

# Re: Are There Any Actual Physicists/Scientists Here?

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- *From:* Andy Resnick <[andy.resnick@xxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:andy.resnick@xxxxxxxxxxxx)>
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Paul Stowe wrote:

On Fri, 19 Aug 2005 09:21:35 -0400, Andy Resnick <[andy.resnick@xxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:andy.resnick@xxxxxxxxxxxx)> wrote:

<snip>

My position is that all knowledge should be freely available to all, period.

Ah, while philosophically this is a laudable position, given demonstrated human nature, sadly, it is not a viable one. For it takes only one amoral bad apple out of the billions of people on this planet that, with the right knowledge and intent, could destroy all.

Well, your approach would result in the cessation of all research. I submit that it is not possible to \*prove\* that there are no "evil" application of a particular project. Now, I have access to carcinogens, mutagens, infectious agents, etc. etc. I can easily order materials to generate explosives, polio, ebola, and a whole host of nasty DNA (so can you, BTW). I can generate penecillin-resistant strains of diseases. I don't have a security clearance. So what? Do I require government approval to do my job? Should I? And that assumes a benevolent government.

If I wanted to, I could go to our cabinet, pull out a bottle of caffeine, head over to the cafeteria salad bar, discretely sprinkle it on, and give

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a bunch of people heart attacks. What is proper \*government\* response to that hypothetical? Keep in mind, I haven't actually done anything yet.

No exceptions.

Would you freely give Osama and his ilk the knowledge to build a viable superflu?

It's not anyone's responsibility to lead a particular person to water. The reality is that they already have that knowledge— forget the web, buy a book. I've seen GPS jammers made from a soda can. This is all irrelevant. In practice, one may not make a WMD without expensive laboratory equipment: partly due to the required technology, but also to protect the technician from the product. It is entirely proper to track who is buying this type of specialized equipment.

Here's another way to ask your question: Should the US government be given the knowledge to build a viable superflu? It's not proper to say "US good, Usama bad."

Now, would I personally provide a recipe to someone who would likely use the end product to kill me? No, I would not. But, that's me. You may have a different answer.

I am concerned that knowledge is gained in an ethical manner...

Indeed, and that is, indirectly, that which places filters upon knowledge.

No, that's not true. One can obtain the published data obtained by Nazi docs from concentration camp inmates. All kinds of detailed tables of how long one may survive in frigid water, time to heal from broken bones, bleed-out rates, etc. etc. All tracked by age and gender.

So the question is "Do we have an ethical obligation to use or not use that data"?

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... (this is more applicable to biological research, especially human research), but I have nothing to say on the ethics of \*applications\* of the research.

Lucky for us all, those in the know, do...

Really. You are the authority on what and what is not ethical? I am much more concerned with the abuse of power than the accumulation of power.

Ethics evolves, what we consider ethical now is different an was what considered ethical in the past, and is surely different from what will be considered ethical.

There exists a primal core of ethics, that has never changed.

Prove it: give examples.

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