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### The Man Who Stands Most Alone: How Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People Addresses Science Ethics

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## The Man Who Stands Most Alone: How Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* Addresses Science Ethics

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Henrik Ibsen's 1882 play *An Enemy of the People* follows a recent discovery that reveals a contaminated water supply, threatening the economy and well-being of a small town. This play is one of many plays that work to create an open dialogue between Science and Art. As theatre director and theorist Anne Bogart argues, theatre and performance as a medium can open up a space to explore how society may discover and adjust to scientific breakthroughs. My research works to further illuminate the interconnection of Science and Art by examining how the theatre might engage with the questions and conflicts of Science Ethics.

My presentation will analyze both Ibsen's play and an acclaimed production of it directed by Thomas Ostermeier (2012) by applying principles of Science Ethics to a close reading of both texts. Specifically, I will examine how Act Utilitarianism, an ethical principle that discerns moral rights from wrongs based on appeasing the greater good (Eggleston & Miller), is illustrated in these works. Ibsen uses this principle to reveal a conflict between public health and private interests, as the characters grapple with what exactly is the "right" thing to do regarding the water supply. Ostermeier's staging of the play helps to highlight this conflict, using a chalkboard backdrop to mirror the ever changing mindset of the townspeople. Both the play and Ostermeier's production force the audience to consider the consequences of using Act Utilitarianism to guide our actions. Applications of this research will help to understand how theatre offers a new perspective to the open dialogue on the issues within science.

## Works Cited

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