

Ethical Agency in Science

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There are lots of research ethics codes..

- [The Nuremberg Code](#)
- [The Belmont report](#)
- [The Declaration of Helsinki](#)
- [The Singapore statement](#)
- OECD [Best Practices for Ensuring Scientific Integrity](#) & [Final report](#)
- [Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland](#) by The National Advisory Board on Research Integrity

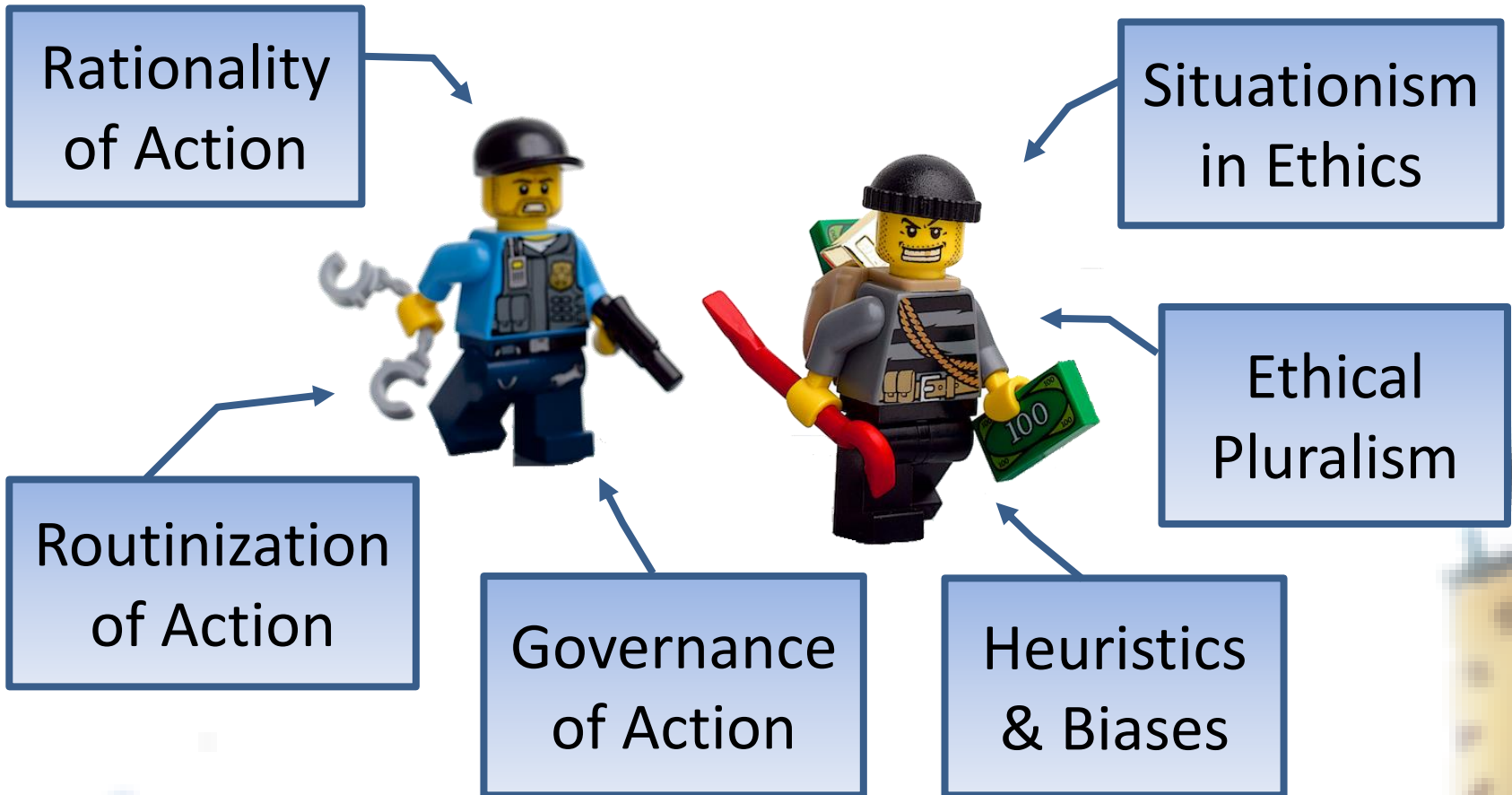
But they don't matter much..

If the natures of human agency and ethics are not taken into consideration by science institutions!



