

UiO : **Department of Informatics**
University of Oslo

Ethics and participatory design

IN 5510

Sept 21, 2026

Guri Verne

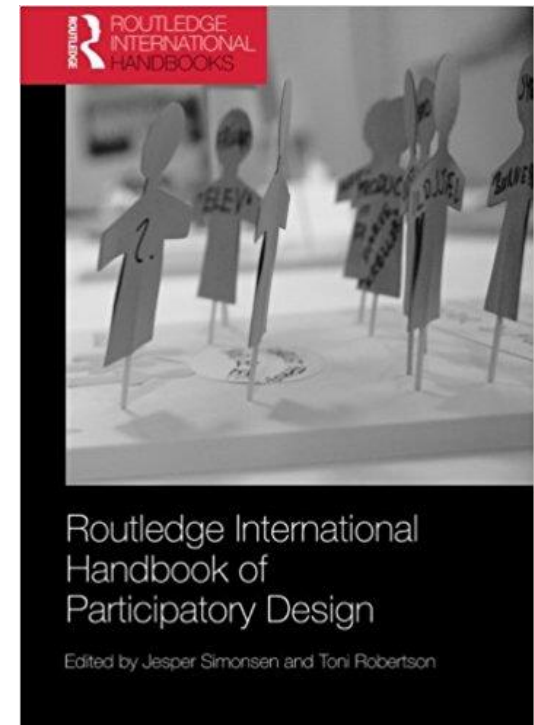


Talk with your neighbour

- Have you encountered any ethical issues in your work or earlier projects ?
How will you describe them?

Topics

- Ethics and PD
- Ethical theories
- Ethics and technology
- Ethical issues of working with users
- Ethics of technology use
- Act on the Organization of Research Ethics Work



Toni Robertson



Ina Wagner

An ethical motivation is at PD's core

“Participatory design .. has at its core an ethical motivation to support and enhance how people can engage with others in shaping their world, including their workplaces, over time. This ethical motivation is not some optional extra ... It is its essence and structures its definition and ongoing development.”

(Robertson and Wagner, 2012, p 65)

Ethics and PD

Working together to shape a better future

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 - Respect other people's expertise
 - Respect their rights to represent own activities

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 - An emancipatory agenda

Ethics and PD

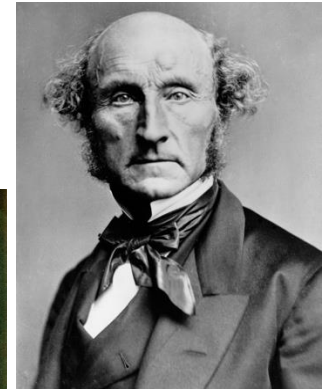
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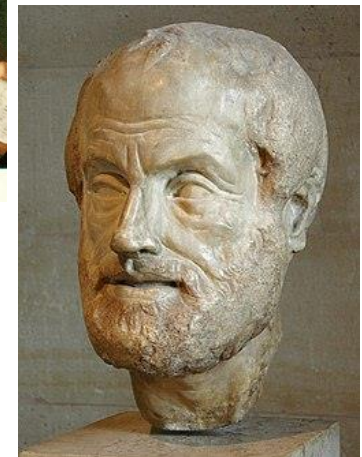
Classical ethical theories

Moral philosophies

- How to live a good life?
- What is a good life?



J. S. Mill



Aristotle

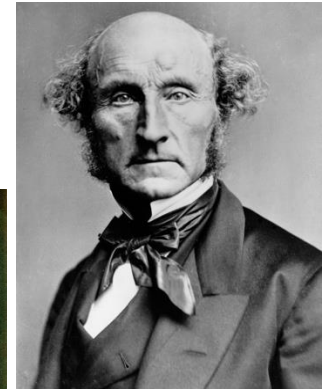
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Right or wrong acts?

