

A philosophical look into research ethics

Roberto Gutiérrez Laboy¹

Abstract

This paper aims to reflect on research ethics from a philosophical stance. The author examines various incidents in which fraud permeates the scientific research both in the natural and social sciences and exposes, through philosophical questioning, possible reasons and likely responses to such crucial ethical and moral dilemma. Considering that most codes of research ethics have been ineffective for many scientists, the author speculates that philosophy could be helpful if the essence of the human being is examined closely and carefully. Displaying samples considered paradigmatic in the ethics of research, it is suggested that awareness of the fragility of human morality, among other conditions, is essential to formulate moral codes that are more effective in the researches being conducted.

Key words: Philosophy. Moral. Fraud. Natural sciences disciplines. Social sciences.

Resumen

Una mirada filosófica a la ética de la investigación

En este ensayo se pretende reflexionar en torno a la ética de las investigaciones desde una postura filosófica. Se examinan diversos incidentes en los que los fraudes permean las investigaciones científicas tanto en las ciencias naturales como en las sociales y se expone, por medio del cuestionamiento filosófico, las posibles razones y probables respuestas a tan crucial dilema ético y moral. Al considerarse que los códigos de ética de las investigaciones han sido poco eficaces para gran cantidad de científicos se especula que la filosofía podría ayudar si se escudriña con mayor fortaleza la esencia del ser humano. Exhibiendo muestras que se consideran paradigmáticas en la ética de las investigaciones se sugiere que la concienciación de la fragilidad moral humana, entre otras condiciones, es fundamental para que se construyan códigos morales que sean más efectivos en las investigaciones que se han llevado a cabo.

Palabras-clave: Filosofía. Moral. Fraude. Disciplinas de las ciencias naturales. Ciencias sociales.

Resumo

Um olhar filosófico à ética em pesquisa

Neste artigo pretende-se refletir a respeito da ética das pesquisas a partir de uma postura filosófica. São analisados vários incidentes em que as fraudes permeiam as investigações científicas nas ciências naturais e sociais e se expõe, mediante o questionamento filosófico, as possíveis razões e prováveis respostas a esse crucial dilema ético e moral. Considera-se que os códigos de ética das pesquisas têm sido ineficazes para muitos cientistas, pelo que se especula que a filosofia poderia ajudar, na possibilidade de escutar com maior força a essência do ser humano. Exibindo mostras consideradas paradigmáticas na ética das pesquisas, sugere-se que a conscientização da fragilidade moral humana, entre outras condições, é crucial para construir códigos morais que sejam mais eficazes para as investigações que estão sendo realizadas.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia. Moral. Fraude. Disciplinas das ciências naturais. Ciências sociais.

1. [Doctor rgutierrez@alumni.rutgers.edu](mailto:rgutierrez@alumni.rutgers.edu) – Departamento de Humanidades, Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Correspondence

Roberto Gutiérrez Laboy – Colinas de Monte Carlo, A1 #5 Calle 23 CP 00924. San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The author reports no conflict of interest.

The scientific researches may be examined from different perspectives: from psychology, sociology, law and economical points of view, among other focuses. In this essay, an effort will be made to reflect on the researches on natural and social sciences. It is necessary to make clarify that the author is neither a social nor a natural scientist. He is a person who studies the philosophy that originates these reflections, or, more precisely, managed in the mind of a person who studies the philosophy whose interests are mainly the ethics with particular attention to the bioethics and the neuroethics.

But, precisely the ones who are not dedicated to the scientific subjects such as these have something to contribute to them. There is no doubt that after Hiroshima and Nagasaki science cannot be considered neutral in moral terms, because academics from other areas watch their activities like spectators to further reflect on them.

One of the first philosophers who attempted to create consciousness about the scientific researches, Hans Jonas, clearly established it when stated that: *Experimentation was originally sanctioned by natural science. It is performed on inanimate objects, and this raises no moral problems. But as soon as animate, feeling beings become the subjects of experiment, as they do in the life sciences and especially in medical research, the innocence of the search for knowledge is lost and questions of conscience arise. The depth to which moral and religious sensibilities can become aroused is shown by the vivisection issue. Human experimentation must sharpen the issue as it involves ultimate questions of personal dignity and sacrosanctity*¹. Therefore, it will be from the perspective of philosophy that the subjects will be approached. That is: this article will philosophically discuss some aspects that the scientific researches should have. To keep the discussion closer to the writer, the author will use the first person in his text, subtracting the free philosophical thought of this essay.