Picture from stavos.nl ("bankrobbery")

Agency and Ethics



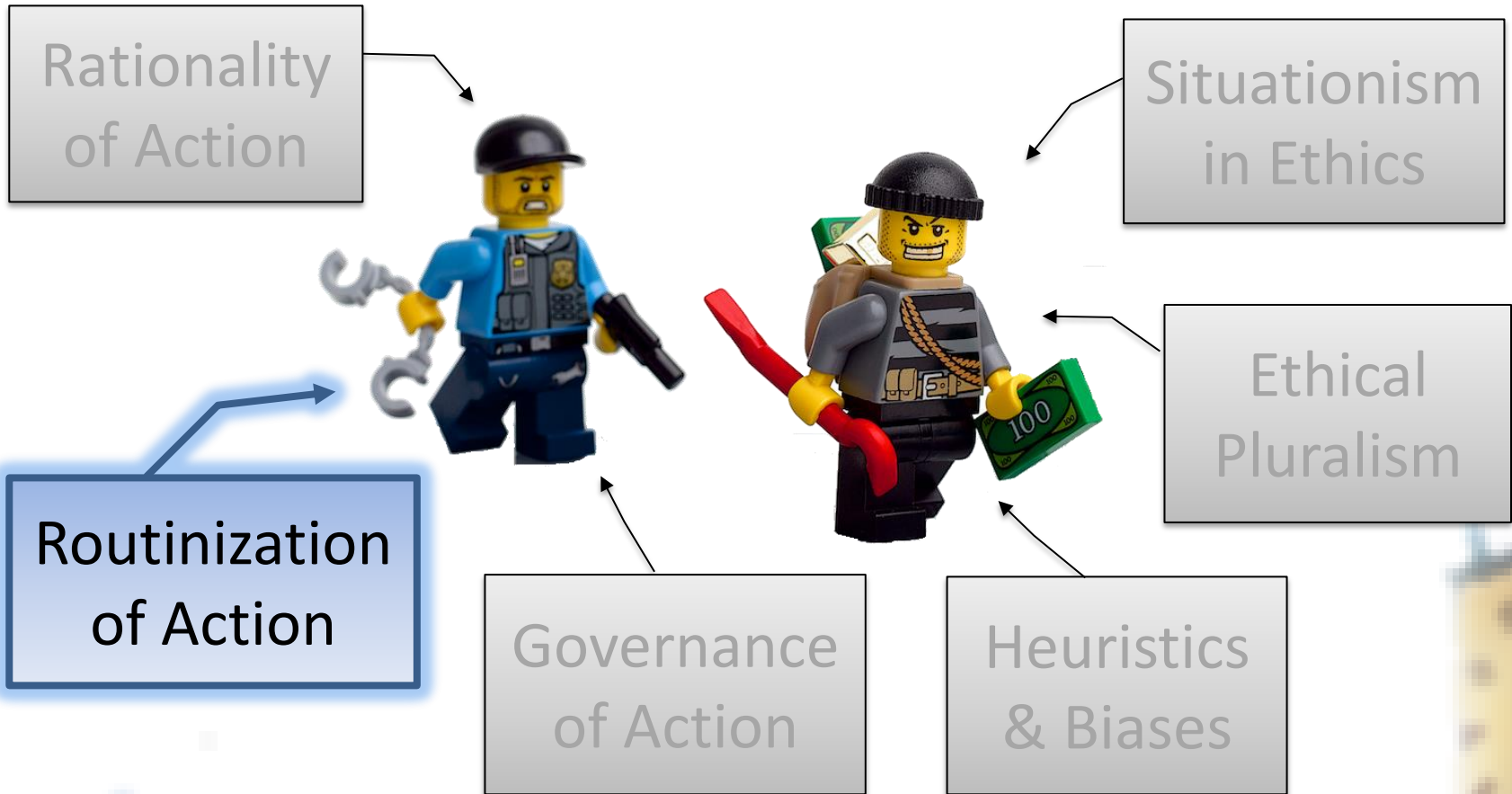
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Rationality of Action

(Niemi 2004)

- Basic Kantian picture:
 - Persons are able to make calculated interventions in the causal chains of the world. They manipulate worldly happenings in order to reach their goals
 - Persons have the ability to rationally deliberate whether it is sensible to follow their immediate instinctual, emotional and habitual impulses

Agency and Ethics



Picture from stavos.nl ("bankrobbery")

Routinization of Action

(Giddens 1984, 6, 41-51, 61-64)

- Everyday action isn't a series of individual deliberations, decisions, motives and acts
- Action is essentially about following familiar **routines** with **reflexive monitoring** of the situation
- Reflexive monitoring involves a practical consciousness of the present schemes of action and following up their success
- Conscious attention is typically drawn in only after some unexpected event breaks the routines

Routinization of Action

Anthony Giddens (1984, 60):

“Routine is integral both to the continuity of the personality of the agent as he or she moves along the paths of daily activities, and to the institutions of society which are such only through their continued reproduction”



Routinization of Action

(Giddens 1984, 61-64)

- The automated and routinized nature of action doesn't mean that action would generally be irrational

On the contrary, routines tend to be rational and agents are typically able to explain the point of their action rationally when interrupted and asked

