

Ethics in Everyday Governance: Bridging Philosophical Foundations and Participatory Practices

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Abstract:

Ethics in everyday governance has become an essential concern in contemporary society, where public policy, social justice, and rapid technological advancements intersect. This paper critically explores how ethical principles—rooted in classical philosophy and expanded through modern ethical theories—inform and shape governance practices across multiple domains. Drawing on a systematic review of interdisciplinary literature, including sources from social work, philosophy, participatory research, and technology ethics, the study examines the normative foundations and practical implications of ethical governance. Special attention is given to virtue ethics, care ethics, participatory and community-based research ethics, and frameworks for responsible innovation. These perspectives highlight the significance of transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and reflexivity in fostering trust and legitimacy within institutions and policymaking. The findings reveal that ethical governance is not merely a regulatory function but a proactive, value-driven process that demands ongoing engagement with diverse stakeholders and attention to long-term societal impacts. In an age of increasing complexity, where governance must navigate both human and technological challenges, embedding ethical integrity in everyday practices is crucial to sustaining democratic ideals and promoting the common good.

Keywords: Ethical Governance, Virtue Ethics, Care Ethics, Participatory Research Ethics, Responsible Innovation

Introduction:

Governance in the 21st century is not merely a function of institutional structures and legal mechanisms—it is fundamentally shaped by ethical considerations that define the legitimacy and accountability of public systems. The dominant discourse often emphasizes laws, regulations, and administrative procedures, but the moral foundations that underpin everyday decision-making remain equally critical. As societies become more complex and diverse, ethical reflection emerges as an indispensable compass for navigating the competing interests and responsibilities of governance.

Philosophical traditions offer a rich foundation for ethical governance. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 BCE/1954) emphasized virtue as central to public and personal life, promoting character, wisdom, and moral judgment as essential to the common good. Similarly, Kantian ethics, as discussed by Baron (1997), introduced the idea of duty and universal moral law, reinforcing the importance of principled action and impartiality in governance. These classical frameworks continue to shape our understanding of leadership, responsibility, and justice in modern public life.

In professional settings, ethics is often operationalized through codes of conduct and the cultivation of virtues specific to health, social work, and public administration. Banks and Gallagher (2009) argue that virtues such as integrity, compassion, and accountability are foundational in professional life.

Banks (2012a) further underscores the role of ethical reasoning in research and social policy, while Banks (2012b) explores the challenges of developing a global ethics that respects both universal values and local contexts. These perspectives highlight that governance is not ethically neutral—it must be actively guided by moral commitments embedded in professional practice.

Contemporary approaches to ethics in governance increasingly emphasize participation, collaboration, and community engagement. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) serves as a key example of how ethics is enacted beyond formal institutions. Cancian (1993) and Cargo et al. (2008) explore the ethical tensions and democratic possibilities within participatory research models, particularly in Indigenous and marginalized communities. The CSJCA and NCCPE (2012) provide guidelines for ethical principles in CBPR, advocating power-sharing, transparency, and mutual respect between researchers and communities. These approaches push the boundaries of governance by integrating lived experiences and local knowledge into policy and practice.

Ethical governance also extends into the realm of higher education and innovation. Benneworth et al. (2009) discuss how universities engage with wider society through socially responsible practices, while scholars such as Floridi (2018) and Jobin et al. (2019) examine the ethical implications of data governance and digital technologies. These developments highlight the need for anticipatory and responsive ethics in the face of rapidly evolving societal challenges. This study, therefore, investigates how ethics is embedded in everyday governance—from foundational theories to real-world practices—offering a holistic view of how moral reasoning informs inclusive and accountable decision-making.

Literature Review:

Ethics in governance has long been underpinned by classical philosophical traditions that continue to shape contemporary practices. Aristotle's virtue ethics, a cornerstone of Western moral thought, emphasizes the cultivation of moral character and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as essential to just leadership and decision-making (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1954).

According to Aristotle, good governance is not merely a matter of policy or structure but depends fundamentally on the moral integrity and virtues of those in power. This ancient foundation is echoed in Kantian ethics, where the moral legitimacy of actions is judged by their adherence to duty and universal moral laws. As Baron (1997) explains, Kant's categorical imperative demands that individuals act only according to maxims they would will to become universal law. Together, these frameworks present a vision of governance that is both principled and character-driven.

