Breakout Questions

2nd North American Workshop on the Ethical Dimensions of the System of Radiological Protection

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The Objective

Clearer ethical framework for the system of radiological protection

(1) Professionals and public better understand what the system is designed to achieve and why (how is more a matter for professionals)

(2) Solid basis, together with science and experience, for evolution of the system
Seek a set of values:

- **Relevant** to the system of radiological protection

- **Common** (or at least acceptable) to the widest possible range of cultures today
  - International recommendations must be broadly applicable

- That stand the test of being applied to current and foreseeable problems, with sensible results
Towards a Set of Common and Relevant Values

**Beneficence & Non-maleficence**

*Do good & do no harm*

**Prudence**

*Wisdom, avoidance of unnecessary risk*

**Justice**

*Fairness, people get what they deserve*

**Dignity**

*Treat people with respect*
Central to medical ethics, where implications of balancing beneficence and non-maleficence are well studied

**Beneficence:** Do good

**Non-Maleficence:** Do no harm

Not absolute:
- doing good may do lesser harm
- avoiding harm may result in a greater harm
Prudence

- Long ethical tradition: Aristotle, Buddhism, Confucianism, ancient peoples of Oceania and America

- In early use: The **wisdom** to see what is virtuous

- **OED:** “The ability to recognize and follow the most suitable or sensible course of action … caution”

- **MW:** “The ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason … good judgment … caution … as to danger or risk”
Prudence & Precaution

- Prudence can be seen as reluctance to accept unnecessary risks

- Rio 1992: “the precautionary approach … where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall be not used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation”
Justice: the perpetual and constant will of rendering to each one his right

Linked to fairness, entitlement and equality

In natural law: justice means individuals or groups get what they deserve, merit, or are entitled to

In radiological protection: fair sharing of benefits and detriments
Justice Broadly Defined

Look beyond humans today as the only moral entities:

+ Descendants → protection of future generations

+ Environment → protection of the environment for its intrinsic value not just its instrumental value

+ Animals → questions of animal welfare?
“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”
(Article 1 of The universal declaration of human rights adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948)

- Something is due to every person because she/he is human. Every individual deserves unconditional respect regardless of age, sex, health, social condition, ethnicity, religion, etc.

- Dignity requires that individuals are treated as subjects, not objects

- “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.” (Immanuel Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, 1785)
Dignity & Autonomy

- Related to dignity, autonomy is about having control over one’s life:
  - freedom, i.e., the absence of constraint
  - the capacity to deliberate, decide and act

Possible conflict: decision makers with a duty of beneficence which may conflict with the autonomy of those effected (paternalism vs. individualism)
Values in Radiological Protection (1/2)

**Beneficence / Non-maleficence**
- Avoid unduly limiting beneficial uses of radiation
- **Justification:** positive net benefit
- **Protection of vulnerable groups**
- **Prevent harmful tissue reactions (equivalent dose limits)**

**Prudence**
- **Reduce risks of stochastic effects to the extent reasonably achievable (optimisation)**
- **Assume there may be risks even at very low doses**
Values in Radiological Protection (2/2)

Justice

- Protection of people and the environment from radiation balanced with beneficial uses of radiation
- Ensure no individual carries an unfair share of risk/harm (effective dose limits)
- Reduce inequities in dose distribution (optimisation with constrains and reference levels)
- Protection of future generations

Dignity/Autonomy

- Right to know
- Stakeholder involvement
- Self-help protection
Values: Next Steps

Using a “draft” set of values:

- **Describe** each (and interactions between) in reference to the system of radiological protection

- **Examine** the broad acceptability of the set

- **Test** and **refine** the set through application to current and foreseeable problems (Rawls’ reflective equilibrium or Habermas’ discourse?)
QUESTION #1

What are the key elements of the principles of beneficence/non-maleficence, justice, dignity, and prudence as they relate to the ethical basis of the system of radiological protection?

(Bonus)

Draft practical definitions of each for this context.
QUESTION #2

Are these four principles a sufficient ethical basis for the system of radiological protection?

If not, what is missing?
Logistics

- Chair and rapporteur
- Both groups address the same two questions
- Breakout sessions
  - Wednesday 13:30-17:00
  - Thursday 09:00-10:30
- Thursday 11:00, 15 min report from each group, followed by general discussion and summary