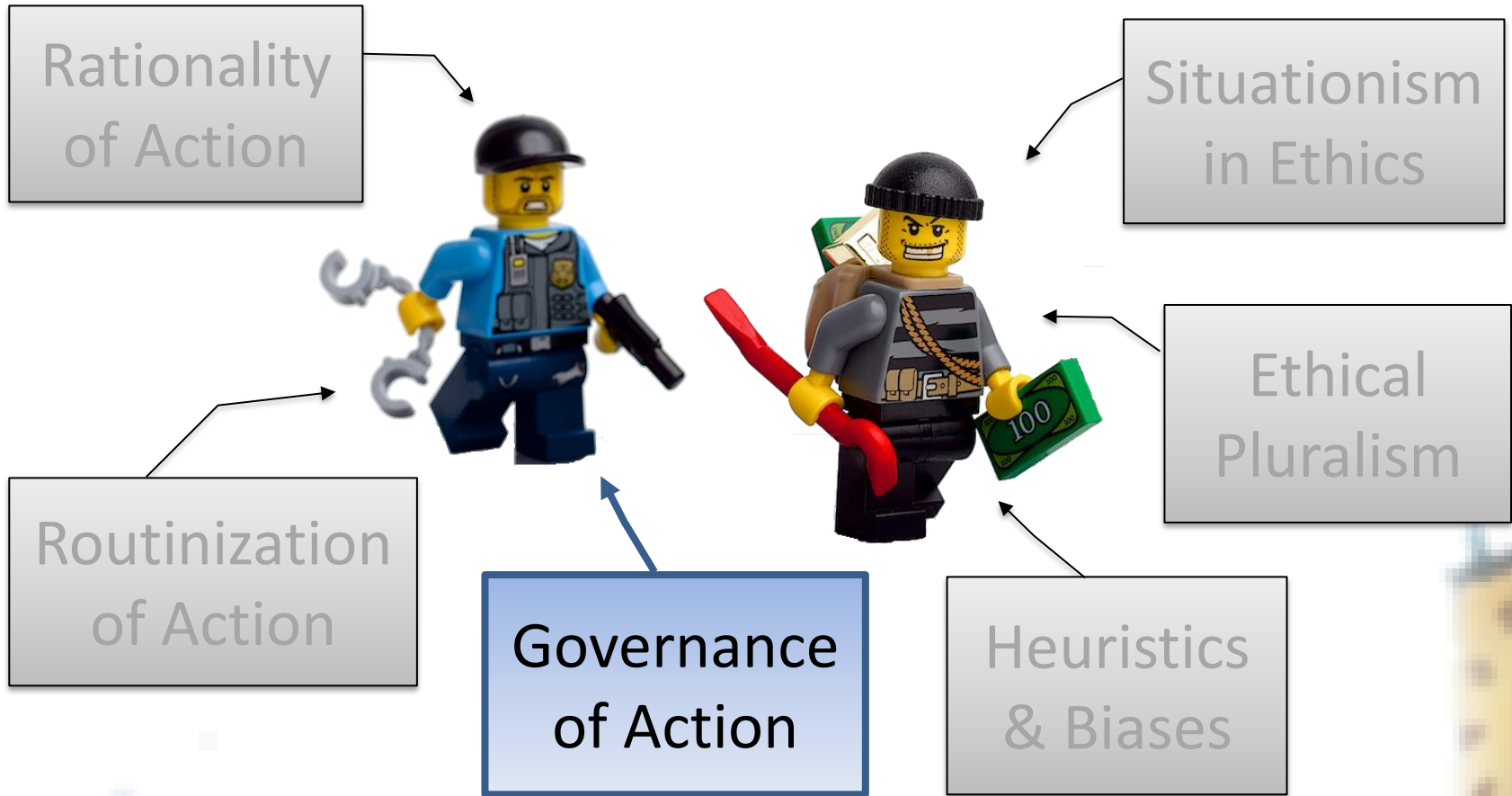
Routinization of Action

Jukka Gronow (2004):

Human action is slow and rigid by nature. People follow their old routines until somebody or something forces them to alter their action



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Governance of Action

(Niemi 2013)

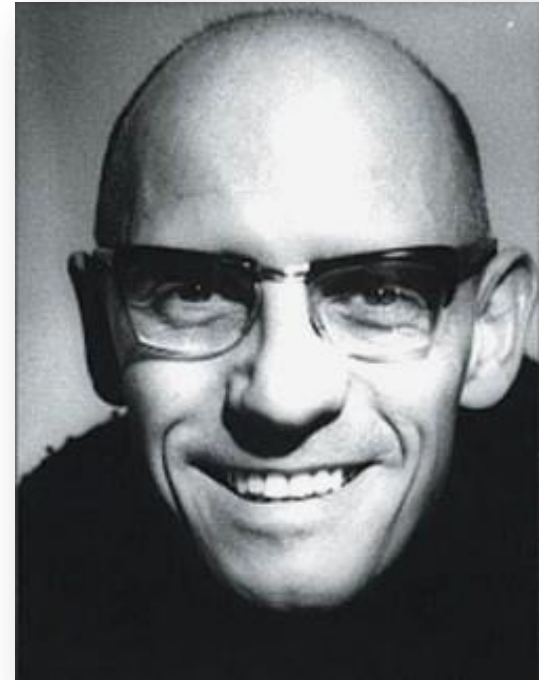
- Social rules, norms and conventions enable action but they also direct, restrict and prohibit it. They represent power!
 - A certain set of rules (a diagnosis, a vocabulary for building self-understanding, a plot for describing the course of events etc.) might be more beneficial for some interest group (social class, profession, political party etc.) than to others

Governance of Action

(Niemi 2013)