- its consequences (J. S. Mill)
- duty (I. Kant)
- Phronesis as a virtue of ethical life (Aristotle)



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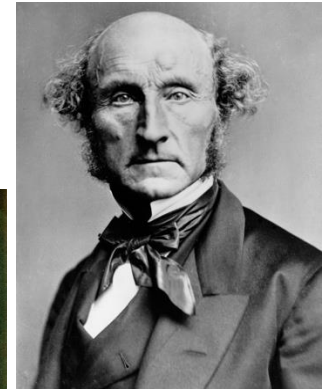
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Dialogical relations with others

- Practical, situated ethics

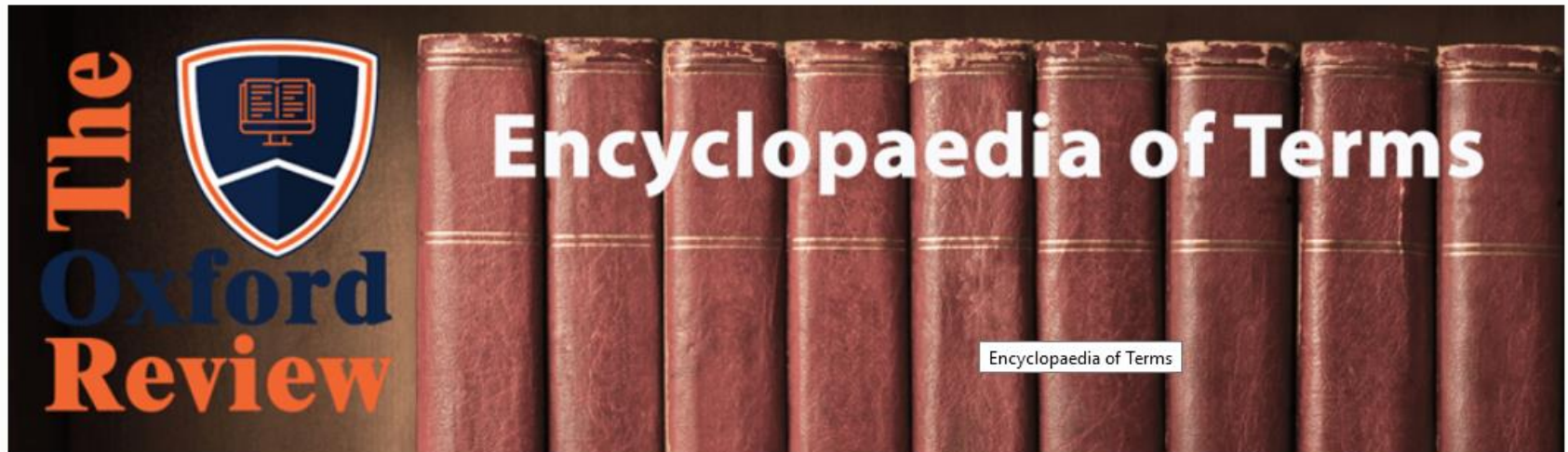


J. S. Mill



Aristotle

Phronesis: definition and meaning



What is Phronesis?

how to act in
particular
situations

Phronesis is a Greek term which means 'practical wisdom' that has been derived from learning and evidence of practical things. Phronesis leads to breakthrough thinking and creativity and enables the individual to discern and make good judgements about what is the right thing to do in a situation.

[Back to The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Terms](#)

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Ethics and technology design



The Imperative of Responsibility

*In Search of an Ethics
for the Technological Age*

Hans Jonas

Starting point: Massively increased capacities of human action

Technology design and use is shaping the future

Traditional ethics only requires a good understanding of the present situation

Hans Jonas:

«The Imperative of Responsibility:

In search of an Ethics for the Technological Age»

Ethics and technology design



The
Imperative
of
Responsibility
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“That general public . . . society at large, *is* affected by everything which *technology* releases into the world, therefore indeed by its progress, which is a progress of results. Now, about the complexity of these results—as fruits for human consumption and as shapers of the human condition—all that can be said is that some have a moralizing and some a demoralizing effect and some possibly both, and I don’t know how to sum up a balance sheet here. Only the ambivalence itself is beyond question. (*IR*, 169, in Morris 2013, p. 154).

.. for Jonas, the problem isn’t technology itself but the fact that scientists, engineers, and marketers of new technologies fail to take into consideration the impacts of technological innovations on the environment and the human world. In other words, we tend to overlook the costs of technological innovation, focusing only on the perceived benefits (Morris 2013, p. 154).