Which philosophy?

What does the adverb “philosophically” mean? I know very well that this is not the time to philosophize about the concept of philosophy. On the other hand, I feel obligated to present, even if very quickly, some notions about the importance that covers this discipline and show a few criterions about it. I think that there are three cognitive levels in the philosophical field. There are the professional

philosophers that by having vocation generate acute and transcendental disquisition around different subjects (like Kant, Ortega and Sartre). There are the philosophy teachers who limit themselves to teaching the subject. At last, there are individuals who have some preparation in this subject because of their educational background or because of their own interests.

The philosophy that I want to highlight is neither the philosophy of philosophers nor the teachers’, but the philosophy of the ordinary human being who knows a few key elements of philosophy, even without knowledge about others of greater relevance. After all, most people who establish the research ethics principles are not philosophers, but professionals from the fields of sciences and law. By this I mean any person that has been occupied with acquiring some philosophical preparation. Generally, among them, philosophy is more of an attempt to comprehend the world and life with the cardinal intention of understanding its meaning and sense in how much it affects them somehow. In the humanity courses that have taught throughout the last thirty three years, I warn my students, that by discussing the philosophy subject, my goal is not turn them into philosophers, but for them to acquire the philosopher’s attitude. I see philosophy, fundamentally, like a methodic thinking method whose main goal is to question life’s uncertainty and that this aspect is what matters in this moment.

Because of that, I have Dewey’s definition of philosophy as *criticism of belief, institutions, customs, policies with respect to their bearing upon good*². So, for me, what is necessary in philosophy is to question. More than the knowledge itself, questioning is essential in philosophy. In this sense, to question everything that has been learned and will be learnt throughout life; everything that can be seen and that cannot be seen. Therefore, in this paper I will articulate some questions about the arguments that I will expose. Overall, reminding that for Heidegger, *the philosophical question is about a prepared disposition for new knowledge*³. Questioning leads us to greater knowledge and if there is something researches are looking for, it is to gather this knowledge.

Unfortunately, the philosophy study has been losing ground in the school system in some countries and something similar happens in many universities. In the Mexican case, where the Board of Public Education proposed in 2008 the elimination of philosophy in the school curriculum, serves as a model in Latin America. In Europe, the Science and

Education Ministry of Spain did the same in 2005. Fortunately, we find countries like Brazil that give us hope, since in 2006, the Federal Council of Education made the study of philosophy - and sociology - mandatory in schools.

What is the reason to deprive the students of the opportunity of getting in touch with such an important subject? Do they forget that philosophy is the origin of all science? Doesn't the system want its citizens to question and to think? Was Jostein Gaarder³ right when he stated that *The ones who ask questions, are always the most dangerous ones. Answering is not so dangerous. Can one question have more gunpowder than a thousand answers?* It is unquestionable that an educational process without philosophy leaves the young people incomplete.

Philosophy is greatly helpful to any human person no matter the tasks they perform. It is of even greater help for scientists. I have no objection in supporting that an acceptable philosophic base will make a difference on the researchers of natural and social sciences. When I acknowledge researches of great value in these sciences, I always think or, at least, comfort myself by thinking that this scientist has something of a philosopher on the exercise of questioning, which is exactly what makes him investigate. Regardless being from different areas of knowledge, researchers and philosophers should agree on this facet. Blaise Pascal and Albert Einstein are paradigms to emulate. After all, like Savater pointed, *...the philosophic question is to categorize as if we were scientists, but incorporating our experience. Moreover, he adds, science is experimenting, philosophy is experiencing*⁴. Here emerges a "philosophic view" that should be understood as a way of trying to sharpen the senses facing the worries that come from the scientists' job in their researches, besides evoking critical questions that help clarify and understand, from a humanistic perspective, contributions or tricks that may appear.