Michel Foucault (1982):

“Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government.. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others”



Governance of Action

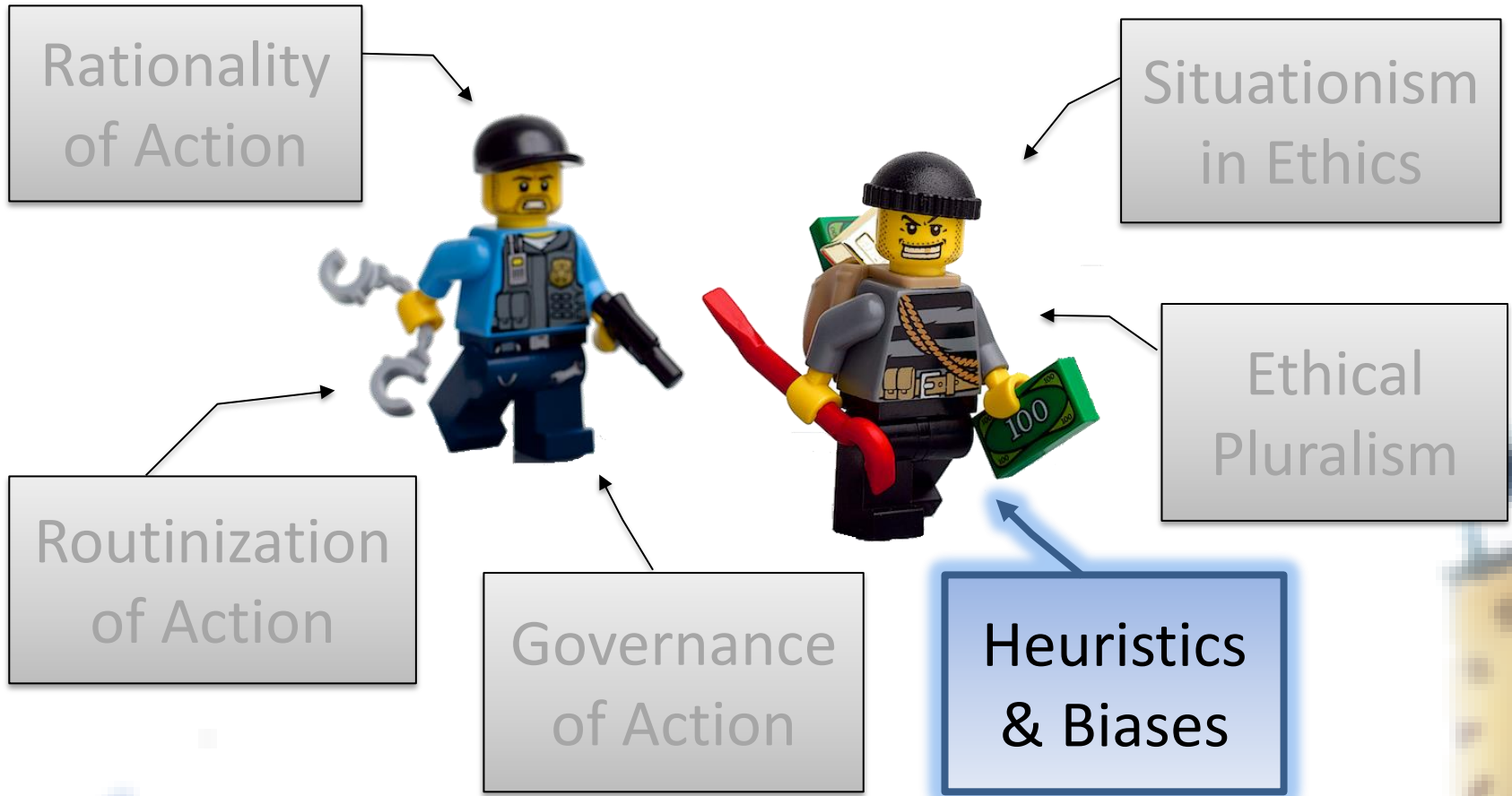
(Niemi 2013)

- According to Foucault, power takes part to the constitution of subjectivities of the actors
 - We cannot sharply separate a ready made subject from power structures outside him or her. Power is always already inside subjectivities
- **Cultural capital** (*Pierre Bourdieu*) greatly influences an agent's goals and values and to his or her ability to estimate and make rational choices

Governance of Action

- There are typically three types of reasons for an act A of a person P:
 1. P's genes, social background and personal history is such that P found A appealing
 2. The social reality P faced was so structured that A was one of the realistic options for him
 3. P chose it either routinely or after conscious deliberation

Agency and Ethics



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Heuristics & Biases

Amos Tversky & Daniel Kahneman

“..people rely on a limited number of heuristic principles which reduce the complex tasks of assessing probabilities and predicting values to simpler judgmental operations. In general, these heuristics are quite useful, but sometimes they lead to severe and systematic errors“
(Tversky & Kahneman 1974, 1124)



Heuristics & Biases

(Sunstein 2005)

