ETHICS, INNOVATION, AND INNOVATION STUDIES¹

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Abstract
I argue that the critical potential of Innovation Studies can be considerably enhanced by including questions of ethics, both as an object of study, and as an aspect of study. I approach this by first reviewing what we understand by ethics, secondly by speculating how two stylised opposing positions in Innovation Studies – radical epistemology and radical politics – might each treat the question of ethics, and finally by offering a position that is complementary to those whilst not attempting any resolution of their supposed dilemma.

¹ This is a revised and shortened version of a paper first presented to CRIC, November 1998, and to the McMaster International Business Conference, Toronto January 1999. My gratitude to all comments received on both those occasions.
1. INTRODUCTION – WHY ‘ETHICS’?
There has been a proliferation of Ethical Codes for a wide variety of professional and commercial activities – the Centre for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, Illinois Institute of Technology, lists over 850 such Codes. These are often accompanied by means for enforcing the Codes, such as Ethics Committees or Professional Conduct Committees. In addition, studies of 'ethics in science and engineering' have mushroomed – the Bibliography on Ethics in Science and Engineering, from the Centre for Ethics in Science and Engineering, Case Western Reserve University, has over 2,000 entries, and there have been significant developments in the procedures and committees concerned with the “ethics of research and technology” in the European Commission and European Parliament. At one level then, ‘ethics’ should be of interest to Innovation Studies as a set of phenomena that are likely to have at least some direct or indirect effect on Innovation.

However, the main subject for this paper is a second but related question: If there is even a grain of validity in any of these Ethical Codes, standards and judgements, then what are the consequences for Innovation Studies? And I need to make it clear that I am not aligning myself with the recent discussions of 'post-modern ethics', 'new ethics', or 'post-human ethics', although I have some sympathy with those discussions. Whilst they may be valid to say that new situations require new concepts, and that old concepts and styles must be carefully re-examined and if necessary dropped, when we attempt to apply these 'new' ethical standpoints to Innovation Studies we begin to see their limits. I shall also suggest that attempting to understand the consequences of Ethical Codes for Innovation Studies can be seen as an exact analogy with debates about how to treat the validity of the Science and Technology being studied within Innovation Studies. However, before addressing these questions head-on, I want to first examine more closely what we mean by Ethics.

2. WHAT IS ETHICS?
At one level, we might initially think that the recent rise of Ethics is essentially a phenomenon of 'late modernity', or 'postmodernity' or somesuch. Whether or not this is true it is clearly important to see how ‘the ethics phenomenon’ has emerged.
G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 1903:
The exemplar of analytical moral philosophy and still dominant amongst most scientists and many social scientists. He see Ethics as the scientific (but not 'naturalistic') discussion of 'what is good conduct' within the context of a broader discussion of 'what is good' and 'what is bad'. 'Good' and 'bad' are seen as intrinsic properties possessed to varying degrees by 'things' - or rather, what is of interest is the degree of 'intrinsic value' of 'things'. 'Things' include, for instance, 'pleasure', but also include 'organic wholes' such as bodies, where the 'good', the 'value' of the whole, is seen to be greater than the sum of the values of its constituent parts. Moore argues that the value of the contemplation and appreciation of an object is greatly enhanced by the inclusion within that contemplation of the 'knowledge' that the object is real or true. In other words, he went to great lengths to demonstrate that "… knowledge, in the ordinary sense, as distinguished on the one hand from belief in what is false and on the other from the mere awareness of what is true, does contribute towards intrinsic value - that, at least in some cases, its presence as a part makes a whole more valuable than it could have been without … It is, indeed, certain that the chief importance of most knowledge - of the truth of most of the things which we believe - does, in this world, consist in its extrinsic advantages: it is immensely valuable as a means" (pp 194 -196). Note that this position had considerable influence on both Russell and Keynes.

**Ethical Codes and Guidelines:**
These are generally of the form "Thou shalt not" or "Thou shalt" or a declaration or pledge that "I will" or "I will not". In other words, most Ethical Codes and Guidelines refer exclusively to 'good and bad conduct'. A few, however, refer also to more general questions of 'what is good and bad', as in the IFIP Code (International Federation for Information Processing), which also refers to the conduct of Organisations, to principles of national and international laws and policies, and to principles of universal human rights.

**Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: a study in moral theory (1981) and other works**
MacIntyre attempts to reinstate a radical, critical role for concern with morals, ethics and 'virtue'. He offers a critique of Nietzsche together with a critique of 'analytical moral philosophy', 'practical or applied ethics', and a despair at the rise of instrumental
reason – he sees the latter exemplified in the 'modern manager'. He also spells out the denial of any 'coherent rationally defensible statement' for liberal individualism, but also denies that there is now any space for Marxist politics or Marxist social and political theory. He advocates instead the Aristotelian tradition of virtues, and the “construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us” (p 245).

