

## Ethics & Medical Research

---

### Deception & The Milgram Obedience Experiments

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

#### Readings

- Stanley Milgram, "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority" (PDF on webpage).
- Wendler & Miller, "Deception in Clinical Research", pp. 315–324.

#### Questions

1. Think about the types of deception commonly encountered in daily life and ordinary social contexts. What would make deception morally permissible in these situations? What would make it morally unacceptable?
2. What is the problem that the Milgram obedience experiments are supposed to address? What are the "laboratory" setups and protocols used by Milgram? What forms of deception did the arms of these experiments involve? Why does Milgram believe all this was both scientifically justified and ethically permissible? Do you agree? More particularly, did these experiments allow subjects to give valid informed consent for their participation? Did they show a general respect for the subjects?
3. According to Wendler and Miller, what is deception and why is it possible for reasonable people to disagree about whether deception occurred in a particular instance? Is there any disagreement about whether the Milgram experiments involved deception?
4. What are the various harms and wrongs of using deception in research that Wendler and Miller consider? Why do Wendler and Miller believe that the guidelines from the American Psychological Association concerning deception are inadequate in response to those harms and wrongs? What is authorized deception, and why do Wendler and Miller believe that it does adequately respond to the harms and wrongs of deception? Could Milgram's study been as scientifically effective if it had instead employed authorized deception?