- There seem to exist also moral heuristics and they seem to misfire in some cases. For example:
 - The representativeness and availability heuristics, moral framing effect (from Tversky & Kahneman)
 - Moral dumbfounding and outrage heuristics
 - “Do not knowingly cause a human death” heuristic and cost-benefit analysis
 - “People should not be permitted to engage in moral wrongdoing for a fee” heuristic

Heuristics & Biases

(Sunstein 2005)

- “Punish, and do not reward, betrayals of trust” heuristic. One significant bias connected to this heuristic is the overemphasized aversion of risks of death that come from products designed to promote safety (airbags, vaccinations etc.)
- “Do not tamper with nature” heuristic. This heuristic creates mistrust against phenomena like genetic manipulation
- Favoring omission over actions heuristic

Heuristics & Biases

Albert Bandura (2002):

”Moral standards do not function as fixed internal regulators of conduct. Self-regulatory mechanisms do not operate unless they are activated. There are many psychological maneuvers by which moral self-sanctions can be disengaged from inhuman conduct”



Heuristic and biased

(Bandura 2002, 103)

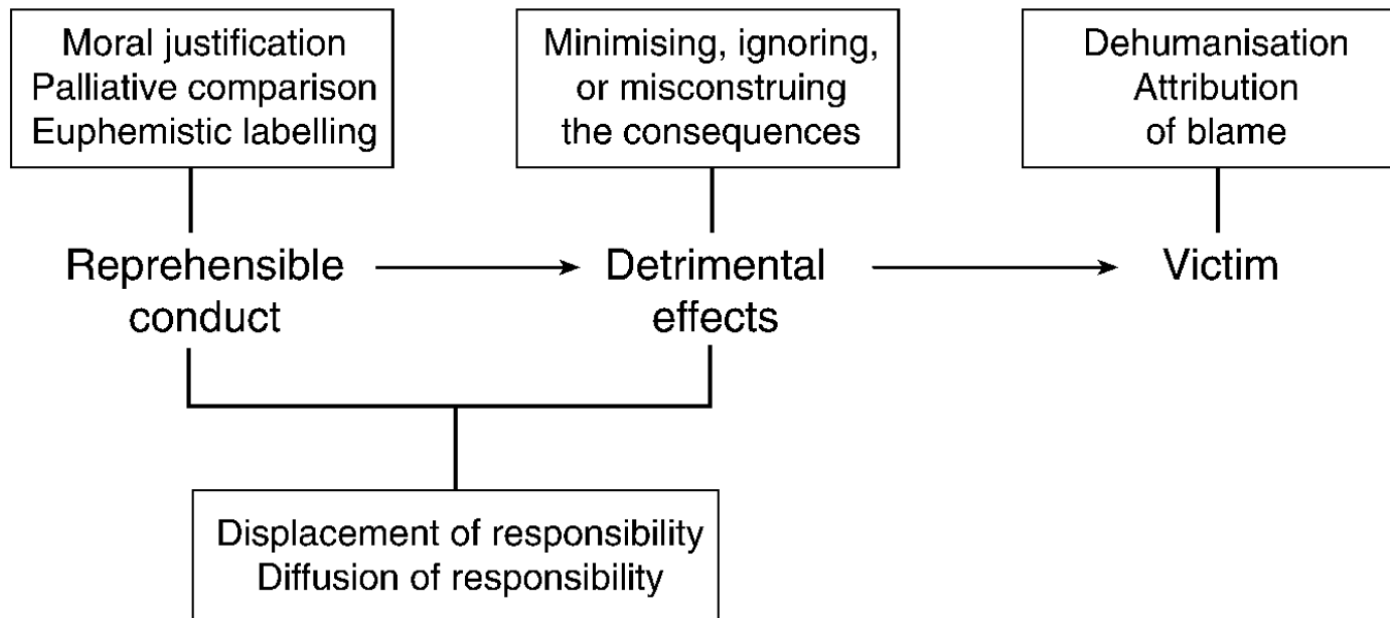
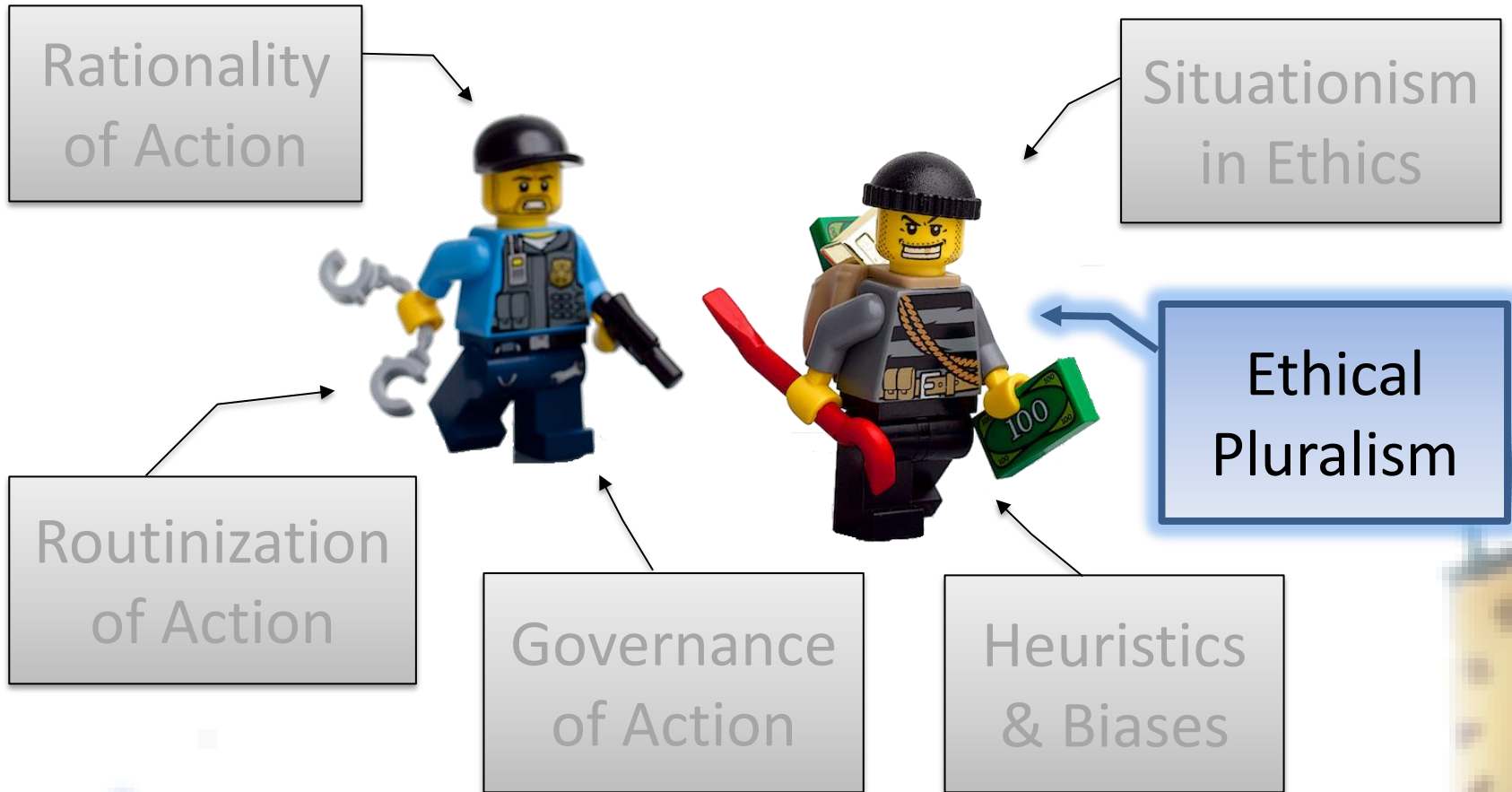