Ethics and Moral

Approaching the research ethics, it is necessary to make it clear what I understand by ethics, bearing in mind that not everyone that practices this subject understands it the same way and how the theme "ethics" is always approached, inevitably, we are forced to clarify the concept contrasting it with the word "moral", since popularly both terms are used as if they were synonymous when in reality they are not. At least that is how I see it. In one of

my books I establish the difference in the following way: *In simple words, you may say that moral refers to the principles and actions that should guide the human being, while ethics is the philosophic subject that reflects in these actions and principles. In this way, ethics is the philosophic questioning of everything we consider moral or immoral and, maybe, amoral. For that reason, it is correct to say that ethics and moral philosophy are synonymous words, but moral is something else, although we can clearly conclude that these concepts are closely interrelated and that from ethical reflection may and should raise conclusions and moral conducts*⁵.

In this point of view, it seems to me what I need the most - in the strict sense of the word - would be to refer to the "moral of (or in) the researches" and not to "a research ethics". It should also approach the "professional moral", whether it is the engineers' or the lawyers' and not the "professional ethics" once in the concept of "research ethics" what's really being made is a research moral which dictates rules and regulations that should be considered the scientists. But, - I repeat - this is my opinion. But as the its use establishes the rules, the words "research ethics" will be used instead of "research moral". I have to insist that by being research "ethics" and by ethics being one of the branches of philosophy, it "has" or, at least, "should" have this questioning and argumentative reflection and critics that is inherent to philosophy. Maybe it is viable to do one thing or another when we talk about a research ethics. That is, establish rules and regulations and, at the same time, make the philosophic exercise of questioning the bases that support these rules and regulations.

So, in my case, when I use the concept of research ethics, I refer to the "reflection" or "questioning" around the moral implications that the researches involving human beings, animals or plants, whether scientific or not, are led before, during and after they are accomplished.

Short notes about the research ethics

In the principles published in the Belmont Report (1979) fundamental elements such as respect, benefits and justice are established. It was first thought of in the natural sciences. If we think about the social sciences, research ethics will cover issues like privacy, confidentiality, mistakes, risks and benefits, plagiarism, etc. Although some experts consider that research ethics in natural sciences is not

A philosophical look into research ethics

equivalent to the one in social scientists' research, both have the same importance. For example, the informed consent and privacy that in both fields are brought out by their importance and hierarchy in all kinds of researches. As it will be shown later, I will refer to subjects that concern both groups because in many occasions they deviate from the path they are supposed to follow.

The research ethics that has as goal the protection of human beings, starts to settle more firmly in documents like the *Nuremberg Code* (1947) and the *Declaration of Helsinki* (1964). Their potential and maximum developments are found in statements like the Belmont Report (1979) and in the *Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights* published by UNESCO in 2005. The atrocious abuses that were committed against the concentration camps prisoners' in the Nazi Germany have been one of the cruelest episodes occurred in human history.

Nevertheless, the outrages that motivated and motivate research ethics are not restricted to them only. The Tuskegee Experiment (1932-1972) in Alabama, in which five hundred poor and illiterate North African Americans infected with syphilis participated in a research that promised to study the natural development of this disease and how it killed patients. The project was carried out without respecting the experimentation subjects. Without knowing the underlying goal, they never gave their consent and neither were they informed about their diagnostic. Another paradigmatic case that happened in the 1960's in the Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital (Brooklyn, New York, 1963), in which cancer cells were introduced without the patients' consent under the theory that these cells would be safely rejected. On the other hand, in the period from 1950 to 1970 in the Willowbrook school for children with mental delay in Staten Island, New York, the interns were contaminated with hepatitis to determine the natural history of this sickness, the different types of hepatitis and to prove the effectiveness of the gamma globulin.

These are only some examples that make urgent, with a lot of ethical (or moral) mistrust in the researches in the general science, to watch over the protection of human and nonhuman subjects. It is worth acknowledging that these examples are given too much notability, but they are not the only ones, because in other places, such as my country - Puerto Rico, an United States territory - is not the exception in cases like these. In this Caribbean island, the North American government had "the operation" (1940-1970) in which they sterilized thousands of Puerto

Rican women - a third part of women in reproductive age - without informing them appropriately about the implications. The goal was birth control.

