Respect the Author: a Research Ethical Principle for Readers

Jesper Ahlin Marceta [1]

Abstract

Much of contemporary research ethics was developed in the latter half of the twentieth century as a response to the unethical treatment of human beings in biomedical research. Research ethical considerations have subsequently been extended to cover topics in the sciences and technology such as data handling, precautionary measures, engineering codes of conduct, and more. However, moral issues in the humanities have gained less attention from research ethicists. This article proposes an ethical principle for reading for research purposes: Respect the author.

Keywords Research ethics · Humanities · Authorship · Reading · Respect

Introduction

Much of contemporary research ethics was developed in the latter half of the twentieth century as a response to the unethical treatment of human beings in biomedical research. Research ethical considerations have subsequently been extended to cover topics in the sciences and technology such as data handling, precautionary measures, engineering codes of conduct, among other things. However, moral issues in the humanities have gained less attention from research ethicists. This article develops a research ethical principle for reading for research purposes, specifically targeting readers and authors in the humanities.

The article has four main sections that are structured as follows. The first section is devoted to a discussion of research ethics, the ethics of reading, and respect. In the second section, the distinction is made between *thin* and *thick* reading. Thin reading is formal, literal, and only concerns the author's stated intentions, whereas thick reading also considers the author and the text from a social perspective. The third section, which holds the major normative content of this article, introduces the notion of *deep respect*. In the fourth section, a research ethical

✉ Jesper Ahlin Marceta
  jahli@kth.se

[1] Division of Philosophy, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden

principle for reading for research purposes is formalized. It is argued that the principle *respect the author* is reason-giving in research contexts.

Research Ethics, the Ethics of Reading, and Respect

There are countless books on research ethics. The topics they treat usually include scientific misconduct, data handling, collaboration between academia and industry, authorship issues, publication and peer review, intellectual property, conflicts of interests, the use of animals in research, protection of human subjects, the researcher in society, laboratory safety, and regulatory frameworks, among other things (see, e.g., Institute of Medicine 2009; Koepsell 2017; Oliver 2010; Shamoo and Resnik 2015). Many of these topics are important for research in the humanities, but much of the discussion is against the background, or in the context, of the natural sciences.

Although fewer, there are also books, articles, and reports targeting social scientists and qualitative research. In addition to the topics mentioned above, the problems treated in these works include values in social research, respect for private interests and other cultures, preservation of monuments and remains, deep interviews, the ethics of doing ethics, social power structures, participatory research, and more (see, e.g., Allmark et al. 2009; Hansson 2017; Smith Iltis 2006; Iphofen and Tolich 2018; NESH 2016). However, researchers in the humanities face moral problems that are specific for their research practices and, arguably, are not encompassed by the principles and arguments in these works either.

One of those moral problems concern *reading*. Researchers in the humanities read texts treating abstract issues, written by authors who present *their views* on those issues. Their analyses are interpretative and theory-dependent. In this article, I argue that when reading such texts researchers have special moral obligations to the authors.

The ethical dimension of reading was studied systemically already in Ancient Greece as an element of general hermeneutics (Mantzavinos 2016). J. Hillis Miller has recently discussed the notion of "the ethics of reading," in arguing that thinking about it triggers questions about "the role of literature in individual and social life, as well as in our schools, colleges, and universities" (Hillis Miller 1987, p. 181). Contrasting his view with Hillis Miller's, Charles Larmore takes a different approach to the ethics of reading (Larmore 2014). Instead of considering whether our lives are enriched "if we read some good books" (p. 49), and similar questions, Larmore takes as his starting point his belief that "our very relation as readers to what we read—to books or more generally to texts—is of ethical significance" (p. 50)." The most basic fact, Larmore writes about the reader's relation to text, "is that this relation is asymmetrical" (p. 50); although the text which is read is not another person, "it was written by a person to embody his or her thinking and feeling," and in the act of reading, "the author is not there, only the text" (ibid). The asymmetry of the relation gives rise to obligations to the author, who is "by nature unable to defend itself against the abuses of misunderstanding that may be perpetrated by" the reader (p. 51). The author is therefore *vulnerable*. And, Larmore concludes, "our ethical character shows itself most clearly in how we treat the vulnerable, since they cannot make it in our interest to treat them well" (p. 54).

Larmore's concluding words form a springboard for my arguments in this article. Being the author of a text means that one's thoughts and ideas are exposed in a way that makes one vulnerable. This vulnerability gives rise to moral obligations for readers. Those obligations can be encapsulated by a research ethical principle for the humanities: *Respect the author*.