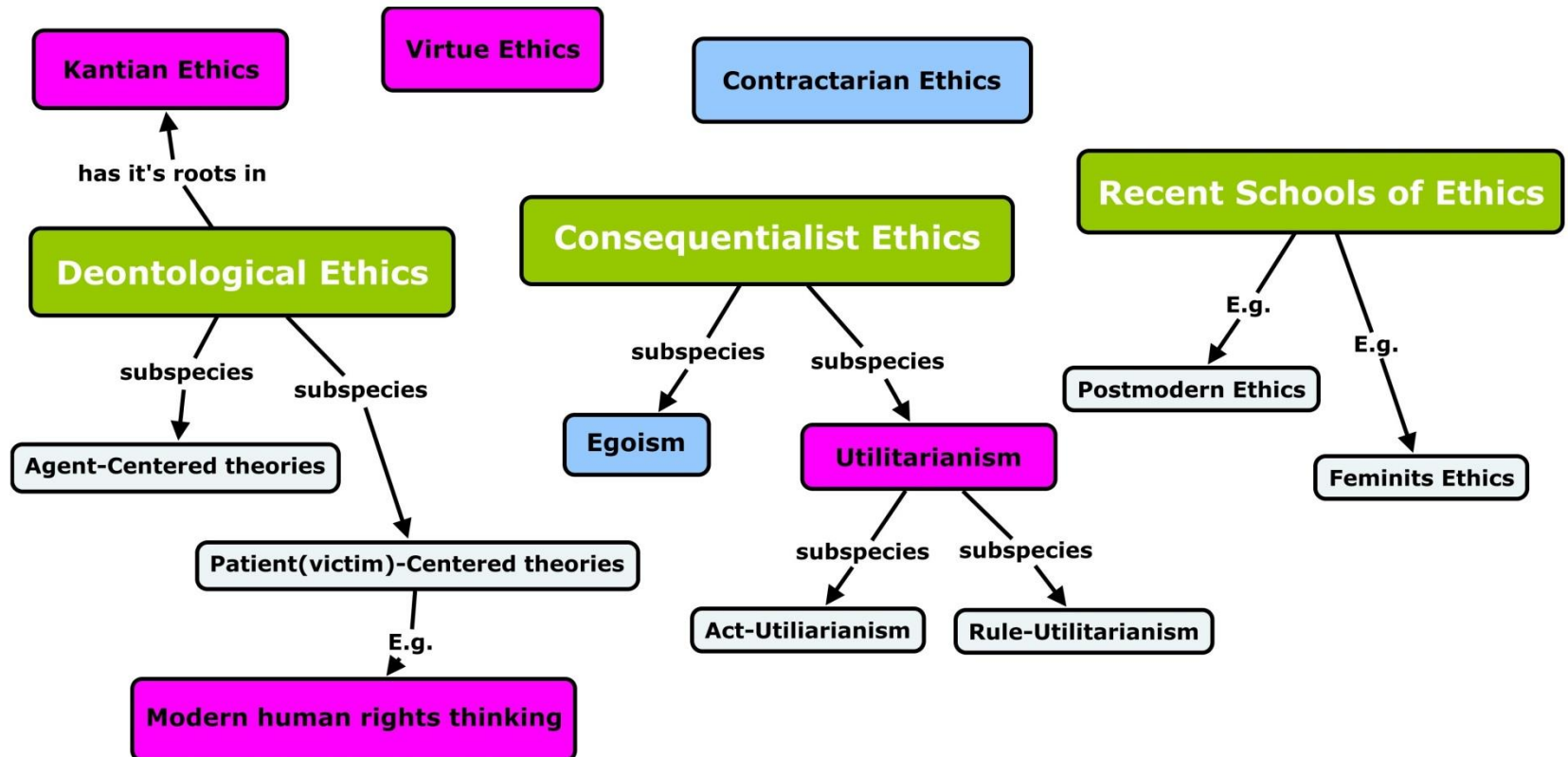
FIG. 1. Mechanism through which moral self-sanctions are selectively activated and disengaged from detrimental behaviour at different points in the self-regulatory process (Bandura, 1986).

