

Does the possession of knowledge carry an ethical responsibility?

Key Question Words

Possession of Knowledge - Knowledge we own
Ethical Responsibility - a moral duty

Introduction

The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility. It questions whether the knowledge (information and facts) we own can come with responsibility (a moral duty.) In this essay I will discuss how an ethical responsibility can be inherent in the information we own or are trying to own, in different areas of knowledge.

Comment [Kev1]: Good clear definitions if and not too many. It is only worth defining the one or two most important terms.

Point 1: Wikileaks and the responsibility to share information

It is arguable that once possession of knowledge in the political branch has to carry an ethical responsibility to share the knowledge they possess with the public whether it be positive or negative. For instance, an international, online, non profit organization WikiLeaks publishes submissions of secret information and classified media onto their website. Their goal is to "to bring important news and information to the public... One of [their] most important activities is to publish original source material alongside our news stories so readers and historians alike can see evidence of the truth." WikiLeaks has the right to share information because:

- In a democratic society people have the right to know what their government is doing: we voted for them, they represent us
- the government is legitimate, if and only if, the government fulfills the will of the majority and so we need to know what they are doing
- In a society where truth becomes treason, we are in big trouble.

Therefore there are clearly some cases when, in politics, knowing something brings with it the ethical responsibility to share this information

Comment [Kev2]: Although this is what you should be doing, you don't actually need to tell me.

You would be better off cutting out this sentence and replacing it with an outline of your answer to the ways in which knowing something does (or does not) bring with it an ethical responsibility.

Comment [Kev3]: Good current example

Comment [Kev4]: Actually quoting from WikiLeaks is a nice touch. Good research!

Counterclaim:

Yes it is true that possession of knowledge in these cases seems to carry the ethical responsibility to share it, however, we have to consider that on the other hand some would argue that we don't have the responsibility to share the information and knowledge we possess because it may cause more harm than good. For example:

- drone attacks- the Guardian's drone attack app was banned because it showed the pattern of where they are bombing and how regularly they did it <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/aug/30/apple-blocks-us-drone-strike-app>
- where to locate destructive missiles / nuclear bombs and the technology behind making these - people might steal, fall into the wrong hands, cause death and more chaos.

In this case, it shows that some people believe that knowledge doesn't always come with a responsibility to share our knowledge

Comment [Kev5]: Excellent approach ó outlining three different reasons why possessing knowledge can bring with it an ethical responsibility. These three points lead to a good, detailed argument

Comment [Kev6]: Good, clear point

Comment [Kev7]: Two more good examples if good citation of references even at this stage.

Comment [Kev8]: This brief sentence after the evidence that sums up the overall point being made is really useful and helps the reader to follow the point you are making and the thrust of your argument

Comment [Kev9]: The decision to call this "Analysis" is a good one ó your response does not always have to be an argument against the counterclaim. It can be an examination of what the CC has shown us.

Comment [Kev10]: Although personal, this example is a little too vague to be really convincing

Comment [Kev11]: Again, good, clear summary at the end of the section so we know what the conclusion is of your argument

Response/ Analysis:

However, even though the possession of knowledge doesn't always come with a ethical responsibility to share, ethical responsibility still exists - just in an other way as the notion of what our ethical responsibility actually is would change. For example, ethical responsibility in this case would be whether one should protect society from dangerous truths. So although we may not always we share knowledge, it seems that we may always have to think about whether sharing it or not would be harmful and that's where the ethical responsibility comes in.

- A personal example may be there were some students in our grade who figured out and gained the knowledge of how to access some very confidential documents. They didn't share this information because this would cause harm to the grade and some people would then experiment with this and ultimately cause harm.

Overall then, there isn't always an ethical responsibility to share the information ó but we always do have to consider whether the act of sharing the possessed knowledge will be harmful or good.

Point 2: Stem Cell Research & Nuclear Bombs: the responsibility to consider consequences

Similarly in the field of natural sciences the possession of knowledge can also bring with it an ethical responsibility. Both AOKs revolve around the idea of whether or not some information will cause harm or good, and they both deal with whether we have an ethical responsibility to share or not. One of the major responsibilities would be the research being public and replicable. For example:

- Stem cell research can save lives, wipe out certain diseases or genetic defects and, as above, we have ethical response to do this, or else people will suffer.