Levinas, Derrida, Bauman

*Levinas* - Justice is conceived as a relationship to 'the other', rather than an absolute. *Derrida* - Deconstruction, and more broadly 'the promise', as a valid form for leaving potential room for such justice, for 'a democracy to come', in that the radical questioning of the inter-linkage between time, law and 'technics' cuts the ground from underneath those who would freeze the future through law-making in the present. *Bauman* - the postmodern condition has opened up ethics as a theme. Similar critique to Macintyre of analytical moral philosophy and non-ambivalent ethical codes. Following Levinas, the crux of morality is 'being-for-the-other', which is a state of being, an ethical *a priori*. Following Derrida, the split between justice (morality) and law is absolute. Both Bauman and Derrida see 'ethics' as a code which attempts to prescribe correct behaviour. For Bauman, it is the celebration of diversity and difference which spells the best hopes for morality.

Foucault

"What is ethics if not the practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom?"
"The concept of governmentality makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others - which constitutes the very stuff of ethics". (Foucault, 1996, pp 432 – 449).

The 'later' Foucault had a dual interest in 'the ethics of the care of the self' in Antiquity - the ancient forms of taking care of oneself by knowing oneself but also by knowing the rules of acceptable conduct - and an interest in more recent manifestations of

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2 For a useful collection of essays, most of which opt for either a MacIntyre position or a Levinas/Derrida/Bauman position, see Parker (1998).
'governmentality' - the 'range of practices which constitute, define, organise and instrumentalise the strategies individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other' - governing the conduct of conduct - 'those who try to control, determine and limit the freedom of others are themselves free individuals who have at their disposal certain instruments they can use to govern others'. Remember that for Foucault 'freedom', like 'truth', is both a relative and an absolute concept: the discourse of 'freedom' has been mobilised in diverse ways, with diverse reasons and effects, throughout history but especially within liberalism and neo-liberalism; and whilst it is a mistake to attempt to legislate (intellectually or otherwise) what is and is not 'freedom', the 'idea of freedom' or rather the 'practices of freedom' are indeed something to be celebrated

Gillian Rose

In The Broken Middle (1992) she argues that there was an ancient and still present 'diremption' (forced splitting) of Ethics and Law. 'The way' - the way one should go, the way things are – was forced to become distinguishable from other 'ways' (of other communities) through the use of intermediate formulations such as law, language, labour. She devotes considerable attention to writers who have attempted to 'suspend the ethical' whilst working towards it - Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Rosa Luxemburg, Hannah Arendt. She revives the radical critical aspects of both Hegel and Nietzsche, and is thus severely critical of the postmodern approaches of Levinas, Derrida and Bauman, but also critical of the mis-readings of Hegel in some of Marx's work, and in most Marxist work. One of the central recurring themes, taken up strongly by Howard Caygill (1989), is the reading of Kant's Critique of Judgement (because of course this is where Kant attempts to justify his separation of 'questions of fact' from 'questions of justice') and the various interpretations and critiques – especially by Hegel and

3 See Osborne, 1999 and Nikolas Rose, 1999, for recent although differing discussions of Foucault, ethics, truth and freedom.

4 Richard Beardsworth, and especially his work on Derrida (1996) and Bernard Stiegler (1995), attempts to adopt a similar focus on the diremption of humans and 'technics', arguing that neither has ever been able to know itself without the other, and thus that there is a need to move on from approaches which, at their heart, either worship or condemn 'technics'.

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Nietzsche. However, she gives only a few clues as to how her philosophy may be put to work. One exception:

"If metaphysics is the aporia, the perception of the difficulty of the law, the difficult way, then ethics is the development of it, the *diaporia*, being at a loss yet exploring various routes, different ways towards the good enough justice, which recognises the intrinsic and the contingent limitations in its exercise."

(Rose, G., 1995, p 116)

**Reprise: What is Ethics?**

To regard Ethics *only* in terms of its recent emergence within late modernity, or postmodernity, whichever, would be a serious mistake. Whilst it is clear that the proliferation of Ethical Codes and Committees is indeed a recent phenomenon, what is also clear from the above brief discussion is that, at the very least, the *intellectual* conditions of possibility for the establishment of those Codes and Committees had been established some considerable time ago – and especially the conditions for how one can or should distinguish, or split, questions of justice from questions of fact. In other words, the foundations of Ethics share many features with the foundations of Science & Technology. Although those intellectual foundations may have mutated, they have mutated within certain limits. In other words, any understanding of the significance of Ethical Codes and Committees must be rooted first in an understanding of the origins and emergence of their intellectual foundations, and secondly in an understanding of their particular recent contexts. This is neither condemning Ethics and Ethical Codes nor trivialising them, but instead to begin arguing that they should be taken just as seriously as we take Science and Technology.

So, returning to the original question: If there is even a *grain* of validity in any of these Ethical Codes, standards and judgements, then what are the consequences for Innovation Studies?

