Ethics of Genetic Counselling
Question 1: Current ethical practice standards

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Reactive swings from eugenics to non-directive ideology to ?

- True that non-directive ideology is/was illusory and misleading
- Danger that a reaction against it might undermine the important value of autonomy
- Autonomy already under attack by those who mistakenly view it as self-sufficiency, or as a western invention
Maintenance of respect for autonomy particularly important given the history of paternalism in the medical profession, and the tendency of governments to override autonomy
• Emphasis in Australasian Society of Genetic Counsellors Code of Ethics on education, a particular understanding of education as communication, a two way process of conversation, possibly deriving from John Dewey?
Question 2: What ethical problems commonly arise in practice?

Here I must remain primarily a listener, since I am not a genetic counsellor (Part of my job is regulator of genetic counsellors).

- Dealing with inequalities of power in counselling situation
- Acknowledging a right not to know
- Allowing client to make decision contrary to one’s own value position
- Dealing with situation where client’s decision will have harmful effects on a third party.
Question 3: What ethical insights might the humanities offer?

Philosophy, history, politics, economics, sociology:

- “Critical skills in logical philosophical reasoning.” (Code of Ethics)
- Understanding of reductionist tendencies in theories of human nature
- Awareness of nature and history of eugenics movement
- Understanding of economic and social forces which may lead to a misuse of genetic information
Example of Nazi psychiatrists asked to classify people as “unfit for life”.

Important for professional codes of ethics to provide protection against misuse of professional knowledge and practice.