

Ethical Restrictions in Human Sciences

Lesson 1: Opening Debate

Focus: *Do ethical restrictions limit the progress of human sciences?*

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyze how human sciences (psychology, data science, behavioral economics) are used to manipulate behavior.• Evaluate how corporations, governments, and institutions exercise power through human sciences.• Reflect on whether ethical responsibility strengthens or weakens human sciences in the digital age.
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction (5 mins)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Present the central question: “Do ethical restrictions limit the progress of human sciences?”<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Responsibility: What duties do researchers have toward participants, society, and future generations?◦ Power: Who has authority to decide what is ethical — researchers, governments, corporations, or communities?◦ Perspective: How do cultural, historical, and societal contexts shape what is considered ethical?• Show a short slideshow of notable scientific developments:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ The Tuskegee Syphilis Study (1932–72): Black men denied treatment in the U.S. to “study” disease progression.◦ The Stanford Prison Experiment (1971): Psychological harm inflicted in the name of research.◦ Cambridge Analytica (2016): Behavioral psychology + Facebook data used to manipulate elections.◦ AI and Algorithmic Bias: Predictive policing and hiring algorithms reinforcing discrimination.◦ Global Happiness Indexes: Whose definition of “wellbeing” is used to measure societies?◦ Cross-cultural research ethics: Tension between Western ethics boards vs. local traditions (e.g., consent in collectivist cultures).• Ask students to consider:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Which of these examples do you find most troubling, and why?◦ Who had the power to decide what was acceptable in each case?◦ Should “progress” ever come at the expense of ethics?2. Debate Setup (5 mins)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use the Kialo discussion: “Do ethical restrictions limit the progress of human sciences?”• Students will respond to the thesis: “Ethical restrictions limit the progress of human sciences.”• Give students time to examine the starter claims, based on the points below.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Starter Claim 1: Human sciences need freedom from ethical restrictions to discover truths about human behavior.<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ PRO: Experiments that would be considered unethical today revealed deep insights about authority and obedience.■ Counterclaim (Responsibility): Causing lasting trauma for a science investigation undermines the legitimacy of the knowledge gained.■ Reasoning Question: Can knowledge be valid if it is produced by harming participants?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Starter Claim 2: Ethical restrictions in human sciences slow progress compared to natural sciences. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ PRO: Strict ethical review boards stop bold, groundbreaking studies that would advance human science. ■ Counterclaim (Perspective): Ethics ensure human sciences reflect human values — without them, findings lose credibility. ■ Reasoning Question: Is slower progress acceptable if it protects dignity and rights? ○ Starter Claim 3: Ensuring research is ethical builds trust and long-term reliability in human sciences. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ PRO: Societies place greater trust in findings when participants are protected (e.g., medical consent reforms after the Nuremberg trials). ■ Counterclaim (Skepticism): Public trust does not automatically equal scientific accuracy as ethically approved studies can still be flawed, biased, or irrelevant. ■ Reasoning Question: Is ethical responsibility truly the same as reliability, or just a social perception of legitimacy? ○ Starter Claim 4: Ethical restrictions provide consistency across cultures, which strengthens rather than limits human sciences. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ PRO: Universal ethical standards (e.g., informed consent, avoiding harm) create a common baseline of fairness, making research findings more globally valid. ■ Counterclaim: Western frameworks often dominate, sidelining local norms of consent and community participation. ■ Reasoning Question: Should ethics be universal, or adapted to cultural perspectives? <p>3. Debate (15–20 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students present arguments and counterarguments, citing real-world cases (Tuskegee, Stanford Prison, Cambridge Analytica, algorithmic bias). ● Teacher guiding prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Should results from unethical studies (e.g., Tuskegee data) ever be used? ○ Are ethics absolute, or can they change depending on culture or context? ○ Do corporations (Facebook, Google) have too much power over research ethics? ○ Is “progress” without responsibility actually regress? ○ How do the TOK concepts of responsibility, perspective, and power help us evaluate these dilemmas?
Reflection Questions	<p>Discuss the following reflection questions in open discussion or exit ticket format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Did ethics in these cases strengthen or weaken the reliability of knowledge? ● Can unethical research ever be justified by its results? ● Who should bear responsibility for protecting participants — researchers, governments, or communities? ● How does perspective (Western vs. non-Western, corporate vs. academic) change what is seen as ethical? ● How do power structures influence what research questions get asked, funded, or silenced?
Resources	<p>Lesson Slides</p> <p>Kialo Discussion : Do ethical restrictions limit the progress of human sciences?</p>
TOK Concepts	<p>Responsibility: What duties do human scientists have toward their participants and the societies affected by their research? Should the pursuit of knowledge ever outweigh the duty to protect human dignity and wellbeing?</p> <p>Power: Who holds the authority to decide what counts as ethical in human sciences — researchers, governments, corporations, or communities? How do power dynamics influence what kinds of research are permitted or suppressed?</p>

	<p>Perspective: How do cultural, historical, and societal viewpoints shape what is considered acceptable research? Should ethical standards be universal, or should they adapt to different cultural contexts?</p>
<p>Critical Thinking Concepts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Confronting Biases & Assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Challenging Progress-at-All-Costs Bias: Reflecting on the assumption that gaining knowledge is always worth the cost, and questioning who benefits when ethics are sidelined. ○ Recognizing Cultural Relativism Bias: Examining the belief that one cultural framework of ethics (often Western) should apply universally, and considering what perspectives are excluded when we adopt this view. ● Exploring Contexts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stakeholder Analysis: Considering who benefits or is harmed when ethical standards are applied (or ignored) — e.g., research participants, universities, corporations, governments, or vulnerable communities. ○ Power and Political Influence: Investigating how funding, institutional authority, or political agendas influence what kinds of research are permitted, suppressed, or celebrated as “ethical.” ● Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adapting Judgments: Being open to rethinking whether ethically controversial knowledge (e.g., Tuskegee or Cambridge Analytica) should count as valid after engaging with different perspectives. ○ Comparing Ethical Frameworks: Weighing how different approaches to research ethics (e.g., universal human rights, utilitarian cost–benefit analysis, cultural/community-based standards) shape what we consider valid or responsible knowledge.