Counter Claim:

Some would argue that the possession of knowledge doesn't have an ethical responsibility, for example:

- the development of the nuclear weapons during the cold war - there is no ethical responsibility in that because protecting ourselves and our countries is important

Response / Analysis:

However, once again this is similar to the political example as the ethical responsibility of making a moral choice to save one self is still being made. Therefore it seems that no matter what technological advances we make there is almost always an ethical responsibility that we need to consider. In the case of nuclear weapons, the responsibility is to save our country, there is also a responsibility to not to share these information incase it falls into the wrong hands.

Point 3: The Stanford Prison Experiment: the responsibility to acquire information ethically

In psychology moral duty is similar to the field of political history and natural sciences. The knowledge we try to gain or gained carries a responsibility with it, especially when it comes to experimentation. For instance:

- The Stanford Prison Experiment shows how we have a moral duty to consider the kinds of experiment we carry out because they can cause harm. The experiment was devised by the psychologist Philip Zimbardo who aimed to prove that prison guards and convicts tend not to use their individual judgment and morals and instead tend to slip into their designed roles and act in the way they think is required. He conducted the experiment in Stanford University, where he chose 24 male, mentally stable subjects and divided them into 12 prisoners and guards. Very quickly the subjects showed signs of emotional and mental distress as the prisoners revolted and the guards reacted very aggressively. Some subjects were deeply affected by the experience.

This is example of how the possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.

Counterclaim:

However, on the other hand although the experiment may seem like it carries ethical responsibility, in reality it is just simply the idea of whether if the action was ethical or not.

Response:

The fact that Zimbardo stopped the experiment early shows that there was an ethical issue here, he also instructed the guards not to use physical violence against the prisoners.

Conclusion:

The idea of whether if knowledge carries ethical responsibility presents a paradox: in some cases it is our responsibility to share what we know however there is also some knowledge which is too dangerous to pursue and therefore we have the responsibility not to share it.

Implications Assumptions:

Is there a magnitude to measuring the level of ethical responsibility?

What does the idea of possession really mean, is it something that we really own?

What about people who disregard ethical issues?

Sources:

<http://voices.yahoo.com/the-stanford-prison-experiment-exploring-ethical-563843.html>

<http://wikileaks.org/About.html>

<http://www.experiment-resources.com/stanford-prison-experiment.html>

Comment [Kev12]: Good, clear comparative point, good focus on the question

Comment [Kev13]: There is a danger that this point is going to be a little too like the first one

Comment [Kev14]: This is actually a slightly different (and more interesting point) point than the above one about doing harm / good because now the candidate is talking about the responsibility to make scientific work replicable. The difference should be made clear and it would be better to explore this idea rather than the first so there isn't too much repetition in the essay.

Comment [Kev15]: This is not a particularly convincing example because the whole idea of protecting ourselves being more important suggests that there ethical values are still involved here.

Comment [Kev16]: As you can see here the candidate has really just repeated Point 1 in a different AOK. If the two AOKs are so similar then they should either be explored together or this comparison should be made really quickly before going on to explore a different kind of responsibility that scientific knowledge brings with it

Comment [Kev17]: Once again a good, clear comparison but it would be better if the candidate explored differences or a new point because to reiterate the same point in three AOKs is too repetitive

Comment [Kev18]: A good example, but it is quite commonly used. Also there is a little too much detail about the experiment and not enough about the point it proves.

Comment [Kev19]: Exactly how needs to be made more clear

Comment [Kev20]: This counterclaim needs to be clearer

Comment [Kev21]: Again it is not clear how this links to the question. The candidate appears to have lost sight of the point being made and how this links to the question

Comment [Kev22]: A nice idea, but this was established in Point 1 and the essay misses the opportunity to go beyond this and say other things about ethical responsibility

Comment [Kev23]: These are some really good ideas and should have been explored more in the essay so there is not so much repetition