On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

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Ethics in Science and Life Standards and Dilemmas
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What is the problem?
What is the problem?

Using the Superlative
What is the problem?

Using the Superlative

Foundation for Polish Science
What is the problem?

Slogan:
What is the problem?

Using the Superlative

Slogan: “support the best so they can become better”
Thesis in the form of recommendation

On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

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§ 1. Examples

§ 2. The axiological argument

§ 3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§ 4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples
§2. The axiological argument
§3. The argument from the philosophy of science
§4. Conclusions

Thesis in the form of recommendation

Do not use the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life
The defense plan

1. Examples
1. Examples
2. The axiological argument
The defense plan

1. Examples
2. The axiological argument
3. The argument from the philosophy of science
The defense plan

1. Examples
2. The axiological argument
3. The argument from the philosophy of science
4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
Examples

§ 1. Examples

Slogan: The ERC's mission is to encourage the highest quality research in Europe through competitive funding and to support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields, on the basis of scientific excellence.
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On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

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§1. Examples

Examples

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is an independent federal agency created in 1965. It is one of the largest funders of humanities programs in the United States.
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The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is an independent federal agency created in 1965. It is one of the largest funders of humanities programs in the United States.
Because democracy demands wisdom, NEH serves and strengthens our republic by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans. The Endowment accomplishes this mission by awarding grants for top-rated proposals examined by panels of independent, external reviewers.
Examples

§ 1. Examples

§ 2. The axiological argument

§ 3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§ 4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§ 1. Examples

§ 2. The axiological argument

§ 3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§ 4. Conclusions

Examples in Life
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§ 1. Examples

§ 2. The axiological argument

§ 3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§ 4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
Further examples

Science
Further examples

Science
the best scientist,
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist,
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher,
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher,
Further examples

Science

the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result,
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result, the greatest scientific discovery

Life
The most talented student, the most intelligent teacher, the most devoted preacher, the worst behaved boy, the best friend, the bravest man, the fairest person
Further examples

Science

the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result, the greatest scientific discovery

Life

The most talented student, the most intelligent teacher, the most devoted preacher, the worst behaved boy, the best friend, the bravest man, the fairest person
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result, the greatest scientific discovery

Life
The most talented student,
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result, the greatest scientific discovery

Life
The most talented student, the most intelligent teacher,
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result, the greatest scientific discovery

Life
The most talented student, the most intelligent teacher, the most devoted preacher,
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Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result, the greatest scientific discovery

Life
The most talented student, the most intelligent teacher, the most devoted preacher, the worst behaved boy,
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result, the greatest scientific discovery

Life
The most talented student, the most intelligent teacher, the most devoted preacher, the worst behaved boy, the best friend,
Further examples

Science
the best scientist, the most talented scientist, the best researcher, the top researcher, the most interesting result, the greatest scientific discovery

Life
The most talented student, the most intelligent teacher, the most devoted preacher, the worst behaved boy, the best friend, the bravest man, the fairest person
An introduction to axiology

Axiology:
An introduction to axiology

Axiology: the study of value, value theory
An introduction to axiology

Axiology: the study of value, value theory

The values:
An introduction to axiology

Axiology: the study of value, value theory
The values:
— are ideal qualities
An introduction to axiology

Axiology: the study of value, value theory
The values:
— are ideal qualities
— for their existence they don’t need other objects
An introduction to axiology

Axiology: the study of value, value theory
The values:
— are ideal qualities
— for their existence they don’t need other objects
— They are neither created nor relative, they do not depend on us
An introduction to axiology

Axiology: the study of value, value theory

The values:
— are ideal qualities
— for their existence they don’t need other objects
— They are neither created nor relative, they do not depend on us
— things are the carriers of values
The values:
— classification:
The values:
— classification: vital, utilitarian, cultural, cognitive, scientific, moral, or religious
— the carriers of positive values are called the *goods*
The values:
— classification: vital, utilitarian, cultural, cognitive, scientific, moral, or religious
— the carriers of positive values are called the goods
— are also ordered—then so-called hierarchies of values occur
The values:
— classification: vital, utilitarian, cultural, cognitive, scientific, moral, or religious
— the carriers of positive values are called the *goods*
— are also ordered—then so-called hierarchies of values occur
Hierarchies of values
Hierarchies of values

What are the axiological and formal assumptions of being the best?
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions

The betterness relation
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

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§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

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§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

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§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

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§3. The argument from the philosophy of science
§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

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On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

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§ 2. The axiological argument

§ 3. The argument from the philosophy of science

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On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

