

Saturday, 24 June 2017, 9.00-10.30 in the Aula, Kollegienhaus (Petersplatz)

Keynote by Jackie Leach Scully

Professor of Social Ethics and Bioethics, Newcastle University, UK

Other people's lives: empathy, ethics, and epistemic justice

Most of us aim to lead good lives. A big part of that is the sense that we are not only making the right decisions about ourselves, but also that we are treating others in a morally defensible way; if we are making decisions that affect unknown others, for example when developing policy, we want to be reasonably confident that those others would also find them morally defensible. In any given situation, how can we know what those others would want, or predict the kind of decisions they would make or would consider acceptable? "Do as you would be done by" might be a useful (and almost universal) guideline; but it presupposes that you and other people are pretty much interchangeable, or at least very similar in all significant features, otherwise how *you* want to be treated would be irrelevant to them. Similarly, if (as some people claim) moral impulses are based on some form of empathy, then ethical behaviour rests on different people sharing enough knowledge of each other's lives that empathy is possible at all. But how can we know that our empathy is based on accurate knowledge of others – that it is epistemically sound?

In this talk, I want to consider some of these questions. I'll look at the extent to which it is possible to imaginatively project ourselves into others' lives in order to be able to empathise with them and the decisions they make. Taking the particular case of disability, I will examine what happens to empathy, and to ethical analysis, under conditions of *epistemic injustice*: that is, when people's own knowledge about their lives is ignored or rejected.

JACKIE LEACH SCULLY held research fellowships in oncology and neurobiology at research institutes in Switzerland, before helping to establish the first interdisciplinary unit for bioethics at the University of Basel. In 2008 she joined PEALS (the **Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Centre**) as Director of Research and is now its Executive Director. Her research interests are in the regulation of genetic and reproductive medicine, and in the more general areas of bioethics, disability, the social construction of moral issues, and in feminist and psychoanalytic approaches to understanding moral processes.