

Teaching ethics and animal welfare to animal behaviour students: a case study in resource-based learning

- *Revalidation in 2003 revealed shortage of ethics teaching in BSc courses. Hence new module*
- *BI 3067 Ethics and Animal Welfare (15 credits)*

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Objectives of module

Module (Students to be able to) :

- Critically evaluate a variety of classical approaches to ethics in their application to issues of animal welfare, including: virtue ethics, utilitarianism, relativism, deontological and other rights based approaches,
- Demonstrate knowledge of the current legal protection offered to animal species in the UK and debate its effectiveness.
- Evaluate the position of various interested parties on the subject of animal welfare such as the RSPCA, medical researchers, sporting groups and conservation bodies.

Module Content

- 7.1 Approaches to ethics: virtue ethics, utilitarianism, deontological approaches, moral relativism, evolutionary approaches.
- 7.2 The Socio-legal context. Historical perspectives on human-animal relationships, development and extent of the law, role of welfare organisations, species-typical welfare guidelines, influence of society on human attitudes to animals.
- 7.3 Current legislation & external influences. Current & draft legislation. Social, political and economic influences on modernisation, change, application & enforcement of legislation.
- 7.4 Case studies. The standpoint of organisations such as the RSPCA, sporting bodies, conservation groups, medical researchers and organisations offering an alternative approach to medical research.

Some problems:

- Ethics a very messy subject .
Fundamental disagreements about methods, premises and conclusions
- Students very little experience of philosophical reasoning
- Ethical thinking helped by discussion
- Ethics and welfare needs to be contextualised in relation to real issues and current practices

Solutions

- Start by outlining different approaches and traditions
- Start gently
- Engineer discussions into sessions in class and on line. Force articulation of ideas through writing and feedback
- Use visiting speakers from various interested parties

The structure of the Module

- Parts 1 and 2 (10 weeks): **Philosophy, welfare and the law** (JHC and LB) On line and booklet based learning. Lectures and seminars. Students could choose to study entirely at home (2004-5)
- Part 2 (3 weeks). **Applied Ethics** - visiting speakers : Anti- vivisection, Blue Cross, Compassion in World Farming, Pharmaceutical Research, BASC, RSPCA

Qualitative feedback and reflections

- Students valued the written resources
- On-line method valued by those who chose it.
- Hard work by tutor in keeping in contact
- Students reluctant to take on line test or use discussion group
- Overall very positive evaluation of the module
- Students found ethical theory challenging

The Future

- Possibly restructure:
 - (i) History of attitudes to animals
 - (ii) Some contemporary issues and dilemmas
 - (iii) Ethical theory as applied to issues
 - (iv) Morality as natural history