The transition from classical theory to applied ethics is evident in contemporary social policy and public service discourse. Banks (2012a, 2012b) argues for a global ethics framework in social work that accommodates cultural pluralism while maintaining fundamental values such as dignity, respect, and justice. Her contributions highlight how professional ethics must balance local context with global standards.

Banks and Gallagher (2009) reinforce this view, emphasizing professional virtues—particularly integrity, empathy, and responsibility—as the moral compass of ethical governance. Their work demonstrates how ethical standards are not merely aspirational but are operationalized through everyday professional conduct and institutional norms. Held's (2006) ethics of care also broadens this perspective by incorporating relational and emotional dimensions into governance, challenging impersonal models of ethical reasoning with a more context-sensitive, human-centric approach.

A significant shift in governance and research ethics emerges with the rise of participatory models. Scholars such as Cancian (1993), Dodson et al. (2007), and the Durham Community Research Team (2011) expose the tensions between academic authority and community agency, especially in collaborative research. These works highlight the ethical risks posed by unequal power dynamics, including issues of consent, authorship, and representation. Couzos et al. (2005) provide a compelling case of Indigenous-led research, arguing that ethical governance requires the active participation of communities in shaping research agendas, methods, and interpretations. Similarly, Horn et al. (2008) and Flicker and Guta (2008) advocate for culturally appropriate and youth-sensitive frameworks, particularly in health research involving marginalized groups. The Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (2012) and Greenwood and Levin (2001) underscore the role of universities in fostering ethical community-university partnerships, where mutual respect, co-creation, and long-term engagement redefine traditional research hierarchies.

The epistemological foundations of participatory ethics are further elaborated by Heron and Reason (2008), who argue for extending knowledge production through cooperative inquiry. This approach reimagines ethical research as an iterative, relational, and inclusive process. Boenink and Kudina (2020) contribute to this dialogue by shifting the focus from abstract values to everyday practices in responsible innovation.

Hart et al. (2007) document real-world examples of such partnerships, demonstrating how ethical governance can be cultivated through sustained institutional commitment and reflexive practice. Fine et al. (2000) also critique the performative dimensions of qualitative research, challenging scholars to account for their social responsibilities in

representing vulnerable populations. Across these contributions, a common theme emerges: ethical governance is not static but must be negotiated in dynamic, pluralistic, and often contested settings.

In the digital age, technological governance introduces a new frontier for ethical inquiry. Floridi (2018) proposes "soft ethics," which advocates for proactive ethical thinking in the design and deployment of digital technologies. This approach stresses transparency, accountability, and fairness without resorting to rigid, top-down regulation. However, critiques from Bietti (2020) and Green (2021) reveal the shortcomings of industry-led ethical initiatives, warning of "ethics washing" and the commodification of moral discourse in the tech sector.

Brey (2012, 2017) calls for anticipatory ethics—ethical frameworks that consider the long-term implications of emerging technologies before they are widely adopted. Similarly, Pitt (2014) interrogates the moral agency of technology, asserting that values are embedded in and enacted through technical artifacts. The European Commission (2021) and Jobin et al. (2019) further institutionalize this debate by mapping the global landscape of AI ethics guidelines, advocating for consistent and enforceable policies to govern digital innovation. As Franssen et al. (2018) explain, the philosophy of technology demands that we understand not only how technologies function but also how they shape human values, relationships, and institutions.

Collectively, these studies show that ethical governance today is multidimensional—rooted in historical traditions, shaped by professional practice, informed by participatory engagement, and challenged by technological change. They underscore that ethical questions are not peripheral to governance but are at its very core.

As governance structures become increasingly complex and interdependent, the need for inclusive, reflexive, and context-sensitive ethical frameworks becomes ever more pressing. This evolving literature sets the stage for examining how ethics is enacted in contemporary governance, especially in areas such as community-based research and digital innovation, where theoretical ideals meet real-world complexities.

Methodology:

This study employed a systematic review methodology to explore the intersection of ethics and governance across the domains of philosophy, social sciences, and technology. A systematic review is particularly suited to this inquiry as it allows for the comprehensive synthesis of existing qualitative research and theoretical literature, offering a structured way to identify, evaluate, and integrate findings across multiple disciplines.

By employing a rigorous and transparent process, the review aims to build a nuanced understanding of how ethical principles are conceptualized and applied in various governance contexts. Data sources included a broad range of academic materials such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and institutional reports.

