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# The Duty to participate in Research?

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# Talk Outline

1. John Harris in 2005 argues Scientific Research is a moral duty.
2. Implications of this
3. Arguments for and why they don't work – at least for grounding an obligation for participation as research subject.
4. Alex London – Egalitarian Research imperative (ERI)
5. Does a duty to participate in research exist under ERI?



# John Harris's Strong Claim:

Participation in or support for research, particularly medical research, is a moral duty

This entails an obligation to “volunteer” to participate in medical research.



# John Harris's Arguments:

1. Unfair to benefit without reciprocation (Free-rider argument)
2. Social duty to maintain those practices that sustain us  
(Argument from Filial Piety)
3. Future benefits of research as duty to prevent deaths  
(Argument from Rescue)



# Free rider objection

Most of us pay for health care and medical research in some fashion – usually through taxes.

Thus at worst – underpaying riders and that is hard to work out...



# Argument from Filial Piety

Its an odd argument.

Many things make us up – unclear why medical research should get special treatment here.



# Argument from Rescue

“[w]here our actions will, or may probably prevent serious harm then if we can reasonably . . . we clearly should act”

But again while medical research is one way to achieve that end it isn't the only way – or even the most effective way – especially in a capitalist medical research environment.



# Underlying contradiction between these arguments

Can you free rider on that which is owed to you as a matter of either justice or urgency?



# Egalitarian Research Imperative

Justice based – focused on the Common Good:

“I argue that the role of this larger division of social labor in a just social order is to advance the common good, understood not as the preservation or perfection of the community as an aggregate entity, but as a set of interests that are shared by all persons.”



# Does this face the same challenges as Harris?

Is direct participation in research required under the Egalitarian Research Imperative?

Depends on definition of “Common Good”



# The Common Good

Corporate Account – On this account there is a common good which isn't simply the amalgamation of the interests of the individuals who make up the “common”.

This would underwrite a requirement.

Basic or Generic Interests Account – On this account there are two sets of interests – those that are relevant only to your personal “life plan” and those that are general and shared by all members of the “common”.

This depends on the account of basic interests.



# Free and Equal Constraint:

“Roughly speaking, to say that persons are morally equal is to say that they each have a deep and abiding interest in being able to formulate, pursue, and revise a life plan of their own and that, relative to this interest, there are no grounds for promoting the interests of one person over another.

Similarly, the claim to be treated as morally free is understood as a social claim to the physical, social, environmental and other conditions that are necessary to have the real ability to exercise these interests in practice without the arbitrary or unwarranted interference from others.”



# A Partial Obligation?

“A just social order treats people as morally free when it recognizes their status as individuals “who exist for their own sake and not for the sake of someone else””

“Whether a life plan is reasonable or not is to be judged from this highest-order standpoint and hinges on the extent to which it is consistent with a social order that recognizes all other individuals as having the same generic interests, and therefore as having the same moral and political standing.”



# This underwrites the Imperative

But rules out enlisting people as research subjects (which the UK Minister of Health as for example as a power).

Still perhaps this puts tension on the insistence on entirely voluntary participation that research ethics usually insists on – especially if we want to maintain the absence of inducements – we allow inducements to incentivise people to produce other basic goods – why not research?

