

ETHICS IN PRACTICE

Written by

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"Bumbling social scientist Dr. Brightwell sets out to prove the benevolent nature of humanity through a series of ethical experiments - and inadvertently reveals the opposite."

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INT. DR. BRIGHTWELL'S OFFICE

CAMERA POV

The camera jostles as DR. BRIGHTWELL (34), an idealistic, bumbling social scientist, sets it up on his desk. His office space is littered with disorganized papers, files, and personal memorabilia. A motivational cat poster hangs behind his head.

He steps back into view.

DR. BRIGHTWELL
Greetings! Dr. Matthew Brightwell
here at the Fordson Social Science
institute-

A door CREAKS. Dr. Brightwell looks behind the camera as DR. SATURNINE (45), a perpetually exhausted and overqualified assistant scientist, shuffles into frame, muttering as she flips through papers. Her head is out of view.

DR. SATURNINE
Here, I've got those notes on the
next study lineup.

DR. BRIGHTWELL
Notes? Oh, we don't need the notes
anymore. I went ahead and got
everything approved!

DR. SATURNINE
Wha- why would you do that?

She notices the camera and leans down, peering into the lens.

DR. SATURNINE (CONT'D)
And what are you doing with this?!

DR. BRIGHTWELL
Filming our proposal for the R.S
grant!

DR. SATURNINE
The R.S grant? The 500,000 dollar
R.S grant? The grant that we need
to keep the institute out of
bankruptcy? You're submitting *this*
study to *that* grant?

DR. BRIGHTWELL
Yep! Say hi!

Dr. Brightwell waves at the camera. Dr. Saturnine sighs.

TITLE: ETHICS IN PRACTICE

TEXT: HYPOTHESIS: HUMANITY HAS AN INNATE SENSE OF MORALITY.

TEXT: EXPERIMENT ONE: THE BUTTON.

INT. LAB CHAMBER

A sparse, simple room, with one table and one chair. SUBJECT 1 sits at it, Dr. Brightwell across from them. Dr. Saturnine stands off to the side with a clipboard, and on the table is single red button.

DR. BRIGHTWELL

The premise is simple: If you push this button, one person will die. However, you will receive one million dollars-

Subject 1 pushes the button.

DR. BRIGHTWELL (CONT'D)

Wha- I- you didn't even let me finish!

SUBJECT 1

Do I get a million dollars?

DR. BRIGHTWELL

No, no you don't get a million dollars! Jesus-

INT. LAB CHAMBER - LATER

Same setup, with the new SUBJECT 2. Dr. Brightwell stares them down. Subject 2 contemplates the button... and then pushes it. And pushes it again. Again. They start pushing the button as fast as possible.

DR. BRIGHTWELL

What, no, stop it! Stop that!!

Dr. Brightwell smacks Subject 2's hand away.

DR. BRIGHTWELL (CONT'D)

What is wrong with you?! You could have just killed someone! That could have been your friend, or your mother, or- I don't know, a senator!

SUBJECT 2

Was it?

DR. BRIGHTWELL

I mean, no, but-

Subject 2 pushes the button again.

INT. DR. BRIGHTWELL'S OFFICE

CAMERA POV

The camera is set up on Dr. Brightwell's desk again. He stands, smiling. It's forced. Dr. Saturnine sits in an office chair behind him, typing.

DR. BRIGHTWELL

Experiment number one did... not go as anticipated.

DR. SATURNINE

I'm working on an alternative proposal as we speak.

Dr. Brightwell pulls Dr. Saturnine aside, speaking in a hushed voice- but we can still hear him.

DR. BRIGHTWELL

I'm not abandoning the study! We can make this work.

DR. SATURNINE

Now is not the time to be taking risks like this!

DR. BRIGHTWELL

Well it's not your study, is it?!

(beat)

Sorry. Just... have some faith in me here. Please?

Dr. Saturnine nods, and sits back down, continuing her work. Dr. Brightwell collects himself and faces the camera.

DR. BRIGHTWELL (CONT'D)

I have determined the probable fault in experiment one- obviously, the subjects knew we couldn't actually commit murder for an experiment. That would be ludicrous! Therefore, we must pivot!

(MORE)

DR. BRIGHTWELL (CONT'D)
 I am confident a series of
 hypothetical dilemmas will garner
 more accurate results.

CUT TO BLACK.

TEXT: EXPERIMENT 2: THE DILEMMA

INT. LAB CHAMBER

RAPIDLY CUTS BETWEEN THE SUBJECT TO DR. BRIGHTWELL TO A NEW
 SUBJECT IN THE SAME PLACE, EACH A NEW ATTEMPT AT THE
 EXPERIMENT.