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Ethical Pluralism



Ethical Pluralism

(Mason 2011)

- Moral pluralism is typically defined as a view that there are more than one distinct ethical values (happiness, liberty, friendship etc.) that cannot be reduced to one super value
 - The consequentialists and virtue ethicists discuss about (possible) plurality of Goods whereas the deontologists talk about plurality of principles
 - Some pluralists (e.g. Isaiah Berlin) accept that there may be situations where we just cannot make reasoned choices between plural values

Ethical Pluralism

- Another version discusses pluralism in terms of ethical intuitions and theories
 - Our ethical intuitions have developed in many different kinds of environments during the long history of our species, so it is no wonder that they may conflict (see Galef 2011)
 - Because different ethical theories seem to articulate different intuitions, it is only natural that also they may conflict and these conflicts may be irresolvable

Ethical Pluralism

- Pluralism doesn't imply relativism!
 - Perhaps the influential intuitions and theories all track different but important ethical values
 - Or they represent different routes to the same destination, perhaps "flourishing" in Aristotelian terms or "well-being" in modern consequentialist terms

Ethical Pluralism

- Both interpretations of pluralism point in the direction of an ideal that decision makers should reflect their decision options from the perspective of all key theories
- For instance, in the area of research ethics, Clarkeburn & Mustajoki (2007) suggest that ethical problems in science should be analyzed from the perspectives of deontological, utilitarian and virtue ethics