A moral basis for choosing between design alternatives



The Imperative of Responsibility

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- *'the indefinite future, rather than the contemporary context of the action, constitutes the relevant horizon of responsibility. This requires imperatives of a new sort. If the realm of making has invaded the space of essential action, then morality must invade the realm of making, from which it had formerly stayed aloof ...'* (Jonas 1984: 9).
- Finding ways to better predict the effect of new technologies as a way to strengthen and improve our decision making about their design and use
- Accountability of technology design and development to the world it creates.
- Are we responsible for unintended consequences of technology?

A moral basis for choosing between design alternatives



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Discuss with your neighbour

Ethical issues of working with users

Who do we engage with in a PD project?

Is giving voice to marginalized people or people who inhabit residual categories a moral obligation of Participatory Designers? (Ina Wagner)

Who can provide “voluntary and unconstrained participation”?

Defining those who have a right to participate

Dual loyalties: Being both critical and constructive



How do we engage with participants?

Mutual trust is basic.

Informed consent is a formal way.

Address risks and responsibilities of research vs design

Sensitive issues and vulnerable participants

– Protection vs exclusion

How to avoid a purely instrumental process of “eliciting user requirements”?

Negotiating and managing of «practical politics»

Informasjon og samtykkeerklæring

Deltakelse i workshop og utprøving i forskningsprosjektet BRIS

Beskrivelse av forskningsprosjektet

Mitt navn er Guri Verne og jeg er forsker i Post.doc-stilling ved Institutt for Informatikk ved Universitetet i Oslo. Jeg holder på med et forskningsprosjekt om hvordan eldre kan kommunisere med andre via video fra sin egen stue. I dag arrangerer vi en utprøving hvor vi vil høre deres erfaringer med hvordan utstyret kan styres ved hjelp av bevegelser. Deres tanker og erfaringer vil være viktig for den videre utviklingen.

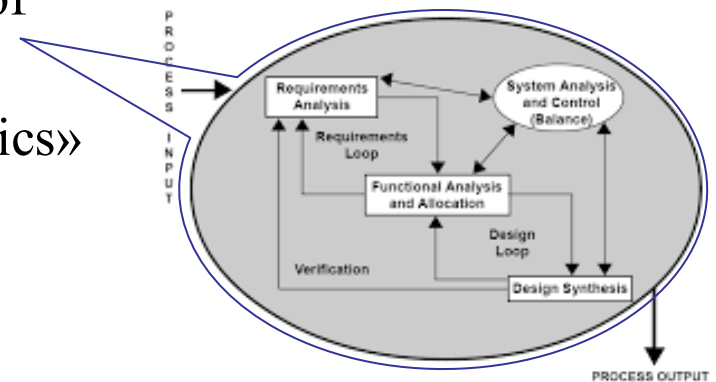
Prosjektets korthavn BRIS uttrykker at det handler om å utvikle «BRakergrensesnitt for velferdsteknologi i Stua». Prosjektet er finansiert av Regionale forskningsfond, hovedstadsområdet.

Vi ber om samtykke til at din utprøving kan taes opp på video. Videopptakene vil kunne benyttes til å forbedre bevegelsesstyringen.

Frivillig å delta

Deltagelse er frivillig, og du kan trekke deg når som helst. Du kan når som helst avslutte deltakelsen eller trekke tilbake informasjon som er gitt underveis. Du kan kreve at personopplysninger om deg slettes.

Anonymitet



How do we represent participants and their work?

Production of representations is critical

Representations are not innocent

Not tell the users what their work is!

- Representations can «silence» or miss

Misrepresentations of work:

You have, you know, 300 cartons of documents and you tear through them and say, I'm going to put Post-Its on the ones we have to turn over to the other side. And then, ideally, you hire chimpanzees to type in From, To, Date. And then, ideally, you then have lawyers go through it again and read each document, with their brain turned on. (Blomberg et al 1996)

Nurses co-representing their own work: humour

Personal, contingent and sensitive to appropriateness

- Residual categories

Listening can add to understanding!