**3. ETHICS AND INNOVATION STUDIES**
For the sake of argument I am going to address this question by utilising Malcolm Ashmore's (1996) distinction between the two interesting positions within Innovation Studies - Radical Epistemology and Radical Politics.

1. Radical Epistemology (ANT, Ethnomethodology, Traweek) would say (I speculate):

   Regardless of any validity within Ethical Codes, we could and should never presume to know or to pronounce on that validity, and therefore the only 'ethics' that we can support are those minimal ethics that are an inherent aspect of our methods of Innovation Studies.

2. Radical Politics (Edinburgh & Bath, Shapin & Schaffer, Freeman & Perez, Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway)

   One can make a straight-forward identification of those validities within Ethical Codes, and, depending on the degree to which one ascribes priority to agency or structure for particular situations, one can focus more or less attention on the importance of Ethics within Innovation Processes, as either an object or an aspect of study.

Now, I have a great deal of sympathy for both of the originating styles or positions, as does Ashmore - indeed, it is precisely because we and others see the validities and drawbacks of both positions that there is so much attention at present in this area. But this speculative outline on how they would each treat Ethics does give a different route to understanding those validities and drawbacks.

Against (1): This gives us no grounds for choosing any particular object of study over any other, nor for deciding whether our method should strengthen the hands of some actors or weaken those of others, nor does it give us much more than a crude

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5 Of course this is a crude distinction - but even so, for many within Innovation Studies it is still a strong 'issue'. There are of course many 'positions' within Innovation Studies which exhibit neither radical politics nor radical epistemology - but they're not very interesting in the current context of looking at Ethics and Innovation.
understanding of the historical continuities and changes within Ethics, and within relations between Ethics and Science & Technology.

Against (2): This cannot understand its own positions in the same ways it understands Innovation. In other words, it cannot subject its own judgements - about the validity of Ethical statements or the validity of its particular understanding of Innovation - to the same forms of scrutiny it would apply to other judgements; hence it must finally resort to sovereign assertions about what is 'right' and what is 'wrong or untrue'.

Against the possible argument that "there are NO grains of validity within ANY Ethical Codes": this can only be established through recourse to either a Derrida-style position - and then the argument against (1) applies; or through recourse to an old-fashioned understanding of 'ideology' or some such, and then the argument against (2) applies.

Whereas Ashmore asked for a 'resolution' and 'coming together' of the two positions within Innovation Studies, this brief discussion suggests that neither can be entirely satisfactory when it comes to understanding Ethics and Innovation, and hence that no combination or resolution of the two can be satisfactory, either. In other words, attempts at a resolution of the two positions would merely be attempting to 'mend the diremption', to pull together two positions which have been torn apart in such a way as to obscure the origins and meanings of that split, and hence the origins and meanings of what might lie between or beyond them.

Instead then: I would argue, from Rose (and indeed from Foucault, who expresses it differently) that understanding the intellectual foundations of the concept - the very idea - of 'ethical code', suggests that it is possible to develop understandings of both Ethics and Innovation that are complementary to Ashmore's characterised 'positions', whilst not attempting to resolve them. The problem, of course, is that this requires considerable work – there are no ready-made sets of universal Ethics we can fall back on, whether from analytical philosophy, from MacIntyre or from post-modern or new ethics.
However, I do believe it is possible to set out some of the characteristics of such understandings of the role of Ethics within Innovation Studies:-

- They are based within historical perspectives and yet rooted in a deep disquiet about the present.
- They would 'suspend the ethical whilst working towards it' - "being at a loss yet exploring various routes, different ways towards the good enough justice, which recognises the intrinsic and the contingent limitations in its exercise".
- They would see Ethics as necessarily about the practice of freedom within limits – especially limits on what exactly constitutes 'freedom' in particular contexts – and thus that it is important to establish how those limits originate, and how they are stretched or not in particular cases.
- In other words, it may well be the case that there is some validity within Ethical Codes, but we cannot gain the fullest understanding and thus pronounce on those Codes merely through surface examination of them, or indeed by studying their 'social construction'. Instead we would examine the origins and emergence of the problematisations that those Codes are intended to address, and the relationship of those problematisations to other issues and questions about governing conduct.
- They would acknowledge that, in many circumstances, people experience a power or force from 'ethical imperatives'. This is in addition to any constraint they may experience from Ethical Codes and Committees, and indeed may be of quite a different character.
- One way in which I have tried to put these characteristics to work is through developing a focus on how the ‘conduct of expert labour’ is and has been governed, where conduct is both the disciplinary aspects of expert labour, as well as its everyday practices. The discipline of expert labour is the formal and informal social, institutional, intellectual and artefactual arrangements for maintaining and developing that form of expert labour. The practices of expert labour are both the formal labour processes and the informal working practices, the ways of 'getting by' and 'getting the work done'.
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