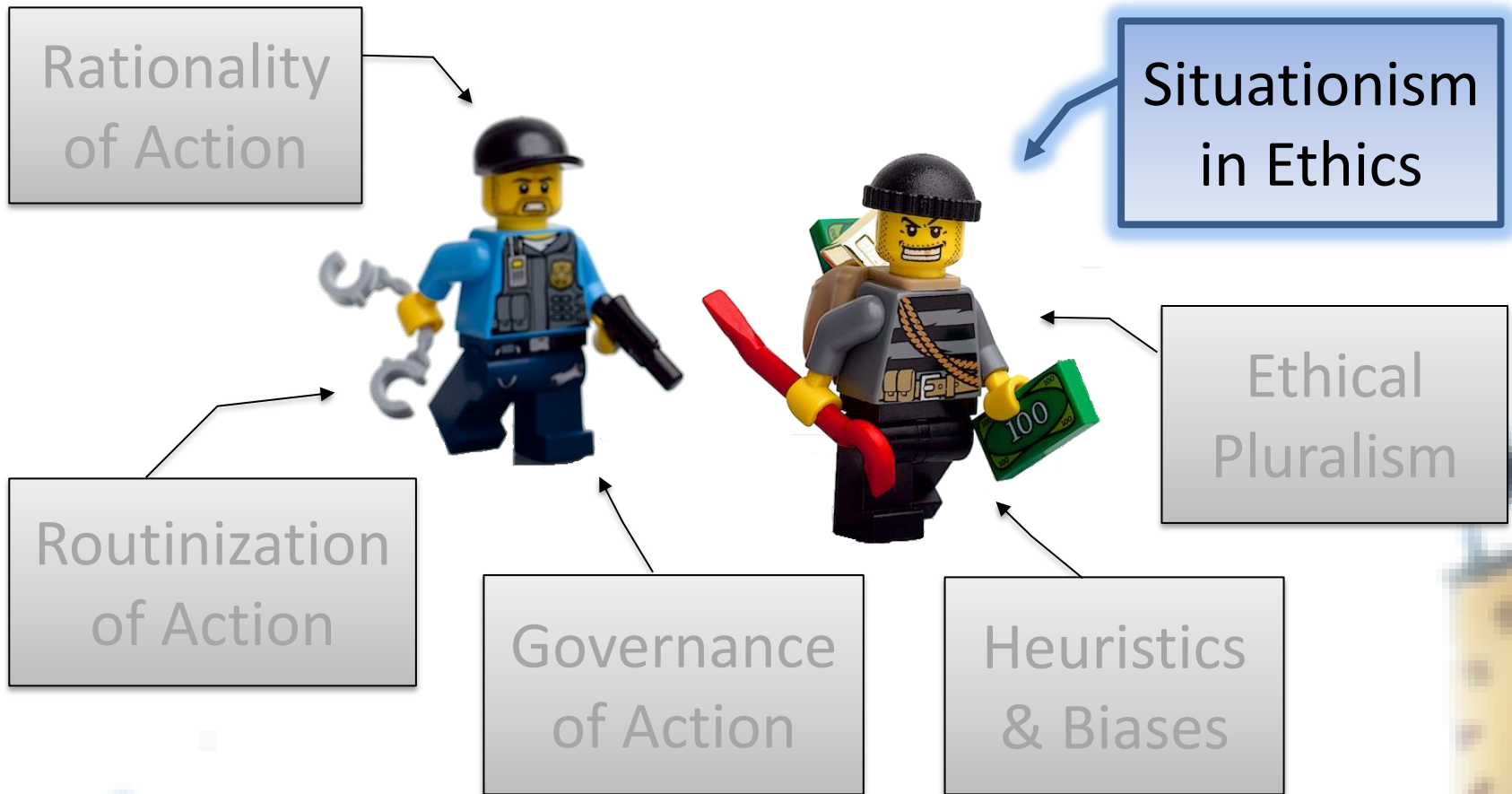
Ethical Pluralism

- In the area of research ethics, especially the importance of **virtue ethics** needs to be stressed. There are two main reasons for this:
 1. The research ethics codes don't function as potential reason for action for somebody who isn't at all sensitive to ethical consequences of action and doesn't have the basic inclination to search ethically good solutions. Virtue ethics discusses this dimension of ethical conduct

Ethical Pluralism

2. The codes have more or less abstract nature so that they usually cannot be mechanistically applied to individual cases. Correct application of them requires **situational appreciation** which is another important Aristotelian theme
 - Even many deontologists nowadays stress that their action guiding rules cannot be applied correctly without **practical wisdom** (see Hursthouse 2012)

Agency and Ethics



Picture from stavos.nl ("bankrobbery")

Situationism in Ethics

(Doris & Stich 2006)

- Social psychologists have repeatedly found that seemingly minor situational features have great influence on ethical conduct. These examples are quoted directly from Doris & Stich (2006):
 - Isen and Levin (1972: 387) discovered that subjects who had just found a dime were 22 times more likely to help a woman who had dropped some papers than subjects who did not find a dime (88% v. 4%)

Situationism in Ethics

(Doris & Stich 2006)

- Darley and Batson (1973: 105) report that passersby not in a hurry were 6 times more likely to help an unfortunate who appeared to be in significant distress than were passersby in a hurry (63% v. 10%)
- Mathews and Canon (1975: 574–5) found subjects were 5 times more likely to help an apparently injured man who had dropped some books when ambient noise was at normal levels than when a power lawnmower was running nearby (80% v. 15%)

Situationism in Ethics

(Doris & Stich 2006)

- Haney et al. (1973) describe how college students role-playing as “guards” in a simulated prison subjected student “prisoners” to intense verbal and emotional abuse
- Milgram (1974) found that subjects would repeatedly “punish” a screaming “victim” with realistic (but simulated) electric shocks at the polite request of an experimenter

Conclusions

- Research ethics teachers need to find ways to **stop** course participants to really observe and analyze..
 - their daily **routines** of studying and conducting science
 - their **moral heuristics** and **biases** induced by them
 - **moral disengagement mechanisms** that might be typical for them
 - **situational variation** in their ethical conduct

Conclusions

- Pedagogical methods and assignment types designed specifically for each purpose are needed!
They may include:
 - Portfolio tasks and essays of which instructions guide towards reflection of required kinds
 - Group discussions about problematic cases
 - Research ethics diaries
 - Enacted scenarios (drama pedagogy!)

Conclusions

- The Aristotelian viewpoint stresses the importance of starting the ethical education as early as possible
- Ways to improve your practical judgment:
 - Read up on the ethical theories, familiarize yourself with their typical applications and application problems
 - Spend some time with typical problematic cases. Analyze them from diverse perspectives. Discuss them with colleagues. Experience helps!

Conclusions

- Researchers and promoters of research ethics should not forget social structures governing action
 - Teaching research ethics to individual students and researchers may be futile if they work in an environment which sustains unethical behavior. The social reality they face may be such that the ethically correct choices are too demanding
 - The codes themselves may contain elements that are not universally valid and equally beneficial for all cultures and interest groups

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