

Leder

Introduction

Hot topics for the 20th year of *Etikk i praksis*

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The Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics will celebrate its 20th year of publishing in November of the coming year 2026. In the last 10 years, the journal has published 229 articles that altogether have attracted 1.3 million views by 53,976 unique users. These articles cover around 126 discrete topics, converging methodologically on an applied ethics approach that articulates rigorous reasoning for adopting good practices, decisions or social policies. We invite researchers to contribute to this on-going discussion of questions in applied ethics by submitting their papers to the journal.

New technological and societal changes constantly raise new—and renew the old—normative questions about good practice in various professions, as well as in different social and political contexts. For instance, the rise of AI and large language models has allowed a new economy to emerge where human experiences are mined for their free raw material for commercial practices. Shoshana Zuboff introduced the concept of ‘surveillance capitalism’ to describe how companies like Google and Facebook gather rich behavioral data from people using AI and algorithmic systems (Zuboff, 2019). These companies can then use these data to acquire inordinate power, especially in terms of knowledge creation and dissemination. In this system, a “division of learning” in society becomes privatized, meaning that private tech corporations control who gets the information and who decides what is learned. In this information monopoly, companies can decide what people know and how they form their beliefs, which may influence their political participation. These few powerful companies can control the information landscape, which may then threaten democratic processes and democratic equality.

Ashton Black (2024) identifies two key resources for democratic equality—free time and epistemic resources. Free time is defined as time not subjected to systemic surveillance, which is required for full political participation. Epistemic resources are the knowledge and information that people can use to autonomously form and revise beliefs. Black argues that AI used in surveillance capitalism thwarts a fair distribution of both resources by creating an inequality in free time and epistemic resources. Surveillance capitalists obtain detailed behavioural data through constant surveillance, which is protected from public regulation due to the free market, and as a result, there is a big knowledge gap between big tech and users in epistemic resources, which translates to a political agency gap. AI used in computational propaganda thwarts democracy by creating a hostile political environment that disrupts collective self-determination. AI bots for computational propaganda can artificially amplify or silence certain viewpoints, which is a violation of the democratic obligation to engage in an open debate. Black highlights the lack of transparency and accountability of AI systems that tech corporations

use. However, there is still a need to thoroughly look at regulatory frameworks that could address these issues.

We welcome papers that discuss the ethics of AI development and implementation. Should legal frameworks be adapted, or new ones created, to ensure transparency and accountability of AI systems? Future research could also look at how surveillance capitalism and computational propaganda impact different social groups, considering factors like age, race and socioeconomic status. There is also a need to discuss technological solutions that could mitigate the negative impacts of AI. Research could look at AI systems that inherently support democratic values—like transparency and user empowerment—as solutions. Further research could look at how the public can be effectively involved in these processes to ensure that diverse voices are heard and considered in the development of AI technologies.

In the field of medical ethics, two long-standing topics are currently again gaining momentum: legalisation of assisted dying, and legalisation of surrogacy. While assisted dying is prohibited in all the Nordic countries, the debate on legalisation is alive. In Norway, polls show an increasing support for legalising assisted dying in the general population. Even among nurses and medical doctors there is a shift towards a more undecided or positive attitude towards the question of legalisation (Magellsen et al. 2025, Sykepleien 2025). The fact that several European countries are moving in the direction of making assisted dying legal is also pushing the debate. Indeed, in the previous issue of *Etikk i praksis*, we published two articles on this topic. We encourage more authors to continue this debate. In 2024, the Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board issued a statement on surrogacy, where a majority supported a continued ban on both altruistic and commercial surrogacy in Norway (Bioteknologirådet 2024A). Interestingly, the Board also arranged a survey with 1650 female respondents of childbearing age, where eight out of ten believe that surrogacy should be legal in Norway, and three out of ten would consider being a surrogate themselves (Bioteknologirådet 2024B). This indicates that there might be a difference between public opinion and legal regulation concerning surrogacy, analogous to the question of assisted dying.

