Reviewer’s report

Title: The Use of Empirical Research in Bioethics: A Survey of Researchers in twelve European countries

Version: 0 Date: 14 Oct 2017

Reviewer: Alan Cribb

Reviewer’s report:

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I would be very happy to see this article published and have only a couple of minor suggestions for possible further reflections. It is a really useful descriptive account of the 'state of the art' of empirical bioethics in 12 European countries. In some cases it coincides with what my guesses would have been but not in all - and it is good to have some empirical work rather than just guesses! The paper should mean that we can now set aside any remaining doubt as to the presence of and relatively established nature of empirical work in European bioethics.

It is helpful that large parts of the analysis reporting refer to those who are declared 'empirical ethics' researchers in some sense - this helps us understand more about this sub group. But a little more reflection on the almost 60% non responders might be warranted - the number who have undertaken empirical work seems very high here. It seems likely that they are significantly over-represented in the responders. This is acknowledged as a possible limitation in the limitations section but I think it warrants a more prominent mention in the body of the paper before we go on to make sense of the data.

According to responses just over a third have attempted to integrate empirical and normative work. But this may be an example of a question where it is difficult to attach clear meanings to the responses - it seems possible that people may have different notions of (and thresholds of) what is possible and counts as integration (i.e. Given person A and person B who have done exactly similar combined pieces of work, A may view it as integrated and B not) The authors also raise sensible questions about the weight we should attach to those saying they do integrate - but the opposite reading is possible (i.e. in a sufficiently weak sense of 'integration' - as apparently assumed by the claimed integrators then many of the others may well qualify as integrators too). I'm not sure that what is needed is 'clear guidance' on how to achieve this integration but rather the building of expectations that different approaches are made explicit as part of a robust exchange of views about integrative methodology.

There is a striking gap - even amongst responders - between numbers expecting researchers to have the ability to interpret empirical research and those who expect them to be able to conduct
empirical research - which suggests a handmaid model of empirical research has not died out completely (and there must be some question for those who care about empirical research as to how possible it is to separate these two things off from one another). Again there is scope to perhaps say a little more about this gap.

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Yes

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