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Humor	
Definition: Facilitating the patient to perceive, appreciate, and express what is funny, amusing, or establish relationships, relieve tension, release anger, facilitate learning, or cope with painful feelings	
Activities: • Determine the types of humor appreciated by the patient • Determine the patient's typical response to humor (e.g., laughter or smiles) • Determine the time of day that patient is most receptive • Avoid content areas about which patient is sensitive • Discuss advantages of laughter with patient • Select humorous materials that create moderate arousal for the individual • Make available a selection of humorous games, cartoons, jokes, videos, tapes, books, and so on • Point out humorous incongruity in a situation • Encourage visualization with humor (e.g., picture a forbidding authority figure dressed only in underwear) • Encourage silliness and playfulness • Remove environmental barriers that prevent or diminish the spontaneous occurrence of humor • Monitor patient response and discontinue humor strategy if ineffective	• Avoid use with patient who is cognitively impaired • Demonstrate an appreciative attitude • Respond positively to humor attempts
1st edition 1992; revised 2008	
Background Readings: - Baron, R. (1991). Make room for laughter. <i>Journal of Nursing</i>, 9(12), 48-51. - Kilbourne, L. G. (1988). Play and laughter. In R. M. Dancy, L. Kegan, C. E. Goetz, & L. Smith, K. (2006). <i>Humor: A handbook for practice</i> (pp. 289-300). New York: Guilford Press. - Smith, K. (2006). Humor. In M. Snyder & R. Lin (Eds.), <i>Humor: Alternative therapies in nursing</i> (5th ed., pp. 9-14). New York: Guilford Press. - Sullivan, J. L., & Deane, D. M. (1988). Humor. <i>Medical Nursing</i>, 14(1), 20-24.	

Hyperglycemia Management	
Definition: Preventing and treating above-normal blood glucose levels	
Activities: • Monitor blood glucose levels, as indicated • Monitor for signs and symptoms of hyperglycemia: polyuria, polydipsia, polyphagia, weakness, lethargy, malaise, blurring of vision, or headache	• Review blood glucose records with patient • Instruct on urine ketone testing, as appropriate • Instruct on indications for, and significance of, testing, if appropriate • Instruct patient to report moderate or severe hypoglycemia

Working with vulnerable users



What is vulnerability?

Unclear - being prone to harm or adverse impacts
(Wrigley and Dawson, 2016, in Sommervold 2017)

Children under 18 considered vulnerable
(Heiberg & Undlien 2013 in Sommervold 2017)

Sommervold (2017) chose methods in respect for the
participating sick children/adolescents:

- Plasticized materials that could be disinfected

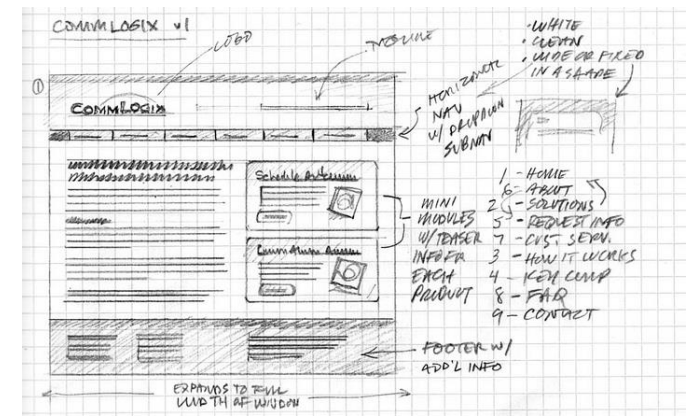
- Magnetic boards to be used with one arm

- Starting from “cool” design -> appropriating to their needs

- Turn to ethics of care: “central focus is attending to and
meeting needs of people for whom we are responsible”



What can we offer participants?



What if no technology is designed for the participants?