The normative questions of surrogacy thus seem to call for further debate, also in the form of academic contributions. In two recent articles in the academic debate on surrogacy, quite different perspectives are exemplified. In the first article, Benjamin Lange argues that parental rights should not be grounded in biology or gestation but in the pursuit of a “parental project” (Lange 2024). A parental project is a creative, long-term commitment to raising a child, involving intellectual, emotional, and often social investments. It begins before birth—through planning, preparation, and anticipation—and continues until the child becomes independent. Unlike biological or gestational accounts, Lange’s project view does not treat genetic or physical ties as necessary for parenthood. Gestation may facilitate a parental project, but it has no independent moral significance. Adoptive parents can acquire parental rights if they have invested in a parental project, and likewise with assisted reproduction and surrogacy. In surrogacy cases, intended parents typically acquire rights because they pursue the project, while surrogates usually do not, as their goal is not to rear the child. This makes parenthood a normative relation grounded in a commitment to raise a child, not the circumstances of conception or birth.

In contrast to Lange's view, Andrea Mulligan argues that surrogacy laws often ignore the importance of gestation—the physical and biological relationship between the surrogate and the child (Mulligan 2024). She warns that this mistake mirrors past failures in adoption and donor-assisted reproduction, where secrecy and denial of biological truths caused harm. In adoption, the old model was “closed”: birth parents were erased from records, and children had no way to know their origins. Over time, this was seen as wrong. Laws changed to allow access to birth records and, in many cases, open adoption, where children can maintain contact with birth families. Similarly, donor-assisted conception once relied on secrecy and anonymous donors. This too failed. Activism by donor-conceived people led to reforms that guarantee the right to know one's genetic origins and often to contact donors. Mulligan argues that these lessons apply directly to surrogacy. If the law treats the surrogate as invisible—by calling her a “carrier” or denying any legal or identity link—it risks repeating these mistakes. Just as adopted and donor-conceived individuals fought for truth and transparency, surrogate-born children will likely do the same. Therefore, surrogacy law should ensure that children know they were born through surrogacy and have access to information about their surrogate. Ideally, there should be systems like surrogacy registers, similar to donor-conceived registers, and arrangements for ongoing contact. We encourage researchers to continue the academic discussion on surrogacy, both along the tracks of Lange and Mulligan, and from other perspectives.

The articles of this issue: Private Citizenship, Organ Transplantation and New Military Ethics

The topic of immigration and citizenship is ever more relevant. The paper 'Are private citizenship markets self-defeating?' by Borja Niño Arnaiz explores whether private actors should be allowed to sell citizenship to foreigners. It challenges the traditional view of state sovereignty and the right to exclude. The core argument is that private citizenship markets do not undermine the right of the state to exclude foreigners, as long as the private citizenship markets are legally sanctioned by the state, because the right to include is not absolute. It argues that private citizenship markets are compatible with the right of citizens to self-determination, as family reunification challenges the state sovereignty model. This argument equips policymakers with reasons to question the traditional rigid conception of state sovereignty and the rigid rule against selling citizenship as commodification. The arguments presented could facilitate a more nuanced conception of inclusion and exclusion in citizenship policy. Despite the novelty of this idea and the reasons that support its controversial conclusion, there is room for counterarguments that we invite readers to ponder upon. Alternative views and arguments are welcome.

A different kind of commodification is at issue in the next paper by Ioannis Ladas, "Between Gift and Commodity: Engelhardt's Bioethical Reflections on Organ Transplantation". The paper reviews the position taken by Tristram Engelhardt Jr. on the permissibility of compensation for organ donation, based on a commitment to the autonomy of the individual and to the moral agency of the donor. Engelhardt holds that the payment of money for an organ does not automatically negate the gift nature of the organ donation if it is motivated by love or necessity. This position is in tension with the prevailing view that the human

body is not a commodity and cannot be used for sale. However, after weighing different positions on this debate, Ladas concludes that the controversy remains unresolved. The danger of understanding the human body as a collection of spare parts that can be sold is real. This danger is more acute in the current global context where the demand for transplantable organs far exceeds its supply (thus called "organ shortage") and where new avenues for acquiring transplantable organs are discussed and implemented. The paper argues for a nuanced approach. The solution to the lack of available organs is not simply a matter of providing legal sanction and incentives for the sale of organs, as any measures must be balanced with the protection of vulnerable populations from being exploited.