Questioning the research ethics

In this short historic report, there are important questions, such as: What values and principles did these scientists - or each scientist in his individual character - have?; How did they feel about the participants' suffering?; Regarding their characteristics, or, their essence, were they humans, inhuman or were they dehumanized?; How did they feel looking at their spouses and children?; What were their conception on human dignity? There are many more questions, because, as Wentler indicates...*In the end, then, as commentators struggle to address the existing ethical concerns raised by clinical research, its conduct in the real world raises new ethical concerns and, thereby, offers opportunities for philosophers looking for interests, not to mention very important issues in need of analysis and resolution* ⁶.

After all, the subjects concerning research ethics do not stay here. The many frauds that are committed in researches call for attention. For example, frauds, lies and partial truths and biased studies are known to happen in pharmaceutical companies with antidepressives and other medications given that economic interests are given more priority than human sensibility. How many times have we heard about the many benefits of a medication and not about its side effects? Frequently we get to know about millionaire demands because of lack of information on medical research. We often hear about millions spent in lawsuits filed due to lack of information from medical researches. There are other situations that have always called my attention. We are often informed that, according to the latest research, we should drink eight glasses of water every day, then some time after, they tell us that it may not be good to drink that much water and we should drink as much as "the body asks". For many years it has been recommended that people who have risk of a heart attack take a small doses of aspirin, but in 2009 Oxford researchers claimed that this is not beneficent.

A few years ago, I read on BBC⁷ London that *Sport makes us smart*. Part of the news started like this: Despite of what many people might think, athletes and sport enthusiasts are, apparently, more intellectual than we believe. The researchers' publication from the Chicago University concludes that ...*"the study shows that activities which are not re-*

lated to language, like playing or watching sports, improve the understanding ability. This happens because the brain areas usually used to accomplish an action get involved in a very active way in the understanding of the language. I am not saying that this is not serious or an example of fraud. The truth is I don't know. But in its broadcasting to the public and in the same professional publications, they show conviction in what they affirm. So, why don't they say, "we believe" or "it is our opinion" and avoid stating with such conviction when uncertainty prioritized in the result of many researches.

Titus, Wells and Rhoades⁸ inform that there are many more fraud cases in research than you could think of. The authors claim that these cases occur in the modality of fabrication, falsification or plagiarism in the scientific research, and for that reason they urge the academy to be stricter when releasing the results of the researches they conduct to public knowledge. The academy and the institutions that promote and support researches have the responsibility of watching over their neatness. Why don't they do this rigorously? Why don't they vigorously safeguard the good practices and evade so many bad practices in researches? As López de la Vieja points out, the "good practices" imply that *...further than the respect for individual rights, it is also the commitment of the researchers and the institutions with some standards that certify the quality in the procedures and the results. These standards will be scientific and, sometimes, moral; for example, the research efficacy should go along with other principles, such as security and equality of opportunities, so that everyone access to the benefits from the essays or from the resulting treatments*⁹.

One of the paradigmatic fraud examples in researches is embodied by the South Korean scientist Hwang Woo-Suk from Seoul National University in one of his studies in the field of stem cells that was published by Science magazine. The hopes he had instilled in global scientists vanished when they saw themselves obligated to accept that the "corollary" in cloning human embryos that had been announced to the world in March 2004, were based on false data. According to the BBC diary: *The colleagues that examined the work of the South Korean scientist concluded that the results of nine out of eleven lines of stem cells that he claimed to have created, were deliberately falsified. The data of the 2005 article were not the result of simple mistakes, but intentional fabrication, said the researchers committee in a public statement*¹⁰. Curiously, it was reported shortly before¹¹ that Dr. Koo Young-Mo

professor of medical ethics, was accused of disloyalty when he initially questioned Hwang about his practices. What draws attention here is that Young-Mo's practices had been ignored until then.

As consequence to the precarious situation in which *Science* magazine had been, its chief writer, Donald Kennedy¹², announced they would take measures to avoid that similar acts happen again in order to recover its credibility. In an official statement they claimed that falsification of results was a reason to worry because it may question a process that is based on trust. After this, they required that the article writers gave details of their contribution and make a declaration of truthfulness of the conclusions. Henceforth, they would require that authors of articles detail their contributions and make a statement of veracity of the findings. They also claimed that they would improve their methods for detecting image alterations, as it had occurred in a paper published in 2005 by Hwang. A similar event occurred with Shane Mayack, then Harvard researcher, who falsified data, published in scientific magazines *Blood* (2008) and *Nature* (2010).

