

Public lecture by

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Mapping the Moral Terrain of Science



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Abstract: We have reason to be disappointed with most accounts of research ethics. They generally suffer from two unfortunate characteristics: 1) The account of the responsibilities for scientists consists of a long list of various responsibilities, often with tensions among them and little substantive guidance for how to consider such tensions; and 2) the discussion of the responsibilities of scientists with respect to society is woefully thin. This talk aims to correct these flaws by providing a more robust map of the moral terrain for scientists. Such a map reveals the complexity of the moral landscape in which scientists work, including the need for four dimensions: 1) the bases to which scientists have responsibilities, 2) the general and role responsibilities of scientists, 3) minimum obligations and ideal behavior, and 4) collective and individual responsibility. I will show why all these dimensions are needed and why we should think they are likely to be enough. Most importantly I will argue that the map can provide guidance for difficult cases. For example, the map makes clearer the responsibilities scientists have to society, what kinds of limitations on doing science can legitimately arise from such responsibilities, and how such resulting restrictions should be handled.

Heather Douglas holds the Waterloo Chair in Science and Society at the University of Waterloo. She is renowned for her work on the intersection of science and society, in particular the role of science in policy-making and the ethics of and policies for science. In her book *Science, Policy, and the Value-Free Ideal* (2009, University of Pittsburgh Press) she argues against the ideal of value-free science and for social considerations within science, while at the same time delineating the proper role that social values can play so as to maintain scientific objectivity. In addition to editing a special issue of *Science & Education* on 'Politics and Philosophy of Science,' her recent publications include 'Weighing complex evidence in a democratic society' (*Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*), 'Facts, values, and objectivity' (*The SAGE Handbook of the Philosophy of Social Science*), and 'Engagement for progress: applied philosophy of science in context' (*Synthese*).