

The Science Learning and Teaching Conference

20th -21st June

2007

Keele

Stand in another's shoes – a “values and rights” exercise to develop and assess students’ ethical awareness

Iain Coleman, Philip Warren, Petula Nurse, Paul Kirk, **Robert Thomas** and **Paul Walker**

School of Applied Sciences

University of Wolverhampton

Wulfruna Street

Wolverhampton

WV1 1SB

The workshop

- Introduction and some history
- Description of the activity
- Group based activity
- Peer/Self assessment
- Closing commentary

Some history

Early 1980s

Honours Special Study

Animal behaviour and use of animals in research

Late 1980s

“Morals, Animals and Man”

Introduced a more philosophical component

Late 1990s

“Biomedical Ethics”

Focus on animals reduced greater emphasis on
new “technologies”

Some history - teaching

Early 1980s

Honours Special Study

Entirely lecture based

Late 1980s

“Morals, Animals and Man”

Mainly lecture based – some groupwork

Late 1990s

“Biomedical Ethics”

Some keynote lectures – mainly groupwork

Some history - assessment

Early 1980s

Honours Special Study

Essay (4000 words) Exam questions

Late 1980s

“Morals, Animals and Man”

Essay (4000 words) Group based presentation
Poster, Morals and Values exercise

Late 1990s

“Biomedical Ethics”

Morals and Values exercise Contribution to debate

Module learning outcomes

On completion of the module, the student is expected to be able to:

- Present and maintain a coherent moral position on the experience of human subjects in biomedicine, and **sympathising with divergent and opposing ethical standpoints**
- Articulate that research with human subjects cannot be wholly isolated from its social, philosophical, ethnic and gender context.

Module Assessment

Component 1

Task 1

Morals and Values (seen) time constrained exercise

Evaluates 3 (brief) cases from 5 nominated ethical stances.

(1 hour)

35 %

Week 6

Component 2

Task 2

**Individual contribution to formal “Oxford Union Style”
debate.**

65%

Weeks 12/13

■ Week 5

Cases, stances and blank table of decisions given to the students

Students can spend some group time discussing the topics

■ Week 6

Students have 1 hour to complete the decisions table

A possible case

A twenty year-old girl, driving a motorcycle, crashes into a tree suffering severe injuries which destroy her mental faculties and ensure paralysis for life. A series of very expensive operations over a period of several years offer a 50-50 chance of restoring her mental powers. Without the operations she will remain in a coma and die quickly. She refused to wear a helmet and was driving recklessly at the time of the accident. She happens to be a very bright medical researcher working successfully towards a cure for cancer. Is there any ethical obligation to provide funds or procedures to try to cure her?

One of the stances

Stance 6: Contractarianism

Moral choice is based on the idea of contracts between people (social contract). People matter as ends in themselves and deserve equal and fair treatment justice). In order to make contracts fair the strong should have no greater bargaining power than the weak, and in practice should exercise any discrimination *in favour of the weak*. To do this people must agree on the principles of justice under a 'veil of ignorance' without knowing the position they will hold in society and ignorant of their own strengths and weaknesses. As in any bargaining for a contract each party will try to do the best for themselves but, since they are veiled in ignorance, asking what is best for themselves is the same as asking them to decide impartially what is best for everyone. This is actually a generalisation of the Golden Rule, or putting oneself in other people's shoes. Such impartial contractors will distribute benefits equally, *unless it is to the benefit of the least well off*.

Yes ✓

No

?

For: In coma – weakest contractor – discriminate in her favour. Best for everyone if she recovers enough to carry on research

Against/dubious: – better to be dead or paralysed? What would one prefer in her shoes? Need evidence of her moral, religious and lifestyle beliefs. Would she wish to be alive with reduced mental powers. Reduced mental powers would not allow her to research. Probable balance in her favour

In your groups

- Read through each individual case
- Read through each ethical stance
- Try to achieve a decision on each case, not from your own point of view but from the stances

Scoring

For each “box”

1 mark for the “yes”, “no” and “?” decision

2 marks for the “for” argument

2 marks for the “against” argument

Add together and divide by 75 to give percentage score

So how do our students do?

	A 70+ %	B 60-69%	C 50-59%	D 40-49%
2004	7	11	19	9
2005	5	10	13	7
2006	3	8	7	3
2007	4	4	3	2

So how do our students do?

	Morals and Values Exercise	Debate	Overall
2004	59%	65%	63%
2005	59%	67%	64%
2006	60%	68%	66%
2007	63%	69%	67%

and what do they think.....

From module evaluation forms
the amount of assessment was deemed
“about right” by over 90% of students.

One comment...

The values exercise was very helpful in
showing me how to approach ethical
problems for my debate topic”

To show you can't win 'em all....

One comment...

“The values exercise was very unfair in that I couldn't use my own views on the cases and didn't get as many marks because of that”

Options

- There is almost no limit to the dilemmas that might be offered

An anonymous couple travelled to England for a complicated delivery of their Siamese twin daughters, joined at the abdomen and with a fused spine. Unless the twins were surgically separated both would die. Mary, the weaker twin, whose brain was underdeveloped, would never be able to survive separated from Jodie. Jodie, who was strong and alert, had an 80-90% chance of dying if surgery was not performed. She had a good chance of surviving in the event of surgery, although, in all likelihood she would be severely handicapped and need medical attention throughout her life. In similar cases in the past, the surviving twin has sometimes died within six months of surgery. In other cases neither twin survives. The medical team at St Mary's Hospital, to which the twins were taken, had never done a successful separation of Siamese twins.

Different stances...

- It is possible to design different stances
- Could ask the students to interpret the dilemma as presenting themselves as Kant or Hume or some other philosopher of their choice?
- Can either give them the information regarding individual philosophers or they themselves can research their own choice of philosopher.

A multi-functional exercise?

- As a summative assessment
- As a formative assessment

In each of these cases peer or self assessment could be included as part of the exercise

- As a tutorial exercise
- In a “lecture” using classroom response systems such as “Turning Point”