In 2012, it was approved by the Office of Research Integrity of the Department of Health in the United States. Unfortunately cases of fraud and unethical research continue as demonstrated by Philip Davis¹³ among others. The question we have to ask is why there is this kind of scenario. Could it be pressure responses from the academy, in search for recognition and prestige, self-esteem problems or to make their projects - legitimate or not - remain funded? Molinoff calls it "conflict of interests". According to him, *obtaining convincing data on an important question has enormous potential benefits for a researcher. Benefits can include publications in prestigious journals, invitations to conferences, receiving grants or awards, as well as academic success, including, for example, the granting of tenure. All of this potential rewards could tarnish their professional judgment.* This is more than a moral issue, I must add. Undoubtedly this is an integrity issue.

The term integrity in Spanish (*integridad*) comes from the Latin word *integritatem*, which is accusative of *integritas* and implies "complete", "total" and, particularly, "honorable proven quality (honesty)". If there is something required in research, it is honesty in every phase of it. The scientists should not lose the confidence that, not only academics, but the general public deposited in them. Otherwise, not only will they struggle to find funding to their propositions, but they will also find it harder to engage suitable candidates willing to cooperate.

A philosophical look into research ethics

Some thinkers say that science is the last great myth^{15, 16}. This is not exactly true. It is undeniable that most people highly trust scientists and that it is a reprehensible act to lose this trust - and, it is even worse that scientists themselves are those who pay for it. Russell assured that *some men feel so impressed by what science knows, that they forget what they do not know*¹⁷. Sometimes I believe it is better this way. I am not very sympathetic of the faith and I consider that we cannot lose the faith we have in the researches that are performed and squander much less faith in scientists (i.e., the faith to which I refer as trust, good concept I have of a person or thing)¹⁸. Imagine losing faith - trust - in doctors, just to give an example. Who should I turn to in case of illness? A religious guide, a healer? Unfortunately, many people have lost so much confidence, or faith, in scientists and in their researches which choose not to help them.

The book *Integrity in Scientific Research: Creating an environment that promotes responsible conduct* states that: *Integrity characterizes both individual researchers and the institutions in which they work. For researchers, integrity is an aspect of moral character and experience. For institutions, it is a matter of creating an environment that promotes responsible behavior by embracing standards for excellence, reliability, and legality establishing institutional practices. For the individual scientist, research integrity embodies, above all, a commitment to intellectual honesty and personal responsibility for one's actions and commitment to a set of practices that characterize the responsible research conduct. These practices include: intellectual honesty in proposing, developing, and publishing the research; accuracy in presenting contributions to research proposals; fairness in peer evaluation; collegiality in scientific interactions, including communications and sharing of resources; transparency in conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest; protection of human subjects in research development; humane treatment of animals in research development; and adherence to the mutual responsibilities between researchers and their research teams*¹⁹.

Minimum ethics in research

These notes I have just emphasized are very important and should be followed as it indicates. They are a kind of requirement of a "minimum integrity" in research. In fact, if philosophers like the Spanish Adela Cortina and the German Theodor W. Adorno suggest us "minimum ethics" or "minimum ethics in

research", her, and "minimum morals", him, we could talk about "minimum ethics in research" or "ethics of minimum in research", because it is in no way censoring anybody like I have manifested somewhere else²⁰.

About "minimum ethics" Cerutti Guldberg explains: *This term refers to the reflection in the field of practical philosophy which aims to build morals based on its own traditions, real political and economical conditioning and from the very praxis and reflection of the individuals involved, providing answers to the demands of secular society, proposing minimum axiological and normative consciousness shared by a pluralistic society, in which each person is free to make offers of maximum and from which the members of this society can make moral decisions on issues of shared moral with questions of applied ethics; in other words, ethics based in interpersonal communicability and the consensus about the minimum required to make the plural society work ethically*²¹.

Something similar to what I mean by "the minimal ethics in research". Therefore, I suppose that the concept of "a minimum ethics in research" is the dialogical capacity in which the researchers from both the social and the natural sciences should get involved to find the moral and axiological minimum principles in a global context that should guide their intellectual activities. Which should they be? Some options I have just indicated, others still have to be discussed, but they clearly must have respect for integrity, dignity and human rights.