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§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

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§2. The axiological argument
§3. The argument from the philosophy of science
§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

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§4. Conclusions
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions

dere is no simple solution
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
The Cognitive Structure of Science

Ludwik Fleck (1896–1961)
The Cognitive Structure of Science

Ludwik Fleck (1896–1961)

cognition is a collective activity
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§ 1. Examples

§ 2. The axiological argument

§ 3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§ 4. Conclusions

The Cognitive Structure of Science

Ludwik Fleck (1896–1961)

cognition is a collective activity

⇓
Ludwik Fleck (1896–1961)

cognition is a collective activity

⇓

it is only possible on the basis of a certain body of knowledge acquired from other people.
The Cognitive Structure of Science

Exchanging ideas & a specific mood & a series of understandings and misunderstandings ⇒ a thought style
The Cognitive Structure of Science

Exchanging ideas & a specific mood & a series of understandings and misunderstandings ⇒ a thought style

\[ \downarrow \]
The Cognitive Structure of Science

Exchanging ideas & a specific mood & a series of understandings and misunderstandings ⇒ a thought style

↓

a thought collective arises
The Cognitive Structure of Science

Exchanging ideas & a specific mood & a series of understandings and misunderstandings ⇒ a thought style

⇓

a thought collective arises

⇓
The Cognitive Structure of Science

Exchanging ideas & a specific mood & a series of understandings and misunderstandings ⇒ a thought style

⇓

a thought collective arises

⇓

the collective divides itself into an esoteric circle (professionals) and an exoteric circle (laymen).
Incommensurability of thought styles

What is a fact to the members of a thought collective $A$ sometimes does not exist to the members of a thought collective $B$, and a thought that is significant and true to the members of $A$ may sometimes be false or meaningless for members of $B$. 
An example of a thought collective in Science & Humanities

On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
An example of a thought collective in Science & Humanities

- category theory vs. set theory (logic, foundation of mathematics)
An example of a thought collective in Science & Humanities

- category theory vs. set theory (logic, foundation of mathematics)
- Metaphysics of $X$—Philosophy ($X$ ranges over the set of ”Aristotle, Plato, Husserl, Whitehead, . . .”)

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§1. Examples
§2. The axiological argument
§3. The argument from the philosophy of science
§4. Conclusions
The second argument

*Individuals* can be *Individuals* only in a certain social space (research groups, thought collectives). Even ”being a misfit” is possible thanks to the surroundings. Being an individual is possible thanks to the social surroundings. Science is a complex body. Its parts are closely linked and dynamic.
Who needs to be the best?
Who needs to be the best?

- sportsman
Who needs to be the best?

- sportsman
- businessman
Who needs to be the best?

- sportsman
- businessman
- researcher?
Who needs to be the best?

- sportsman
- businessman
- researcher?
- politician
Who needs to be the best?

- sportsman
- businessman
- researcher?
- politician (science
Who needs to be the best?

- sportsman
- businessman
- researcher?
- politician (science +
Who needs to be the best?

- sportsman
- businessman
- researcher?
- politician (science + politics)
Who needs to be the best?

- sportsman
- businessman
- researcher?
- politician (science + politics = science policy)
A selection THE best in science and life
A selection THE best in science and life
On a Few Ethical Aspects of Using the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life

B. Skowron

§1. Examples
§2. The axiological argument
§3. The argument from the philosophy of science
§4. Conclusions

A selection THE best in science and life

⇒

it is based on the inadequate axiological structures
A selection THE best in science and life

⇓

it is based on the inadequate axiological structures

⇑
A selection \textbf{THE} best in science and life

\[ \uparrow \]

it is based on the inadequate axiological structures

\[ \uparrow \]

demoralization in science and life
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B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions

THE BEST EXCELLENCE
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§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions
Do not use the Superlative, Both in Science and in Life
What was not a thesis

— there is no difference between researcher, because they belong to the collective
What was not a thesis

— there is no difference between researcher, because they belong to the collective
— all are equal
What was not a thesis

— there is no difference between researcher, because they belong to the collective
— all are equal
— there is no better and worse researchers
What was not a thesis

— there is no difference between researcher, because they belong to the collective
— all are equal
— there is no better and worse researchers
— science does not need the prestige
What was not a thesis

— there is no difference between researcher, because they belong to the collective
— all are equal
— there is no better and worse researchers
— science does not need the prestige
— scholars do not need the elite
Thank you for your attention!
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B. Skowron

§1. Examples

§2. The axiological argument

§3. The argument from the philosophy of science

§4. Conclusions