Dr. Brightwell sits across from SUBJECT 3. Dr. Saturnine
 stands behind him, in front of a whiteboard with a drawing of
 the trolley problem.

DR. BRIGHTWELL

So?

SUBJECT 3

Not my problem.

SUBJECT 4

I don't interfere with God's will.

SUBJECT 5

Listen, it's not that I HATE the
 elderly-

SUBJECT 6

Huh?

Subject 6 looks up from their phone.

SUBJECT 6 (CONT'D)

... I don't get it.

Dr. Brightwell slams his head into the table.

INT. DR. BRIGHTWELL'S OFFICE

CAMERA ON DESK POV

Dr. Brightwell sifts through a cabinet of files, his
 appearance disheveled. Dr. Saturnine leans against the wall,
 growing increasingly concerned.

Dr. Brightwell pulls out a slightly damaged manilla folder.

DR. BRIGHTWELL
Okay, okay, let's try-

CUT TO BLACK.

TEXT: EXPERIMENT 3: THE SPIRIT OF COOPERATION

INT. LAB CHAMBER

Dr. Brightwell and Dr. Saturnine look on as a group of people argue loudly over a table with an abandoned collaborative building exercise.

There's the sound of someone getting KNOCKED to the ground as a fight breaks out. Dr. Brightwell simply turns and walks away.

INT. DR. SATURNINE'S OFFICE

CAMERA POV

The camera is set up on Dr. Saturnine's desk. She sits in her office chair. Her setup is sparse and orderly, her only decoration a tiny potted cactus.

DR. SATURNINE
It's been a week since we put the study on hold. Dr. Brightwell has... not been taking things well.

CUT TO:

INT. PLANNING ROOM

Dr. Brightwell is curled in the corner of a disorderly planning space.

He's sobbing while eating an entire tub of ice cream. Dr. Saturnine crouches next to him, awkwardly patting his shoulder.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. DR. SATURNINE'S OFFICE

She pinches her nose.

DR. SATURNINE
A doctorate at Stanford for this...

The door CREAKS, and she looks up behind the camera, hearing Dr. Brightwell's SNIFFLING.

DR. BRIGHTWELL (O.S.)
Rachel...

END DESK CAMERA POV

Dr. Brightwell sits across from Dr. Saturnine. He's looking rough- he's in a full sweat suit and has eyebags that resemble a raccoon's.

DR. SATURNINE
How... how are you doing?

DR. BRIGHTWELL
I just don't understand where it
all went so wrong!

He flails onto the table, hiding his face. Dr. Saturnine pats his shoulder.

DR. SATURNINE
With all due respect, doctor, it
wasn't exactly an airtight study.
Your methodology was all over the
place, the sampling was flawed, and
your hypothesis is basically
impossible to prove-

Dr. Brightwell tears up, somehow looking even more pathetic.

DR. SATURNINE (CONT'D)
What I'm trying to say is, your
results here are not indicative of
the morality of the greater human
population. There are good people
out there.

DR. BRIGHTWELL
You really think so?

DR. SATURNINE
Well you're here, aren't you?

Dr. Brightwell squeezes Dr. Saturnine's hand appreciatively.

DR. SATURNINE (CONT'D)
And we got at least one person to
mildly inconvenience themselves for
the sake of another. A 4% success
rate isn't nothing!

They both laugh.

DR. BRIGHTWELL
Ah, shoot, the grant...

DR. SATURNINE
Don't worry. We still have time. We
can come up with something, and get
at least partial funding. Come on.

INT. PLANNING ROOM

The planning room has been cleaned up and organized. Dr. Brightwell is happily tapping on a laptop, while Dr. Saturnine sketches out proposals on the whiteboards.

Suddenly, EXECUTIVE LARSON (49), a classic suit type, bursts into the room. The doctors look between each other nervously.

DR. BRIGHTWELL
Mr. Larson! We, uh, weren't
expecting you!

EXECUTIVE LARSON
I know.

He strides in, slams his briefcase on the counter, and pops it open, sifting through papers.

EXECUTIVE LARSON (CONT'D)

50,000 dollars on setup. 65,000 for
staff. 5,000 in *catering*- I want to
know whose brilliant idea it was to
waste tens of thousands of dollars
on childish experiments with zero
tangible results!

Guilty silence.

EXECUTIVE LARSON (CONT'D)
Well?!

Dr. Brightwell points at Dr. Saturnine.

DR. BRIGHTWELL
She did it.

CUT TO BLACK.