What I show now is nothing new and there are already good attempts. In the Science European Foundation (SEF) report, entitled *Integrity Guardians: institutional methods to promote and protect the good practices in researches in Europe*, John Marks, Assistant Executive Director of SEF and supervisor of report elaboration, points out that *we can only be glad to note that, in most countries, the research organizations have assumed the responsibility of acting as "integrity guardians" to develop clear codes of conduct and establish solid mechanisms that address allegations of malpractice*²². What happens is that we cannot keep divided in our own world, but, as I said before, a global context should be established in which language and race are not obstacles, on the contrary, among the cultural differences, emerge fair and reasonable agreements. The commitment must be unwavering and endorsed by every researcher who want to see their papers defrayed, which has not been done so far.

For the moment it should be emphasized that any researcher center - weather sponsored by universities or pharmaceutical companies - should

have ethics committees with a few clear and precise guidelines establishing the “minimum” suitable policies and procedures in an ethical and moral point of view. These committees, mainly the hospitals, are composed of researchers – or in other options - lawyers, religious people and, in certain cases, bioethicists. In these committees, the presence of a highly qualified philosopher with graduation in bioethics is essential. It is fundamental to understand that having training in bioethics does not make anyone a philosopher. That is why I insist that a philosophy professional should be part of these committees.

An exemplary act occurred recently when scientists, theologians and philosophers met in Geneva to discuss the Higgs boson. I found it very successful when Rolf Heder, director of the European Organization for Nuclear Research, said that, *we need, as naive scientists, philosophers and theologians argue the time before the Big Bang*, although in a “serious joke” tone, added that *I wouldn't go as far as let you do experiments here, but I would not have any problems in having resident philosopher*²³.

So far, I have been pondering a bit on some aspects that have to do with research ethics. In this moment I want to give a unique example that has caught my attention and that could lead us to a greater reflection on this issue that concerns the natural (specifically the neurology and psychiatry) and social (specifically the psychology and sociology) sciences. I refer to the infamous case of David Reimer. I think that a brief inquiry about this case will induce us to a philosophical introspection about the ethical implications of researches.

The Reimer case (1965-2004)

The twins Bruce and Brian Reimer were born in Canada. Since six months of age they started having problems to urinate and the doctors recommended circumcision. In 1996, they were operated using a process in which the skin is burned with an electric cautery. Bruce's penis burned in such a way that it could not be surgically reconstructed so it was removed. In a television program his parents were informed about the theories of the controversial Dr. John Money who was a pediatrics and medical psychology professor at Johns Hopkins University. Money sustained that the boys could be raised as girls. They visited him and the doctor considered Bruce the perfect candidate. The way the children are brought up determines the children's gender, and not nature, he assured.

According to the journalists Oliver Burkeman and Gary Youngue, this *doctor, brought up in a religious and conservative family in New Zealand, had rebelled into describing himself as a 'sex missionary', showing through astonishing responses in his tireless defense of open marriages and bisexual group sex, his debility and preference. The most extreme affirmations of Money approved, or at least did not condemn, incest and pedophilia, but in the television program in which Janet and Ron Reimer participated, these issues were not mentioned. They wrote him a letter and he quickly responded*²⁴. At 21 months of age, Bruce's testicles were removed and without saying anything to anyone, his parents returned to their home with a girl named Brenda. His mother Janet Reimer confessed that they got used to this situation quickly because for them she was a beautiful little girl. This way, she was raised as a girl, dressed as one, her mother taught her how to put make up on.

Nevertheless, once in school, Bruce did not enjoy playing with the girls and did not behave like them. His brother Brian²⁵ sustained the opinion that *the only difference between my brother Bruce and I is that he had long hair while mine was short*. When he reached puberty, Money recommended them to make a vagina, to which Bruce objected. Finally, his father told him his whole story. Bruce considered murdering the ones who had atrophied him, but what he did was attempt suicide in three occasions, and he fell into a coma. Once he “overcame” the “shock state” caused by his father's confession, he cut his hair, dressed up as a man and changed his name to David and began to have a “normal” life. After the writer John Colapinto published *As nature made him: the boy who was raised as a girl*, David devoted himself to giving lectures against what had been done to him. Meanwhile, he was underwent four reconstructive surgeries to physically return to being a man and married a woman who had three children from a previous marriage.

