

Editorial

Journals are more than mere vehicles for dissemination. They are likely to have an impact on the fields they represent and on the forms of research they make accessible. The GSP will, I suspect, be no exception to this rule. It is likely to have a significance beyond the simple objective of providing authors with an effective channel for scholarly communication. What will the impact of GSP be, or rather, what would we like it to be? As Ruth Chadwick pointed out in the editorial to the first issue of our journal, we encourage submissions that address issues at an early stage, in a responsive and anticipatory manner. This will allow us to do away with the prejudice (unfortunately widespread) that ethical and social reflection on scientific innovation is by definition “behind schedule”, commenting on what is actually a “fait accompli”. And there are some other misunderstandings that we would like to challenge. First of all, there is the widespread idea that ethics is by definition about “ethical problems”, that is: inflictions of harm or violations of informed consent. The scope of ethics is, of course, much broader. Ethical assessments of scientific fields entail a comprehensive analysis that should also address the broader societal impact, the social and economical benefits and risks, the way we understand ourselves, our world, our future.

There is, however, another impact I hope this journal will have, and that is interdisciplinary research. During the past few years we already made some progress in challenging the long-standing dichotomy between facts (to be studied by social scientists) and values (to be analyzed by ethicists). Interdisciplinary collaboration should not only involve collaborations of scientists with either ethicists or social researchers. Rather, it must become a triangular affair. In recent years, social scientists increasingly managed to overcome their ethics phobia, their allergy to opening-up normative perspectives. They have learned that an assessment of normative dimensions, as well as the ways in which they are addressed, is not something that can be delegated to others, but rather an inherent part of relevant research. Likewise, ethicists increasingly became aware of the importance of facts, trends and social data. They learned to appreciate and use the tools developed by social scientists to study them in a professional and reliable manner. These developments have led to an “empirical turn” in ethics and a “normative turn” in social research. It greatly encourages the development of innovative methods and approaches. The GSP I hope will stimulate these innovative forms of collaborations between empirical researchers and philosophers (moral or other), as an important dimension of interdisciplinary research.

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