The search strategy involved keyword combinations like "ethics in governance," "philosophical ethics," "participatory research ethics," and "technology and ethics," using academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Institutional and policy documents were also consulted from reputable organizations like the European Commission to provide current and applied perspectives on ethical governance, particularly in digital and AI-related domains.

Inclusion criteria for the literature selection were guided by three primary considerations: (1) theoretical relevance to the discourse on ethics and governance; (2) methodological rigor, especially in qualitative and normative analyses; and (3) representation of diverse governance settings, including philosophical frameworks, participatory research in marginalized communities, and technology ethics in both public and corporate sectors. Publications that offered case studies, conceptual analysis, or normative frameworks were prioritized to ensure depth and diversity of insight.

To ensure objectivity and coherence, each selected work was subjected to thematic coding and analytical categorization. Key themes such as virtue ethics, deontological frameworks, ethics of care, participatory governance, community-based research ethics, and anticipatory ethics in technology were identified and systematically mapped. Through this thematic synthesis, the review was able to draw connections across seemingly disparate fields while also highlighting points of tension and convergence.

The review process remained sensitive to contextual diversity, acknowledging that ethical governance cannot be universally defined but must be interpreted within specific social, cultural, and institutional environments. The inclusion of literature representing Indigenous perspectives, youth engagement, and global policy-making ensures that the review reflects the plurality of ethical thought and practice. This methodological approach ultimately aims to offer a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and reflective account of the evolving landscape of ethics in governance.

Findings and Discussion:

Virtue and Duty in Governance:

The ethical foundations of governance have long been rooted in the philosophical traditions of virtue ethics and deontological reasoning. Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia or human flourishing, as articulated in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (350 BCE/1954), emphasizes the cultivation of moral character and the pursuit of the common good. Governance, from this perspective, should not be limited to mere rule-following or policy enforcement, but should embody the virtues of justice, prudence, and integrity that promote societal well-being.

Leaders are called upon to exemplify moral excellence not as an instrumental means, but as an intrinsic aspect of their role in public life. As Banks and Gallagher (2009) affirm, the ethical life in public service involves more than technical competence; it demands the sustained development of virtuous dispositions that support ethical decision-making.

Kantian deontological ethics complements this Aristotelian framework by grounding governance in a duty to uphold universal moral laws, irrespective of consequences. According to Baron (1997), Kantian ethics insists that public officials act according to maxims that can be willed as universal law, ensuring impartiality, respect, and accountability.

This moral imperative is particularly relevant in contemporary governance structures where conflicts of interest, bureaucratic inertia, and populist pressures often compromise ethical standards. Duty-based ethics insist that public administrators remain committed to principles such as fairness, truthfulness, and respect for human dignity, thus reinforcing the trust placed in democratic institutions. The European Commission (2021) aligns with this vision through its emphasis on transparent, accountable, and rule-based governance, especially in matters of digital transformation and global cooperation.

These ethical traditions find contemporary expression in the practice of participatory and community-based governance, which prioritizes inclusive decision-making and shared responsibility. Banks (2012a; 2012b) highlights the emergence of global social work ethics that draw upon both virtue and duty, especially in culturally diverse and politically contested contexts.

Participatory research, as discussed by Cancian (1993) and Heron and Reason (2008), challenges hierarchical models of authority by fostering collaborative inquiry and ethical reciprocity between researchers and communities. Such engagements require not only methodological rigor but also moral sensitivity to local values, needs, and aspirations. Community-based participatory research (CBPR), as outlined by the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (2012), emphasizes ethical principles like mutual respect, co-learning, and equitable power-sharing—all of which are grounded in both virtue ethics and moral duty.

Ethical governance is especially complex in the context of technological innovation, where emerging challenges demand anticipatory and responsive ethical frameworks. Brey (2012, 2017) introduces the concept of anticipatory ethics, advocating for forward-looking approaches to the ethical evaluation of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital surveillance. Floridi (2018) furthers this argument through the notion of "soft ethics," which encourages adaptive, contextual moral reasoning that complements formal regulatory measures. Jobin, Ienca, and Vayena (2019) catalog a global landscape of AI ethics guidelines, revealing a common emphasis on transparency, justice, and beneficence. However, Bietti (2020) and Green (2021) critique the superficiality and performativity of such guidelines, warning against "ethics washing" where companies invoke ethical language without enacting substantive reforms. As Pitt (2014) and Boenink and Kudina (2020) suggest, the integration of ethics into technology governance must move beyond abstract values to embodied practices that reflect moral responsibility and democratic engagement.