By "respect," in this context, I have in mind an *attitude* building from certain moral obligations, and a *phenomenological experience* of a certain quality. I follow Stephen Darwall in thinking about respect as consisting in "giving appropriate consideration or recognition to some feature of its object in deliberating about what to do" (Darwall 1977, p. 38). This is the "disposition to weigh appropriately in one's deliberations some feature of the thing in question and to act accordingly" (ibid). Showing something or someone respect in this sense means that one's range of potential course of actions toward that something or someone is narrowed down. Accordingly, respecting an author means that one's attitude toward the author is morally appropriate, where that attitude is motivated by the fact that the author is an author.

Regarding respect as a phenomenological experience, I follow the broad observations made by Uriah Kriegel and Mark Timmons (forthcoming). Most importantly for the present purposes, respect is a "particular mode of apprehending the object: the person who respects something pays attention to it and perceives it differently;" respect *feels* like "trying to see the object clearly, as it really is in its own right, and not seeing it solely through the filter of one's own desires and fears or likes and dislikes," and involves a *deontic* experience, in that one *must* "pay attention and respond appropriately" (p. 6). That is, in broad terms, how I think of the phenomenology of respecting an author.

Thin and Thick Reading

Reading for Research Purposes

Reading for research purposes means following basic research methodology. Among other things, following basic research methodology entails that readers should aim for *reliability*. In the empirical sciences, reliability concerns the internal consistency of an experiment or observation; a second team of researchers should be able to reproduce the results that the first team presents, i.e., by using the same data and method they should obtain identical results. In the humanities, I hold reliability to concern *person-independence*. A text should be read *as it is*, so that it conveys the same meaning to all readers disregarding of their various identities and psychologies. An interpretation of a text that hinges on the reader's identity or psychology is not reliable (unless that identity and psychology is explicitly and accurately accounted for in a methodological statement).

I distinguish between *thin* and *thick* reading. Thin reading is formal, literal, and only concerns the author's stated intentions. If the author states, "I will argue that x," she should be read as arguing that x and her arguments should be assessed after how well they support x. In thin reading, no information other than the words and sentences as they appear influences the reader's interpretation of the text. For instance, Jason Brennan writes in defense of the individualism supported by John Stuart Mill; "I will argue that Mill's conception of individualism is sound" (Brennan 2005, p. 484). A thin reading of Brennan's article means that the reader assumes that Brennan does what he writes that he will do, and evaluates how well he does it without considering, for instance, Brennan's other texts, his identity as a philosophy professor, and so on.

This is opposed to thick reading, which among other things involves assessments of the author's psychology and interpretations of the text as a representation of social phenomena. A thick reading of the author's text may include judgments such as whether she is a person who should be expected to support x, an assessment of the moral value of x and that value's

relevance to the understanding of the text in its entirety, and the interpretation of the text not on independent grounds but as an instance of some social structure. For instance, a thick reading of Brennan's article may involve the judgment that he is a person who fails to acknowledge the conditions of the social reality of human beings, the assessment that individualism is morally unjustifiable in light of the interests of communities, and the interpretation of Brennan's article as an instance of neo-liberal political propaganda.[1]

My understanding of reliability in the humanities entails that the epistemic value of reading a text is dependent on the quality of a thin reading of it. This view is opposed to radical esotericism, according to which the context of a statement must be perfectly understood "before an interpretation of the statement can reasonably claim to be adequate or even correct" (Strauss 1980 [1952], p. 30). In this article, I work from the hypothesis that the epistemic value of reading a text is not *necessarily* contingent on the contextual understanding of it. A thick reading of Brennan's article on Mill's individualism, for instance, does not contribute much to the reader's understanding of the topic or the argument. A thin reading of it, to the contrary, does contribute to those things. This does not mean that thick reading, or esotericism, is *never* appropriate. For instance, sometimes the research purpose of reading is to investigate social phenomena such as neo-liberal political propaganda. In such cases, a thick reading of Brennan's text is epistemically warranted, as his text is read under the hypothesis that it is an instance of a particular phenomenon subjected to critical scrutiny. I will return to this below.

