

Ethics & Medical Research

Exploitation & Justice

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

- Alan Wertheimer, “Exploitation in Clinical Research”, pp. 201–210.

Questions

1. Wertheimer defines wrongful exploitation as “when A takes ‘unfair advantage’ of B”. He then goes on to give eleven points of refinement to this definition. Some of these points specify essential elements of exploitation, whereas other merely provide some important implications of those essential elements. Clarify which points are which, while using the essential elements to provide a more substantive definition of what it means for A to exploit, or to take unfair advantage of, B?
2. Why does Wertheimer believe that wrongful exploitation may still occur even when both parties benefit (economists call this situation of mutual benefit “Pareto superiority”)? What does Wertheimer mean by saying that such wrongful exploitation may still be morally permissible? What is his argument for that position? Do you agree?
3. What scandals have we studied where the researchers involved claimed that there was mutual benefit? How did these scandals involve exploitation? Would Wertheimer’s account of exploitation have prevented these scandals, or would they still have been permitted to occur?
4. How does Wertheimer apply his account of exploitation to developed nations (or the companies within such nations) doing clinical research in developing countries? Why does Wertheimer believe that wrongful exploitation is distinct from background injustice, especially when it comes to international research? Do you agree with his arguments here?