

Ethics in action

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PROPOSITIONS

Ethics in Action: Multi-sited Engaged Ethnography on Valuation Work in Contemplative Science

Mareike Smolka

1. Reenchantment may be most vigorously sought after in scientific fields like brain research where science and technology seemingly threaten to subvert moral virtues, free will, experiences of transcendental significance and other features that many deem to be essential to their self-understanding.
2. Both proponents and opponents of contemplative science overemphasise the potential of meditation research to impact society, culture and personhood.
3. Although institutional and political structures constrain individual agency, contemplative scientists reflexively engage with and take responsibility for the socio-ethical aspects of meditation research.
4. Rather than seeing multiple attachments, commitments and identities as threats to academic integrity and objectivity, researchers – social scholars and technoscientific practitioners alike – should consider them as resources for reflection on the epistemic and societal dimensions of their work.
5. The concept of valuation work is useful for scholars in Science and Technology Studies to examine the practical activities through which actors resolve frictions between seemingly incompatible values, systems of orientation and forms of authority.
6. Empirical investigations of ‘ethics in action’ reveal situated, context-dependent negotiations and decision-making which are oft-hidden in regulatory frameworks and taken-for-granted norms of professional practice.
7. Knowledge claims must be placed in the context of their production to be evaluated on their own terms, for what counts as ‘good’ knowledge is contingent on the interplay between the research object, methodology, study participants and situated practices of valuation.
8. Scholars seeking to advance Responsible Innovation and Responsible Research and Innovation should articulate clearly what they mean when calling their work ‘critical’ and how this meaning translates into research practices.
9. To enhance the social steering of technoscience, scientists, policy makers and social scholars should make common cause to create discussion fora where conventional approaches, opinions and practices as well as their underlying assumptions are opened up to reflection, deliberation and transformation.
10. Attending to affect in interdisciplinary collaboration is not a sign of self-indulgence and navel-gazing, but instead helps cultivate interpersonal sensitivities that support collaborative knowledge production.
11. Although completing a PhD thesis during a pandemic is sometimes accompanied by anxiety and confusion, imposed isolation and enforced suspension of many activities deaccelerate work and life rhythms so much that there is finally time to think more deeply through writing.