The ethics of reading is aligned with the methodology of reading. If the research purpose is to study a text as an individual product thick reading is not only epistemically suboptimal to thin reading, it is also unethical. One reason why follows from the arguments above; thick reading is then unethical because researchers should strive for knowledge and understanding, which requires thin reading. But, thick reading can also be unethical for independent reasons; it is *disrespectful to the author* to neglect her stated intentions and arguments, and instead conduct assessments of her supposedly "real" intentions, speculations in her psychological motivations, and so on. Furthermore, it is sometimes disrespectful to the author not to appreciate her text as an individual product. Treating an author's text only as a representation of some social phenomenon—unless this is the research purpose—is to reduce the author from *person* to *prop* on the scene of events; it is to take away her agency and, in Kantian terms, to forsake one's obligation as a reader to treat the humanity in the author as an end in itself.

Deep Respect for Authors

How to Show Deep Respect

It is probably common to hold that successful thin reading entails that the reader shows the author respect. Call this *naïve* respect for the author. I write "naïve," as the view seems feasible that a deeper form of respect can be discerned. Let us consider John Stuart Mill himself, and not only Brennan's defense of his individualism. What is it to show Mill respect as an author? It may be that naïve respect is *necessary*, but sometimes *not sufficient* for the deep form of

---

[1] To be clear, I think of this particular thick reading of Brennan's article as unjustified and do not endorse it in any way other than as an example for the sake of argument. The reason why I use Brennan's text(s) as example(s), here and below, is that I have encountered this reading of Brennan's work in verbal conversations with scholars who disagree with him; it is, in my view, a disrespectful reading.

respect that I have in mind, and which it is possible that researchers should do their best to show authors.

In chapter 2 of his book *On Liberty*, Mill argued in support of freedom of speech (Mill 1977 [1859]). He defended his views on the grounds that freedom of speech would render desirable states of affairs, in the sense that unhindered debate leads our beliefs away from falsity and into the direction of truth. One of his well-known arguments for this is (p. 229):

> But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.

An evaluation of Mill's argument, as quoted here, should result in the conclusion that Mill was mistaken (see, e.g., Cohen-Almagor 2017). For instance, in our digital age it is quite easy to see that one thousand anonymous accounts on social media that systematically spread disinformation can overflow political debate so that the dozen-or-so intellectually honest accounts remain unheard. In reality, "the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error," is often absent.

This evaluation of Mill's argument for freedom of speech is necessary to respect Mill as an author. But it may not be sufficient. In the view I explore here, showing Mill *deep respect* as an author also involves taking into account factors other than his words and sentences as they appear. My argument begins with some brief biographical notes.

John Stuart Mill was born on 20 May 1806 to Harriet Barrow and James Mill (Macleod 2016, here and henceforth). He was brought up by radicals intending to equip him with the education he needed to become the leader of the next generation of radicals. By the age of eight, he had been taught both Greek and Latin. At twelve, he had studied most of the classical canon, algebra, Euclid, and the most important Scottish and English historians. At fifteen, he started working on the major treatises in philosophy, psychology, and more. Later in life, Mill suffered from periods of mental crises and depression; it is probable that his radical and experimental upbringing had an effect on Mill's well-being.

Consider further Mill's extraordinary intellectual achievements in life. His contributions to logic, economics, ethics, and political philosophy are significant. To mention but one of them, Mill took Jeremy Bentham's moral theory of utilitarianism, advanced its theoretical value-base of hedonism, and applied it to politics—thereby creating a coherent system-wide theory of political thinking that is still studied and applied by theorists and practitioners to this day. Finally, consider the *content* of Mill's moral and political views. In a pre-democratic age, he wrote extensively on gender equality and advocated female suffrage both in his theoretical work and as Member of Parliament. It is no exaggeration to say that Mill was before his time; a brave and honorable political theorist and practitioner championing democratic values.

It is reasonable to say that Mill's moral character and vast achievements give rise to a certain moral obligations, which are encompassed in a form of deep respect for him as an author. In this view, it is morally appropriate to conduct thick reading of Mill's texts *in addition* to the thin reading which has already been discussed as an epistemic and moral necessity. This means that when reading chapter 2 in *On Liberty*, for instance, we should take the following into account (and possibly more).

First, Mill's radical upbringing is likely to have induced in him a strong conviction that humans are generally moved by rationally intelligible reasons. It is probable that his belief in the effects of free debate, at least to some extent, can be traced back to his childhood's extreme focus on the intellectual aspects of life. When reading Mill's arguments for free speech, it is appropriate to consider his psychology; deep respect for Mill as an author warrants appreciation for how his life began, and later unfolded. As a consequence of this respect, we should refrain from *judging* Mill for having an, arguably, inadequate understanding of how human beings function (although we can, of course, *disagree* with him and express this disagreement respectfully). Showing Mill deep respect means that we feel sympathy for his optimistic worldview, and experience a deontic wish to respond to it appropriately.