- Incomplete design delivered
- No learning from use
- Researchers can harvest findings also from a failed project
- We often receive more than we can give

PD - as responsible and reflective practice - can offer

- Joyful participation
- Making their own representations
- Mutual learning

«Understand the politics of change and where you stand within them» (Blomberg et al 1996)

Following up for a project to grow



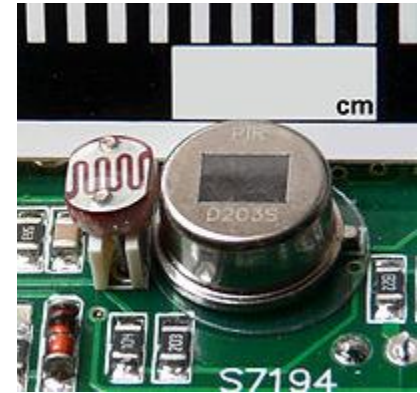
Ethical issues of design in and for use

- Issues that arise in use, strategies for resolving them
- Does the design increase the power-to?
 - Or space for activity and change?
- Challenges - design is completed in use
- Monitoring and surveillance



Examples

- Surveillance versus communication (BRIS-project)
- What is «good» for the participant/user?



Microethics - what happens in every interaction

Ethical choices with unknown consequences in the course of events

- Negotiating multiple agendas (parents', teachers')
- On being Care-ful e.g. in working with children
- Acknowledging Personal Context – gender expressions and body influence participation
- Ethical principles came in conflict with microethics

(Spiel et al., 2018)

Ethical principles versus microethics strategies

- to look into the seemingly mundane everyday activities and situated judgements that contribute to ethical conduct

Ethical Principles	Strategies in Micro-Ethics
full context of children	navigation of carers priorisation of topics
do no harm	complex risk assessment making judgements
child-led PD	negotiation of needs being responsible
professional conduct	personal relationships commitment to participants embodied research

Table 1: Tensions between ethical principles stemming from virtue ethics and strategies used in micro-ethics

(Spiel et al., 2018)

Questions to guide ongoing ethical reflection

- Do users actually have decision power? If so what kind?
- Does a design method, tool or process recognise and encourage participants' abilities to learn?
- Does a design method, tool or process guide designers and researchers to analyse and develop their interests and attitude towards participants?
- Does a design method, tool or process include participants' evaluations not just of what is being designed but of the design process itself, including the opportunities for and process of participation?
- Does a design method, tool or process deal with a justified loss or change of design focus, for example when participants identify problems that require non-information technology solutions while the process was initiated to design information technology)?

Page 82 in Simonsen and Robertson (2013)

Lov om organisering av forskningsetisk arbeid (forskningsetikkloven)

Dato	LOV-2017-04-28-23
Departement	Kunnskapsdepartementet
Sist endret	LOV-2024-03-08-9 fra 01.08.2024
Ikrafttredelse	01.05.2017
Endrer	LOV-2006-06-30-56
Kunngjort	28.04.2017
Rettet	07.09.2021 (faglige fotnoter fjernet)
Korttittel	Forskningsetikkloven

Jf. tidligere [lov 30 juni 2006 nr. 56](#).



Kort om loven

Sist endret 19.11.2024

Forskningsetikkloven er en norsk lov som skal bidra til at forskning skjer etter anerkjente forskningsetiske normer. Loven regulerer forskernes aktsomhetsplikt, krav til forskningsinstitusjoner og behandling av uredelighetssaker.

Den forrige forskningsetikkloven, forskningsetikkloven fra 2006, var den første lovreguleringen av forskningsetikk i Norge. Kunnskapsdepartementet hadde i 2014 etterkontroll av forskningsetikkloven for å vurdere om det var behov for lovendring. Etterkontrollen viste at det krevde så store endringer i daværende forskningsetikklov at det ikke var hensiktsmessig og tilstrekkelig å revidere loven, og det ble derfor vedtatt en ny forskningsetikkloven, som er dagens lov.

[Les mer i Store norske leksikon.](#)

§ 1. Formål

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

Final words

Participation as a means of resolving conflicts that emerge in technology use – more than merely observing, analysing, monitoring consequences.



Aim to lessen
future conflict
by participation
the design
process

References not in the reading list

Heiberg and Undlien, 2013, Genetisk forskning på barn, in: Fossheim, H., Hølen, J., Ingierd, H. (eds), Barn i Forskning: Ethiske dimensjoner, Forskningsetiske komiteer.

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Wrigley and Dawson, 2016, Vulnerability and Marginalized Populations, in: Public Health Ethics: Cases Spanning the Globe, Springer, pp. 203-240.