Institutional efforts to align governance with ethical principles are evident in the practices of universities, health systems, and civic organizations. Hart, Maddison, and Wolff (2007) document community-university partnerships that aim to address local problems through co-produced knowledge and mutual accountability. Similarly, Couzos et al. (2005) describe Indigenous-controlled health research as an exercise in ethical self-determination, shifting control from academic institutions to local communities.

These models reflect Held's (2006) ethics of care, which underscores relational interdependence, empathy, and responsiveness as key elements of moral life. The Durham Community Research Team (2011) and Flicker and Guta (2008) further underscore the ethical complexities involved in engaging vulnerable populations, especially youth and marginalized groups, in research and policy-making. Ethical governance in such contexts requires not only procedural safeguards but also an ethos of solidarity, humility, and attentiveness to lived experiences.

Ethical governance is best understood as an evolving interplay between virtue, duty, and participatory ethics. Classical philosophical traditions, particularly Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian deontology, offer enduring insights into the moral responsibilities of public actors.

These insights are rearticulated in modern frameworks of community-based research, technological ethics, and institutional engagement, which seek to operationalize ethical values in concrete practices. Governance that is ethically grounded does not merely enforce rules but fosters human flourishing, upholds moral duties, and engages diverse stakeholders in co-creating a just society. As governance challenges grow increasingly complex in the digital age, the integration of ethical reflection into decision-making processes becomes not just desirable but imperative.

Ethics of Care and Relational Governance:

The ethics of care represents a paradigmatic shift in moral reasoning, emphasizing relational responsibilities, context, and emotional engagement over abstract and impersonal principles. Held (2006) argues that care ethics reorients moral philosophy from the universalist, rule-based approach of traditional frameworks toward one that prioritizes human relationships, responsiveness, and the moral significance of care. This perspective is particularly resonant in social work and community-based engagement, where practitioners navigate complex relational terrains and moral ambiguities that cannot be adequately addressed through deontological or utilitarian reasoning alone.

At the core of this ethical orientation is the acknowledgment that individuals are fundamentally embedded in webs of relationships and interdependence. This view challenges the atomistic and rational individual of Kantian ethics, which posits that moral action arises from universal maxims and autonomous will (Baron, 1997). Instead, care ethics understands moral responsibility as arising from specific contexts of vulnerability and need. This resonates strongly with Aristotle's (350 BCE/1954) virtue ethics, which similarly emphasizes character, practice, and the cultivation of practical wisdom (phronesis) in navigating the moral life. Like Aristotle, care ethicists value the importance of habituated virtues—such as empathy, attentiveness, and responsiveness—in enabling moral agents to discern what is right within particular relational settings.

Banks (2012a, 2012b) and Banks and Gallagher (2009) apply these insights to social work ethics, arguing that professional care must be grounded not only in principles of justice and rights but also in the cultivation of moral virtues and relational accountability. Their approach, which integrates elements of virtue ethics with care theory, stresses that good practice involves navigating tensions between professional obligations and interpersonal relationships. Ethical challenges in social work often arise not from clear-cut rule violations but from conflicting responsibilities to clients, colleagues, and institutions. In such cases, decision-making must draw on emotional intelligence, contextual sensitivity, and dialogical engagement—capacities central to care ethics.

Moreover, the ethics of care intersects meaningfully with the notion of relational governance, which views power and accountability as co-produced through participatory relationships rather than imposed hierarchically. This is evident in participatory and community-based research practices, where ethical engagement involves not only respecting autonomy and securing informed consent but also co-creating knowledge and addressing power asymmetries between researchers and communities (Cancian, 1993; Dodson et al., 2007). As Greenwood and Levin (2001) and Heron and Reason (2008) observe, the collaborative ethos of action research aligns well with the care ethic's focus on responsiveness, mutual recognition, and ethical engagement.

Participatory research with Indigenous and marginalized communities has underscored the importance of relational accountability and care-based ethics in ensuring respectful, equitable, and meaningful engagement (Couzos et al., 2005; Horn et al., 2008). In these settings, communities assert not only their rights to participate but also their authority to lead and control the research process—highlighting an ethics of care that recognizes the moral claims of historically disempowered groups and centers their lived experience. The Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA, 2012) and the Durham Community Research Team (2011) have both outlined ethical frameworks that prioritize long-term relationship building, shared decision-making, and community benefit, all of which align with Held's vision of care as both personal and political.