Second, chapter 2 of *On Liberty* should be read not only as an individual work, but also as an element of Mill's collected writings. There are epistemic reasons to study Mill's argument for free speech in combination with studies of his views on utilitarianism and economics, among other things. But there are also moral reasons to do so. Studying chapter 2 of *On Liberty* as an element of Mill's collected writings is to appreciate the chapter for what it is in a wider context, namely as an element of Mill's liberal democratic political philosophy. It is deeply respectful to Mill to maintain that perspective of his individual works. Doing so means that the reader thinks about them as individual pieces in a puzzle, thus adopting an appropriate attitude toward to the complete picture.

Third, a thin reading of Mill's arguments for free speech should render the conclusion that Mill was mistaken in this particular issue. However, on a thick reading of it one should realize that *Mill stood on the right side of history*. I do not mean the winning side (although this is true), or the majority side (Mill was in minority), but the *morally praiseworthy* side. Showing deep respect for Mill includes acknowledging that his overall project was ethical. We should *sense* this when reading him, making it an element of our experience of reading Mill.

This form of deep respect should be shown to most authors at most times. There are exceptions to the rule. One is that thick reading is sometimes impossible. For instance, when reading texts by anonymous authors readers cannot consider their psychology. Furthermore, in peer-review processes, reviewers should only conduct thin reading, as it is not their task to consider the societal effects of supporting or discouraging articles, books, and research projects. Therefore, it suffices that reviewers show authors naïve respect; only editors and grant providers should conduct thick reading and aim to show authors deep respect. Tentatively, the rule should be considered to apply when deep respect (1) is epistemically feasible and (2) does not jeopardize the purposes of reading. At least one obvious objection to this should be expected, namely that some authors do not deserve respect. I discuss this objection and the moral standards of deep respect in the subsections that follow.

"Godwin's Objection"

Godwin's law is the humorous theory that as an online discussion progresses "it becomes inevitable that someone or something will eventually be compared to Adolf Hitler or the Nazis, regardless of the original topic" (Godwin's law n.d.). To anticipate this, I pose the question myself: Should we show deep respect to Adolf Hitler as the author of *Mein Kampf*? In short, my answer is *yes*. But the objection draws attention to the problem whether deep respect always entails that the author is dignified, or honored, in the sense of giving praise. In short, my answer is *no*.

Hitler dismantled democracy in Germany, threw Europe into war, and orchestrated the industrialized murder of six million innocent people. But he was also an author. Against the backdrop of the discussion above, and considering the positive connotations associated with the word "respect," the claim seems counterintuitive that Hitler's readers should show him "deep respect." However, consider the essence of "respect," as it is described above. The notion means showing "appropriate consideration or recognition." Phenomenologically, showing respect feels like "trying to see the object as it really is in its own right." In the case of Hitler, showing him deep respect as an author does not entail *approval*, but that the reader has an *appropriate* attitude and experience when reading his book.

These words, which end the autobiographical chapter VII of *Mein Kampf*, titled "The Revolution," are the most chilling that I know of: "With the Jews there is no bargaining, but only hard either–or. I however, resolved now to become a politician" (Hitler 1941 [1925], p. 269). The reason why I find them chilling is that I know the historical facts and am therefore aware of the social meaning and implications of Hitler's writing. I show Hitler deep respect in a sense which is similar to how mountaineers show respect to hazardous cliffs and gorges. My attitude to his words, and my chilling experience when reading them, is appropriate.

"Godwin's objection" nonetheless merits further elaboration. It is one thing to say that an attitude or experience is appropriate, another to motivate the standards according to which attitudes and experiences should be assessed. What *is* appropriateness in this context?

Standards of Appropriateness

The standards according to which attitudes and experiences should be assessed are objective; John Stuart Mill is good, Adolf Hitler is evil. For the purposes of this article it must be explained which those standards are and what justifies them. However, first, some clarifications are necessary regarding how the principle *respect the author* should be understood in the larger context of research ethics.