In the morally complex and ambiguous world of military operations, ethical decision-making is frequently difficult and challenging. David Bergman's paper, "Beyond Snapshots: Longitudinal Pathways and Moral Dead Ends in Military ethics", deals with the challenges of military ethics through an interesting discussion on the ethical problems associated with military conduct and how they can be addressed. The innovation introduced in the paper is the move beyond the 'static' case studies that fail to capture the cumulative dynamics of ethical decision-making towards longitudinal aspects of moral decision-making in military contexts, i.e. the temporal and sequential nature of decisions. It shows the interaction between risk factors, protective factors and key decision points in interaction through time, leading to moral outcomes. The paper argues that ethical resilience in military contexts not only is a function of the ethical decisions immediately made at a static point in time but is part of a series of decisions and factors that combine to shape the moral course of action. The paper gives examples from historical case studies, including My Lai and Abu Ghraib, to show how a series of preceding decisions and contextual factors can lead to 'moral dead ends', i.e. where all possible options are morally unacceptable. This provides a strong case for incorporating longitudinal analyses within military ethics education, so that leaders learn to prepare for and navigate the cumulative pressures of their environment.

This longitudinal approach to ethical analysis and moral education resonates deeply with current issues in military ethics and leadership. The increasing complexity and multi-faceted nature of military operations in today's world make the need for a more comprehensive understanding of ethical decision-making more pressing than ever. Therefore, the emphasis on the temporal dimension of ethical choices in the paper is particularly relevant to the existing global context. In today's world, where military leaders are making tactical and ethical decisions under conditions of uncertainty and stress, adopting a longitudinal approach could offer a more comprehensive perspective and richer contextual resources to draw upon than mere focus on the specific case or decision point. Taking a longitudinal perspective implies that ethical decision making is cumulative. The paper therefore calls for an amalgamation of psychological, organizational considerations with normative ethical theories to construct a more holistic approach to military ethics education. This amalgamation is important when addressing contemporary challenges, such as the psychological impact of prolonged combat exposure and the ethical implications of emerging technologies in warfare. In light of recent global

events, including war scenarios that have brought to question the ethical conduct of military forces, Bergman provides relevant points about the importance of ethical resilience. By providing military leaders with the cognitive skills to recognize and counteract the cumulative factors that shape ethical decision-making, we can better prepare them to maintain the highest standards of conduct in the midst of stress and adversity. This paper is not only an academic addition to the field of military ethics but also to moral education in other professions, including nursing, medicine, allied health, firefighting, disaster response, etc.

Cornelia Vikan's "Teaching military ethics as resilience – the case of the Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy" lauds how Bergman flips the dominant paradigm on its head. The traditional narrow focus on the ethical dilemma in military ethics at the expense of the context and the process of decision makes Bergman's approach refreshing. That is, ethical decision making is the product of recruitment, training, and organizational culture. Vikan emphasizes the importance of embedding ethics education into the military training process for developing resilient and ethical leaders and presents the case of ethics education in the Norwegian Defense University College generally, and at the Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy (RoNAF Academy) in particular. Instructors and leaders need to lead by example and act as role models, demonstrating the desired values and behaviours of military officers to embed in the cadets. It is only by living these values that cadets learn to internalize them as part of their identity as officers. Moral failures can only be prevented by developing resilience and ethical awareness, which does not exclusively happen through ethics training in the classroom. Ethics education should be seen as a continuum, not only during the training process but through a cadet's career, in order for them to develop resilience and ethical awareness before they are officers, allowing them to deal with future challenges. Ethics education should not be a single course, but embedded in a continuum of training, such as leadership courses, air power studies, exercises, and reflections. This highlights that ethics awareness and resilience are built up over time and are also influenced by personal and cultural background. Leadership and groups (cohesion) are seen as important elements in developing resilience and ethical behaviour. Training should emphasize these aspects and prepare for real-life situations and unexpected and challenging situations where ethical dilemmas have a high probability of occurring. Using cadets' personal experiences and embodied knowledge can build their respect for ethical standards and encourage them to risk being ethical and developing the confidence to stand up to unethical behaviour. Developing a supportive learning culture where cadets can be open and vulnerable, speak up about ethical concerns and confront unethical behaviour is required.

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