionalized and gained a lot of social power. Concomitant with power entered problems into science that science was and is expected to solve. Paternalism, research and citation cartels are ruling out rationality and are paving the way for the realization of personal interests. The public interest is dissected now in particular ones due to specialization and the division of labour. The particular interests have materialized in an ethical pluralism in which each position has to be justified according to its own standards. But Pluralism runs contrary to rationality. There

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is only one reason, one λόγος, one rationality. Or in terms of the social contract: There is only one right way to common welfare which is best for all at once.

The prevalence of pluralism today must be understood as rational helplessness. This might be constitutional for men, bestowed with poor wits and tentative knowledge; nevertheless it stresses the permanent need to overcome this helplessness. This can only be done by the unification of science with the humanities. For the presupposition to have one rational answer to moral questions is to have one rationality in science. The unification of the sciences with the humanities brings up the scientific task to think and act within the connectivity of values that lends society and its citizens their sense and meaning. With the unification society advances to more and more a rational republic. The advancement though requires rational regulations. For the advancement the procedure of rationalizing is at least as important as its rational outputs. An approved procedure in society is voting. If something is rational, people vote for the rational, and if it is not, the voting majority bridges the rational gap to the public interest.

In a modern state, that dismisses irrational authorities for ethical reasons, science strives for the standards that democracy sets. This means a steady scientification of democracy and durable democratization of science. The mutual impact of both leads to a regular refreshing of the standards that keep society free from irrational influences. This, again, is the ethical end that unites science and society, an end which is pressed by the media in a critical coverage of the scientists' and society's behaviour.