I think of it as a mid-level principle. Among other things, this means that it is not committed to any particular high-level moral theory. The principle, or more specifically its normative content, can be justified with reference to different ethical theories, such as Kantianism and virtue ethics. It also means that the principle must be balanced against other moral principles before a final conclusion can be reached in any particular case; at least in theory, the principle *respect the author* can conflict with other principles in research ethics, such as *respect for privacy*, and on the view defended here none of those principles trumps the others a priori (cf. Beauchamp and Rauprich 2016). Their utilization requires substantial moral deliberation, and some of their normative content is determined upon application rather than in the preceding theoretical work (Ahlin Marceta 2019, pp. 23–31).

The standards of assessment vary depending on the object toward which the reader's attitude and experience is directed. So far in this article, the objects discussed have been the author's psychology, their text as a social phenomenon, and their ethics.

"Appropriateness" does not mean the same thing for each object. However, in all cases the author's *autonomy*, i.e., her degree of self-governance, has a central role to the justification of the evaluative standards. In general, a reader's attitude should vary according to the degree of autonomy of the author, so that less autonomy warrants a gentle and forgiving attitude whereas more autonomy warrants a strict and non-forgiving attitude.

(1)   An appropriate attitude toward, and experience of, an author's *psychology* should be assessed according to a standard building solely from the degree of autonomy of the author's personal development. For instance, readers should relate differently to, on the one hand, an author who was born into a sect and has been manipulated since childhood to develop extreme and irrational behavioral patterns and, on the other hand, an author who has, to the extent that this is possible, chosen her own cognitive composition knowingly and deliberately. The latter should be judged more firmly than the former, as she is more responsible for how she functions psychologically.

(2)   An appropriate attitude toward, and experience of, a text as *an instance of some social phenomenon* should be assessed according to the following standards. First, the degree of autonomy of the author's contribution to the phenomenon in question matters for these evaluative purposes. Consider an author who adheres to an overarching agenda and writes individual texts than in combination contribute to it. For instance, returning to Brennan's defense of Mill's individualism as an example, Brennan has also written at least one book in defense of capitalism (Brennan 2014) and several research articles from a libertarian stand-point, including one in which he criticizes arguments supporting the view that employers have a duty to pay a living wage (Brennan 2019). Suppose, for the argument's sake, that Brennan thus contributes to neo-liberal political propaganda. (To be clear, treating a text as an instance of any particular social phenomenon must of course be justified with reference to independent factors; see also footnote 1 above.) It makes a difference to which attitude a reader should have when reading Brennan's defense of Mill's individualism whether Brennan contributes know-ingly and purposefully to an overarching neo-liberal agenda, or whether he does so unknow-ingly or accidentally. The former should be judged more firmly than the latter, as the contribution is then more autonomous.

Furthermore, it matters to the appropriateness of the reader's attitude what the social phenom-enon in question *is*. The reader should be neutral with regard to its ideological content, within the limits posed by democratic values as they are understood in the wide, liberal, sense familiar from the Western world after the end of WWII. This means, for instance, that neo-liberal propaganda is a legitimate social phenomenon toward which readers should adopt a tolerant attitude, whereas Nazi propaganda is illegitimate and obliges readers to adopt an intolerant attitude. What is more, readers should adopt an intolerant attitude toward social phenomena that deliberately or accidentally disrupt the conditions for meaningful intellectual debate, such as large-scale disinformation campaigns and ad hominem assaults.

(3)   An appropriate attitude toward, and experience of, an author's *ethics* should be assessed according to standards known from analytic moral philosophy. For these evaluative purposes, it matters to the reader's attitude whether the author displays consistent or inconsistent moral beliefs, whether those beliefs are clear or vague, and whether they are justifiable with reference to valid and sound ethical theories. A reader should adopt a skeptical attitude to the extent that the author's moral beliefs are weak according to these standards, and a trusting attitude to the extent that the beliefs are strong accordingly. Furthermore, as in (1), the reader should judge the author in accordance with the extent to which the author's beliefs are autonomous, i.e., self-chosen, and to the extent to which the author should be expected to have developed justifiable moral beliefs. For instance, an old and experienced author should be judged more firmly than a young and unexperienced author.

In summary, to show authors respect, it is necessary but sometimes not sufficient to evaluate their words and sentences as they appear. To the extent that the reader is in the epistemic position to make further judgments, deep respect for authors requires that the reader adopts an appropriate attitude toward, and experience of, the author's psychology, their text as a social phenomenon, and their ethics. Appropriateness, in this context, should be judged according to objective standards. These standards oblige readers to make firm or mild judgments, and to adopt tolerant or intolerant and skeptical or trusting attitudes.