These principles also intersect with broader debates on the ethics of emerging technologies and responsible innovation. Scholars such as Floridi (2018), Green (2021), and Bietti (2020) have critiqued superficial applications of ethics—or "ethics washing"—in technological domains, advocating instead for governance approaches rooted in social responsibility, relational accountability, and value-sensitive design. The emphasis here is not merely on compliance with abstract principles but on continuous engagement with stakeholders, ethical reflexivity, and institutional practices that embed care into the design and deployment of technologies (Boenink & Kudina, 2020; Franssen et al., 2018).

From this perspective, relational governance becomes a normative and methodological commitment to sustaining ethical relationships in the face of institutional, technological, and epistemic complexity. This is especially salient in contexts such as community-university partnerships, where ethical practice requires navigating institutional imperatives and community needs (Hart et al., 2007; Benneworth et al., 2009). As Flicker and Guta (2008) argue in the context of adolescent health research, relational ethics also demand sustained dialogue, transparency, and attention to the lived experiences and vulnerabilities of participants—principles that go beyond one-off consent procedures.

Furthermore, Held (2006) emphasizes that care is not a soft or secondary virtue but a foundational ethical and political commitment that challenges dominant paradigms of governance and justice. Care ethics foregrounds dependency, embodiment, and the moral relevance of caregiving and receiving, offering a corrective to neoliberal individualism and instrumental rationality. It thus provides an essential normative grounding for reimagining professional practice, institutional ethics, and community engagement as fundamentally relational, participatory, and justice-oriented.

Integrating the ethics of care with relational governance enriches our understanding of ethical responsibility in social work, research, and public engagement. It reframes morality not as adherence to universal rules, but as an ongoing, situated practice of attending to others, cultivating trust, and engaging in dialogical processes that respect the dignity and agency of all participants. This approach, grounded in virtue, empathy, and relational accountability, is vital for addressing the complex ethical landscapes of contemporary social and professional life.

Participatory Ethics in Community Research:

Participatory research emphasizes that ethical governance is not merely about adhering to regulatory compliance, but about fostering genuine community empowerment and engagement. It challenges traditional hierarchical paradigms of knowledge production and insists on shared authority, reciprocal learning, and moral responsibility (Cancian, 1993; Heron & Reason, 2008). Rather than viewing ethics as a static set of rules, participatory ethics positions ethical practice as deeply relational and dynamic—rooted in the lived experiences and cultural contexts of the communities involved.

From an Aristotelian perspective, ethics concerns the cultivation of virtues and the pursuit of the common good (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1954). Participatory research aligns with this classical vision by prioritizing justice, respect, and mutual flourishing. These virtues are realized through practices such as inclusive decision-making, co-ownership of knowledge, and shared responsibility in the research process. Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, is particularly relevant here. It demands that researchers act ethically not just by following abstract principles, but by navigating complex situations with sensitivity, empathy, and contextual judgment.

Banks (2012a; 2012b) expands this ethical view to a global context, emphasizing that ethical research must respond to cultural diversity, power asymmetries, and institutional constraints. Her concept of "global ethics for social work" is highly applicable to community-based participatory research (CBPR), where ethical challenges emerge from negotiating differing worldviews, interests, and expectations. For example, the Durham Community Research Team (2011) identifies challenges in establishing equitable relationships between academic researchers and community partners, highlighting the necessity of transparency, consent, and mutual benefit.

Similarly, Couzos et al. (2005), in their work with Aboriginal communities in Australia, argue that ethical governance in research must be grounded in principles of self-determination and community control. Their phrase—"We are not just participants—we are in charge"—encapsulates the participatory ethic of recognizing communities not merely as subjects but as co-researchers with legitimate authority. This shift reconfigures the moral geography of research, placing communities at the center of ethical deliberation and action.

The ethics of care, as articulated by Held (2006), further enriches participatory ethics by stressing the importance of empathy, responsiveness, and nurturing relationships. This approach aligns with participatory methods that require researchers to listen actively, value diverse forms of knowledge, and sustain long-term commitments. It challenges the depersonalized nature of conventional research ethics and insists on a situated, relational, and context-sensitive morality.

Dodson, Piatelli, and Schmalzbauer (2007) describe participatory research as a process of "interpretive collaboration," where power is redistributed and the "unspoken contract" between researchers and participants is acknowledged and renegotiated. Ethical practice in this context involves more than avoiding harm—it means actively working to redress inequalities, foster empowerment, and create social value.

