

TITLE: The Ochlocratic Trap

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ABSTRACT: If we defend ethical decisions by relying on popular opinion or groupthink, we risk making severe moral mistakes. A better way is to approach ethics through a structured approach based on the scientific method.

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## THE OCHLOCRATIC TRAP

by Thomas F. Heston

When we defend our acts by merely citing the approval of others, we fall into the "ochlocratic trap." This is the mob approach to ethics, and it doesn't work. Although Copernicus knew our solar system was heliocentric, the majority of his contemporaries thought it to be geocentric. Likewise, proper ethical action will often meet with public disapproval.

Ethics can be compared to science: both A) have a hypothesis, B) collect data, and C) seek the truth. Using the scientific method in ethics would involve: A) formulation of a hypothesis, B) testing the hypothesis with a vigorous,

open debate, and C) deciding which parts of the hypothesis withstood this debate. In science and ethics, an individual or a pair of people working in close unison make the major breakthroughs. Rarely does the consensus do it.

Ethics can be approached scientifically. With this approach, we find no security by following the majority. This way demands that we always consider new evidence, or more logical thinking, not a democratic vote.

The ochlocratic trap must be avoided if we are to make ethical advances.

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This idea has been updated in 2023.

REFERENCES:

1. Heston TF. The Ochlocratic Trap in Bioethics. *Jour Clin Med Res.* 2023;4(3):1-5.

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