I have argued that the objects toward which our attitudes and experiences should be directed include the author's psychology, their text as a social phenomenon, and their ethics. However, it has not been made clear why these objects are on the list, nor whether the list is exhaustive. The explanations are that these objects seem relevant for these purposes upon stable and considered reflection, and for the reasons accounted for in (1) through (3) above, and that the list should be thought of as open-ended; it is possible that more objects should be added to it.

Respect for the Author as a Research Ethical Principle

Respect for the Author Formalized as an Ideal Principle

The arguments in the sections above support the view that readers should sometimes show some authors deep respect. In this section, the arguments are organized into a formal research ethical principle that should be followed by anyone who reads for research purposes.

However, reading for research purposes may be difficult; after all, we are only humans and are as such subject social influences, personal biases, prejudices, and so on. Such human shortfalls have an effect on the quality of our reading. It is likely that many of us fail to follow the methodological demands of reliable reading, why it is probably the case that our understanding of some of the texts that we read is epistemically suboptimal. That is one reason why we train ourselves and our students in the scientific art of reading.

Our human shortfalls also have moral implications. Some of these implications can be addressed taking as starting point the methodological distinction between *ideal* and *realist* moral theory. There is no consensus among moral theorists about how these concepts should be understood (see, e.g., Hamlin and Stemplowska 2012; Simmons 2010; Valentini 2012), but the following brief explanation suffices for the present purposes. In *ideal* theory, abstract principles and concepts are formulated for agents as abstract constructions. Real-world constraints, such as agents' lack of motivation to abide by the normative content of the principles and concepts, are irrelevant to the truth-status of those principles and concepts.

For instance, consider the moral principle that rich people should donate half of their fortunes to good causes. Now, suppose also that the majority of the rich people in the world cannot bring themselves to follow that principle, despite the fact that they, by hypothesis, acknowledge that the principle is true. In ideal theory, this *feasibility constraint* does not matter to the truth-status of the principle. To the contrary, in *realist* theory, that feasibility constraint *does* matter to the truth-status of the principle; because the rich people cannot bring themselves to follow it, the principle is false (cf. Southwood 2016). Realist theorists take such constraints into account when formulating moral principles whereas idealist theorists do not.

Now, think of the human shortfalls that are likely to influence us when we read. Because of them, readers sometimes fail to show authors warranted respect. To continue using Brennan as an example, some readers may simply be incapable of *not* reading his article on Mill's

individualism as an instance of neo-liberal political propaganda, despite that they would want to do so upon informed and critical reflection. It is, of course, unethical to *purposefully* ignore an author's stated intentions, and so on, but it is something else for readers to misread them because they cannot bring themselves to do otherwise. Here, I will only suggest an ideal version of the research ethical principle *respect the author*. However, in light of the discussion above, it is possible that it should be complemented with realist versions.

The following applies as an ideal version of the research ethical principle *respect the author*:

Reading for research purposes obliges the reader to

(1)   read the text according to the author's stated intentions, not taking into consideration anything beyond the words and sentences as they appear in the text, and,

(2)   unless the reader lacks necessary knowledge, or if it jeopardizes the purposes of reading, the reader should appropriately consider

    a.   the author's psychology, ethics, and
    b.   the text as an instance of a social phenomenon.

For (1), if there is no stated intention, the reader should interpret what the intention is by means of reliable reading of the text itself and, if necessary, also take into account other relevant texts by the author. If this cannot be done, the reader should also take into account the social phenomenon that the text is an instance of, if any, and justify the interpretation by means of basic research methods.

For (2), the standards of appropriateness build from the author's degree of autonomy, taking into account the degree to which the author's views are justifiable. For (2b), the interpretation of the text as an instance of a social phenomenon must be justified by means of basic research methods.

In all cases, the reader should aim to conduct person-independent reading, so that the reader's identity and psychology does not influence the interpretation of the text (unless that identity and psychology is explicitly and accurately accounted for).

Respect for the author as a reason-giving factor

The principle *respect the author* should be followed for reasons inherent to it. However, it also narrows down the reader's possible courses of actions, and adds further motivation to adhere to other moral principles in standard research ethics. Because a reader respects an author, some courses of actions are no longer available to her. For instance, it is not an option to her to mock or taunt the author. Likewise, she will not "sub-talk" the author, which means that she will not address the author's written words without crediting them to the author; if she mentions the author's views, she will also mention the author herself as to facilitate a response and critical evaluation by others.