Moreover, Fine et al. (2000) caution researchers about their social responsibilities in representing marginalized voices. Participatory ethics thus demands vigilance against the commodification or misrepresentation of community narratives. It requires researchers to be reflexive about their own positionalities and to adopt ethical stances that promote dignity and justice.

Heron and Reason (2008) advocate for cooperative inquiry as a way to democratize knowledge production. They argue that extending epistemology through participatory practice leads to more ethical and credible research outcomes. Similarly, Greenwood and Levin (2001) propose pragmatic action research as a means of transforming universities into learning communities that are ethically accountable to the public.

Institutions have a role to play in supporting participatory ethics. Benneworth et al. (2009) and Hart et al. (2007) call for universities to embrace civic engagement not only as a strategy for societal impact but as an ethical imperative. Research governance structures should therefore facilitate community-university partnerships grounded in trust, reciprocity, and shared values.

Importantly, the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA) and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) (2012) provide practical guidelines for ethical CBPR. Their framework emphasizes inclusive research design, transparent communication, respect for local knowledge systems, and long-term benefits for communities.

Participatory research also intersects with anticipatory and responsible innovation. Scholars like Brey (2012, 2017), Boenink and Kudina (2020), and Floridi (2018) argue for ethical foresight and responsibility in guiding emerging technologies. Their insights are transferable to community research, particularly in ensuring that innovations serve societal well-being rather than exacerbate inequalities.

Participatory ethics invites a rethinking of what it means to do ethical research. It goes beyond formal codes to foster moral agency, relational accountability, and the co-construction of knowledge for transformative change. In the spirit of Kantian respect for persons (Baron, 1997) and Aristotelian virtue (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1954), participatory ethics is not an add-on to research—it is the foundation of an ethical, inclusive, and just inquiry.

Responsible Innovation and Technological Ethics:

As digital and scientific technologies evolve at unprecedented speeds, the imperative for ethically guided governance grows more urgent. Responsible innovation, especially in fields like artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology, and data science, demands not only technical foresight but moral imagination. Scholars such as Brey (2012, 2017) have long warned that the pace of technological development often surpasses the ability of existing ethical frameworks to anticipate its societal impacts. As emerging technologies reshape how we live, communicate, and interact, governance must be designed not merely to mitigate harm but to embed ethical principles into innovation processes from their inception.

At the heart of responsible innovation is the concept that technologies are never neutral. As Pitt (2014) provocatively argues, values are embedded within and around technological systems. A gun or an algorithm may appear value-free, yet their design and deployment are always shaped by human purposes, political systems, and social norms. Green (2021) furthers this argument by asserting that "tech ethics" must move beyond abstract principles and engage directly with sociotechnical systems. In other words, ethical governance must not merely scrutinize outcomes but interrogate the processes and power structures that produce them.

This aligns with the shift toward anticipatory ethics, as proposed by Brey (2012), which calls for ethical reflection at the early stages of technological development. Rather than reacting to harms post hoc, anticipatory ethics encourages developers, scientists, and policymakers to consider potential consequences before innovations are widely implemented. Brey (2017) expands this model, suggesting that ethical assessments must be iterative and context-sensitive, recognizing that technologies evolve and interact with unpredictable sociopolitical dynamics.

Similarly, Boenink and Kudina (2020) emphasize the need to move from abstract values to practical engagements, suggesting that responsible research and innovation (RRI) should focus not just on values as static entities but on how they are enacted through specific practices. This perspective bridges philosophical ethics with participatory governance, calling for stakeholder engagement, transparency, and reflection at every phase of technological innovation.

A major obstacle to cohesive ethical governance in emerging tech domains is the fragmented nature of current guidelines. Jobin, Ienca, and Vayena (2019) identify over 80 AI ethics guidelines issued by governments, corporations, and civil society organizations globally. These frameworks, while well-intentioned, often lack consistency and enforcement mechanisms, leading to what Bietti (2020) critiques as "ethics washing"—where organizations adopt ethical language to enhance legitimacy without enacting meaningful changes. Floridi (2018) responds with the notion of "soft ethics," which promotes flexible, culture-sensitive ethical norms embedded within organizational cultures rather than rigid regulatory standards.