Shortly after, he lost his job (at a slaughter house) and divorced his wife. According to his mother, he never got over the death of his brother two years before. On May 4th, 2004, at the age of 38, David Reimer committed suicide. On one occasion, David had confessed he was *a kind of a brainwash. He would give anything for a hypnotizer to erase all memories from my past. It is a torture I cannot stand. What they did to my body is not as bad as what they did to my mind*²⁴. The controversy around the “nature versus education or upbringing” (nature vs. nurture) is not yet resolved. Even so, the philosophic perspective urges to keep on questioning which prevails over the other.

I, for one, am convinced that nature (meaning the brain) is dominant, but it is not determinant. When the poet and playwright of the Spanish golden age Pedro Calderón de la Barca raised the issue of fate - of great philosophical and theological interest -, he concluded that it inclines, but it does not force. The same could be argued in this case: Nature inclines, but does not force. The validation of this approach was left to others, as philosophers ask questions and problematize arguments rather than solving problems.

But what is important here are the values that gravitated or not in the mind of Dr. Money. He defended until his death the success of his “experiment”. However, as I have already pointed out, David’s reaction does not match his appreciation. As a matter of fact, in many occasions, David alleged that Dr. Money sexually abused him and his brother. An important study about the results of which is also known as the “John/Joan” case was conducted by Diamond and Sigmundson²⁶. This study questions the validity of the methodology and lists the “experiment” as a failure.

The curious thing is the prestige that this researcher used to have and still does. In an article in his memory it is reported that *Professor Money was the first honorary member of the Spanish Association of Sexology Societies (SASS) and has proposed that the research prize of the Spanish Federation of Sexology Societies (SFSS) take his name*²⁷. I believe the proposal was not accepted. Furthermore, it is necessary to note that the Magnus Hirschfeld Medal (2002) was given to Money by the German Society for Social-Scientific Sexuality Research.

I do not believe it is necessary at this moment, to judge Money’s scientific merits and I am aware of

other contribution made. In fact, the authors of the same periodical article added that *it is in the mysteries of the psychosexual, adding concepts such gender identity and gender role. He was a pioneer in the study of sexual fantasies, paraphilia and a long etcetera*. However, his life and work are still of great interest within the framework of the topic of research ethics: the frauds, the lack of integrity and honesty, the little or no value to feelings and lives of others among many other elements. On which he did not seem to have a clear concept and the worse thing is that some entities crossed the case without objection.

Final Considerations

It is unquestionable that many researchers with vast moral principles follow exactly, as much as possible, the guidelines and codes established. However, these guidelines and codes are nonexistent or not important for many others. What can we do? How effective are these existing codes? Is the retaliation against fraud sufficient and effective? Is it objectively possible to avoid these practices? Are there possible answers? Did these unscrupulous scientists - and the ones to come - act with more moral consciousness? How? Which are the philosophical and human assumptions that set the time to start their research? What is the significance assigned to biotic beings? Which is its real appreciation around the dignity of these beings? Did we forget that they are not different from the others and, like many others, have moral fragility, which characterizes many human beings today like the ones as yesterday? There are many other questions urging for better answers. This is why we have to keep emphasizing, reflecting and having a philosophical perspective on research ethics (moral).

References

1. Jonas H. Philosophical reflections on experimenting with human subjects. *Daedalus*. 1969;98(2):219.
2. Dewey J. Experience and nature. London: George Allen & Unwin; 1929. p. 408.
3. Heidegger M. Europa y la filosofía alemana. [Internet]. 18 abr. 1936 [acceso 15 out. 2012]. Conferencia pronunciada en el Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut, Biblioteca Hertziana di Roma. Disponível: http://www.heideggeriana.com.ar/textos/europa.htm#_edn1
4. Savater F. Cómo se hacen las ideas filosóficas. *Letras Libres*. 2012;124:16.
5. Gutiérrez Laboy R. Ética a Ana Laura: hacia una ética humanista. Madrid: Manuscritos; 2008. p. 29.
6. Wendler D. The ethics of clinical research. In: Edward N. Zalta, editor. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [Internet]. 2012 [acceso 12 out. 2012]. Disponível: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/clinical-research>
7. El deporte nos hace inteligentes. *BBC Mundo.com*. [Internet]. 2 set. 2008 [acceso 17 out. 2012]:BBC Ciência. Disponível: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/science/newsid_7593000/7593594.stm
8. Titus SL, Wells JA, Rhoades LJ. Repairing research integrity. *Nature*. 2008;453:980-2.
9. López de la Vieja MT. Ética de la investigación: las buenas prácticas. *Arbor: ciencia, pensamiento y cultura*. 2008;184(730):234.