What is more, the principle *respect the author* provides readers with further reasons to follow other research ethical principles. For instance, scientific misconduct is sometimes understood as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in research (see, e.g., Institute of Medicine 2009, p. 15). Scientific misconduct is unethical for various reasons, such as that it denotes a failure to give due credit and risks undermining society's trust in academic research, among other things. Respecting the author is another reason not to fabricate, falsify, or plagiarize; making up, distorting, or copying an author's text is disrespectful to her.

Thus, the principle is reason-giving in a wider context of research ethics and can make a real moral difference to research practices. It should therefore be considered as a research ethical principle among others, to be taught and adhered to in research contexts.

References

Ahlin Marceta, J. (2019). *Authenticity in bioethics: Bridging the gap between theory and practice* (doctoral thesis). KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden.

Allmark, P., Boote, J., Chambers, E., Clarke, A., McDonnell, A., Thompson, A., & Tod, A. M. (2009). Ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews: Literature review and discussion. *Research Ethics Review, 5*(2), 48–54.

Beauchamp, T. L., & Rauprich, O. (2016). Principlism. In H. ten Have (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of global bioethics (pp. 2282–2293)*. Springer International Publishing.

Brennan, J. (2005). Choice and excellence: A Defense of Millian individualism. *Social Theory and Practice, 31*(4), 483–498.

Brennan, J. (2014). *Why not capitalism?* Routledge.

Brennan, J. (2019). Should employers pay a living wage? *Journal of Business Ethics, 157*(1), 15–26.

Cohen-Almagor, R. (2017). J.S. Mill's boundaries of freedom of expression: A critique. *Philosophy, 92*(4), 565–596.

Darwall, S. (1977). Two kinds of respect. *Ethics, 88*(1), 36–49.

Godwin's law. (n.d.) In *Lexico*. Retrieved (2019-07-16) from: https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/godwin's_law

Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology. (2016). Norway: The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH).

Hamlin, A., & Stemplowska, Z. (2012). Theory, ideal theory and the theory of ideals. *Political Studies Review, 10,* 48–62.

Hansson, S. O. (2017). The ethics of doing ethics. *Science and Engineering Ethics, 23*(1), 105–120.

Hillis Miller, J. (1987). The ethics of Reading. *Style, 21*(2), 181–191.

Hitler, A. (1941). *1925*. Reynal And Hitchcock: Mein Kampf.

Institute of Medicine. (2009). *On being a scientist: A guide to responsible conduct in research*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Iphofen, R., & Tolich, M. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research ethics*. SAGE Publishing.

Koepsell, D. (2017). *Scientific integrity and research ethics: An approach from the ethos of science*. Springer International Publishing.

Kriegel, U., & Timmons, M. (forthcoming). The phenomenology of kantian respect for persons. In Dean, R., & Sensen, O. (Eds.), *Respect for persons*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved (2019-07-16) from: https://philpapers.org/archive/KRITPO-16.pdf

Larmore, C. (2014). The ethics of reading. In P. Brooks & H. Jewett (Eds.), *The humanities and public life*. Fordham University Press.

Macleod, C. (2016) John Stuart Mill. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved (2019-07-15) from: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill/

Mantzavinos, C. (2016). Hermeneutics. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved (2019-10-23) from: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/

Mill, J. S. (1977 [1859]). On liberty. In J. M. Robson (Ed.), *The collected works of John Stuart Mill, volume XVIII: Essays on politics and society part I (on liberty)*. University of Toronto Press.

Oliver, P. (2010). *The student's guide to research ethics*. Open University Press.

Shamoo, A. E., & Resnik, D. B. (2015). *Responsible conduct of research*. Oxford University Press.

Simmons, J. (2010). Ideal and nonideal theory. *Philosophy & Public Affairs, 38,* 5–36.

Smith Iltis, A. (Ed.). (2006). *Research ethics*. Routledge.

Southwood, N. (2016). Does "ought" imply "feasible"? *Philosophy & Public Affairs, 44,* 7–45.

Strauss, L. (1980). *1952*. Persecution and the Art of Writing: The University of Chicago Press.

Valentini, L. (2012). Ideal vs. non-ideal theory: A conceptual map. *Philosophy Compass, 7,* 654–664.