

The Don Difference Series
Abe Schwab

0:00-0:15 My areas of research focus on the intersection of epistemology and medical ethics, primarily interested in clinical decision making. One way to characterize my work is that I'm curious how decisions go wrong in medicine, both for the physician and for the patient, and even the policy maker.

0:16-0:25 And so, by focusing on epistemology, I'm looking at how people know what they know and what justifies them claiming to know what they know and how that then matches up with the decisions that they make.

0:26-0:44 I also do some work in research ethics. So, what does it mean to do research in the right kind of way? Then you can see how that connects back up to the question of how they know what they know, but it also is simply a question of how does one respect a patient or research subject while still trying to find robust conclusions that can guide future medical practice.

0:45-1:15 So, one way to understand the difficulty is through the lens that I'm looking at more recently, which is through conflicts of interest. So the typical taxonomy for talking about conflicts of interest is between potential and actual conflicts of interest. Once we setup that taxonomy and start applying that taxonomy to the difficulties of our current situations, where we have some we can't and some we can avoid. Then we can actually start looking at, okay so now we have these unavoidable conflicts of interest... these conflicts of interest that it's not practical for us to organize our society in such a way that they don't exist. How should we handle those?

1:16-1:38 I had one student once who was feeling particularly bucky one day, and she said, 'Um, I could do your job. All I have to do is come up there and ask unanswerable questions, right?' And so that was fair because I was doing that a little bit with them, but I said, 'But the key difference is that I'm asking you unanswerable questions, but you assumed you knew the answer. Right?'

1:39-2:09 And so, the ethics class, that's sort of where the game is. It's sort of about getting them to think about things that they've always assumed about the world around them. And so one of the keys in order to be a good citizen... right...to be a good thinker, is to be able to sort through information and sort of recognize what's important and what's not. Being able to distinguish between

information that you should be using, and information you should be setting aside. And so that's the primary goal that I want from all of my students. Then beyond that, I want them to start thinking about the fact that every decision they make has some kind of ethical import.

2:09-2:12 (Music)