10. Clonación: científico mintió. BBC Mundo.com. [Internet]. 29 dic 2005 [acceso 17 out. 2012]. Disponible: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/science/newsid_4565000/4565938.stm
11. BBC Mundo.com. Apoyo a científico en desgracia. [Internet]. 25 nov. 2005 [acceso 19 out. 2012]. Disponible: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/science/newsid_4472000/4472192.stm
12. Special Online Collection: Hwang et al. Controversy, committee report, response, and background. Science. [Internet]. 1º dez. 2006 [acceso 19 out. 2012]:Online extras. Disponible: <http://www.sciencemag.org/site/feature/misc/webfeat/hwang2005/>
13. Davis P. The persistence of error: a study of retracted articles on the internet and in personal libraries. J Med Libr Ass. [Internet]. 2012;100(3):184-9. doi: 10.3163/1536-5050.100.3.008.
14. Molinoff PB. Conflict of interest in american universities. In: Ravitsky V, Fiester A, Caplan AL, editors. The Penn Center guide to bioethics. New York: Springer Publishing Company; 2009. p. 281.
15. Feyerabend PK, Naess A. El mito de la ciencia y su papel en la sociedad. Valencia: Cuadernos Teorema; 1979.
16. Quintanilla MA. El mito de la ciencia. In: Diccionario de Filosofía Contemporánea. Salamanca: Sígueme; 1976. p. 65-81.
17. Russell B. Ensayos impopulares. México: Hermes; 1963. p. 37.
18. Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua. 21ª ed. Madrid: Espasa Calpe; 1992. Fe: p. 956.
19. Integrity in scientific research: creating an environment that promotes responsible conduct. Washington: The National Academies Press; 2002. p. 34-5.
20. Gutiérrez Laboy R. El problema de la prohibición en la ética. Problemata: revista internacional de filosofía. 2011;2(2):156-75.
21. Cerutti Guldberg H. Diccionario de filosofía latinoamericana. [Internet]. México: Unam. Ética mínima. [acceso 31 out. 2012]. Disponible: http://www.cialc.unam.mx/pensamientoycultura/biblioteca%20virtual/diccionario/etica_minima.htm
22. Fundación Europea de la Ciencia. La integridad en la investigación, a salvo en la mayoría de los países europeos. Comisión Europea, Cordis. [Internet]. 15 jul 2008 [acceso nov. 2012]. Disponible: http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=ES_NEWS&ACTION=D&SESSION=&RCN=29658
23. ¿Hay un lugar para Dios en el Big Bang? BBC Mundo.com. [Internet]. 21 oct 2012 [acceso 2 nov. 2012]. Disponible: http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/noticias/2012/10/121020_ciencia_big_bang_dios_jgc.shtml
24. Burkeman O, Youngue G. David no aguantó ser Brenda. El Mundo. [Internet]. 15 may 2004 [acceso 23 out. 2012]. Disponible: <http://www.elmundo.es/salud/2004/572/1084572003.html>
25. ¿Quién fue David Reimer? SHB Europe. [Internet]. 2010 [acceso 3 nov. 2012]. Disponible: <http://www.shb-info.org/reimer.html>
26. Diamond M, Sigmundson HK. Sex reassignment at birth: a long term review and clinical implications. Arch Pediat Adolesc Med. [Internet]. 1997[acceso 3 nov. 2012];151. Disponible: http://www.hawaii.edu/PCSS/online_artcls/intersex/mdfml.html
27. Pérez M, Borrás JJ, Zubieta X. In memoriam de John Money. El Mundo. [Internet]. 14 ju. 2006 [acceso 4 nov. 2012]. Disponible: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2006/07/13/sexo/1152787165.html>