Yet, such soft ethics must not substitute for accountability. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 BCE/1954) offers timeless wisdom in this regard, emphasizing that ethical action arises not just from rules but from the cultivation of virtues—prudence, justice, and courage. Modern ethical governance must similarly prioritize character, integrity, and responsibility among innovators and institutions. As Banks and Gallagher (2009) argue in the context of health and social care, virtues remain central to professional ethical life, shaping not only individual decisions but institutional ethos.

From a policy standpoint, the European Commission (2021) underscores ethical digital governance as one of its core strategic priorities, linking innovation to democratic values, transparency, and human dignity. Such institutional declarations reflect growing recognition that science and technology are not autonomous from society—they are deeply embedded in cultural, political, and economic life. Franssen, Lokhorst, and van de Poel (2018) suggest that philosophical inquiry into technology must therefore consider the broader moral, epistemic, and ontological dimensions of human-tech interactions.

Ethical governance also demands public participation, especially among communities disproportionately affected by technological decisions. This perspective is strongly supported by literature on community-based participatory research (CBPR), which emphasizes democratic, inclusive, and reciprocal engagement. The Durham Community Research Team (2011) and Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (2012) both outline the ethical complexities involved in collaborative inquiry, such as negotiating power dynamics, respecting local knowledge, and co-creating goals. This approach has particular relevance for technological ethics, where marginalized voices are often excluded from design and deployment discussions.

For example, Couzos et al. (2005) highlight how Aboriginal communities took leadership roles in the NACCHO ear trial, asserting that “we are not just participants – we are in charge.” Their insistence on autonomy and cultural relevance exemplifies a deeper commitment to justice and dignity in research. Such principles echo Held’s (2006) ethics of care, which emphasizes attentiveness, responsibility, and responsiveness in relationships—values that are equally applicable to the relationship between humans and technological systems.

Furthermore, Cancian (1993) and Dodson et al. (2007) stress the tensions between academic objectivity and activist ethics in participatory research. Similar tensions exist in the governance of technology, where corporations may prioritize profit over public good, and researchers may face conflicts between scientific curiosity and ethical restraint. Banks (2012a, 2012b) argues that global ethics must account for these tensions while promoting solidarity, fairness, and respect for cultural diversity.

Finally, Aristotle’s ethical framework reminds us that governance must aim not merely at legal compliance but at eudaimonia—the flourishing of individuals and communities. Technological ethics must thus ask: what kind of society do we want to build? What virtues must we cultivate to ensure that innovation serves humanity rather than undermines it?

Responsible innovation requires more than technical regulation or abstract principles. It demands a systemic, participatory, and virtue-based approach that integrates philosophical traditions with modern challenges. Ethical governance must anticipate risks, foster inclusive deliberation, and hold institutions accountable—not only to avoid harm but to promote a more just and humane technological future.

Conclusion:

Ethics in everyday governance transcends abstract theorizing; it is a vital, lived practice that anchors the legitimacy and sustainability of decision-making in both public and private spheres. Drawing from classical foundations such as Aristotle’s virtue ethics and Kantian deontological reasoning (Baron, 1997; Aristotle, 350 BCE/1954), ethical governance demands not only rule-following but also the cultivation of moral character, practical wisdom, and human flourishing. In contemporary contexts, this foundation is enriched by frameworks of participatory and community-based research (Banks, 2012b; CSJCA & NCCPE, 2012), which stress inclusivity, mutual respect, and empowerment in shaping knowledge and policy.

Ethical governance must also rise to the challenges posed by technological innovation. As Brey (2012, 2017) and Boenink & Kudina (2020) assert, emerging technologies require anticipatory and values-sensitive approaches to prevent harm and uphold human dignity. The work of Jobin et al. (2019) highlights the fragmentation of global AI ethics guidelines, calling for harmonized, coherent frameworks that transcend tokenism and “ethics washing” (Bietti, 2020). In this light, ethics becomes not an external constraint but an integral part of innovation, design, and policy development.

Furthermore, scholars like Green (2021) and Pitt (2014) emphasize the sociotechnical nature of technologies, showing that tools are embedded with values and are never neutral. Therefore, governance must incorporate ethical scrutiny at every stage of technological development and deployment.

Ethical governance must be anticipatory, inclusive, and grounded in shared values. Institutions and individuals alike must embrace ethical reflexivity, transparency, and collective accountability. Only through such commitments can governance inspire public trust, promote justice, and ensure that innovation serves the common good rather than private or short-term interests.

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