

An Appropriate Role for Ethics in Teaching Contemporary Issues¹

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ABSTRACT: There seems to be general agreement among animal scientists that training in contemporary issues is an appropriate goal of animal science curricula. One approach is based on the view that public policy issues embody moral dilemmas that arise when the moral perspectives (values) of opposing groups are incompatible. Based on this view, an understanding of such issues requires some training in ethics. More specifically, knowledge of major moral theories and the nature of values is necessary to identify and analyze the moral components of issues. An appreciation for ethics also provides insight into addressing issues in a morally responsible manner. The plurality of values and the contextual nature of policy issues precludes solutions based on application of universal moral principles. Nevertheless, informed

judgments, based on the collective wisdom of individuals, frequently offer solutions that address opposing values. Such judgments can be attained when those affected by issues form communities, attempt to achieve a collective understanding of the problem, and, if possible, construct a common set of values that facilitates consensus. Based on this analysis, issues courses should facilitate the development of learning communities wherein students and teachers critically analyze (i.e., deconstruct) and reconstruct issues in ways that enhance understanding and instill a respect for diverse moral perspectives. An expression of such understanding and respect is the ability to distinguish between situations when consensus offers fair solutions and when it subjects minority groups to the tyranny of the majority.

Key Words: Ethics, Teaching

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Introduction

Many animal science departments have incorporated into their curricula courses that deal with public policy issues pertaining to agriculture (Swanson, 1999). The nature of such courses presumably varies depending on how those who develop these courses perceive such issues. The approach I will discuss is based on the view that policy issues involve conflicts in values that arise from different ideologies, or world-views. Two features of issues make resolution difficult. First, competing values are often grounded in incompatible moral frameworks. Second, the contextual

nature of issues precludes universal application of a particular moral theory or ethical methodology. For these reasons, I am skeptical that ethics can be used to unequivocally settle issues. However, ethics can be useful in helping students illuminate and understand competing views on how issues should be resolved. More specifically, an understanding of the ideologies that underlie issues can help students identify the moral considerations an issue raises. This insight can help students achieve a collective understanding directed toward making informed judgments.

The Nature of Policy Issues

The issues that are of academic interest to animal scientists are public policy issues. These are questions regarding the norms that govern our behavior: How should we manage farm animals? How should food be processed? How should we use land and water? These

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questions are contested because two or more groups advocate different policies. There are different explanations for why groups might support different policies. A view commonly expressed in animal agriculture is that issues arise from a lack of, or a misunderstanding of, factual information. This view reflects the heavy influence of logical positivism in animal science (Thompson, 1999). Logical positivism is the view that because the claims of science are empirically based, they are the only kind of claims that depict an objective reality and therefore must be foundational for all other claims (e.g., moral). Such a view gives rise to the notion that issues can be resolved through "education" programs. For example, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association lists on its Web site a list of "myths" allegedly disseminated by "anti-meat groups," followed by the "facts." Similarly, the Animal Industry Foundation provides a booklet, a brochure, and a video discussing the myths and facts concerning animal agriculture. This view is also expressed by Kastner (1995), who differentiates between "real" and "perceived" issues. Although such approaches provide advocates of animal agriculture material to support and promote their positions, it is questionable that these education programs influence the opinions of individuals who hold opposing views. Moreover, positivistic approaches promote indoctrination rather than an understanding of policy issues, and they are, therefore, inappropriate as pedagogical tools (Schillo, 1997). The approach to issues advocated by Weber et al. (1992, 1995) illustrates the concerns I raise about so-called education programs. These authors argue that policy issues involving animal agriculture should be viewed as risk assessment problems that can be resolved using "policy education methodologies." Although these authors advocate the use of communities of interest groups to discuss issues, they reject as legitimate the views of "extremists" and advocate risk-benefit as the *only* perspective pertinent to policy issues. This seems to be an attempt to portray policy issues in a way that animal scientists can establish authority and control (i.e., using the empirical information they generate as the basis for deciding issues) rather than an attempt to illuminate the complexities of policy issues and to develop solutions that are fair to a diverse populace.

The nature of the abortion issue supports the claim that availability of factual information does not preclude or resolve conflict. Both pro- and antichoice groups understand the medical facts associated with abortion, and each group has used these facts to support their views. Likewise, some noteworthy opponents of animal agriculture, understand and use

information generated by the proponents of the meat industry to support their arguments. Carol Adams (1990) relies on meat science textbooks to support her feminist critical theory of vegetarianism. Jeremy Rifkin (1992) cites extensive evidence generated by the animal agriculture community to support his argument advocating a reduction in beef production and consumption. Simply put, facts do not speak for themselves. Facts require interpretation, and interpretation reflects the perspective of those who generate or use the facts.

The reason that empirical evidence alone does not usually resolve public policy issues is because most of these issues embody genuine moral dilemmas, that is, cases in which two or more competing courses of action are supported by reasons that seem right and decisive (Nagel, 1979). Decisions in these cases are difficult even when the pertinent facts are known, when the pros and cons of opposing positions are clearly defined, and when the outcomes of these positions are well characterized and their probabilities known. Nagel (1979) suggests that the reason these cases are difficult to resolve is that they involve fundamentally different perspectives that can be neither prioritized nor ignored. According to this, public policy issues are analogous to the question, Is Figure 1 a drawing of a duck or rabbit? Some people see a rabbit, whereas others see a duck. We cannot ignore the duck and rabbit answers; most people see one or the other, or both at different times. Although one's answer depends on point of view (e.g., a rabbit producer vs a duck hunter), the answers need not be arbitrary; they can be based on sound reasons (e.g., a bill, long ears).

The Nature of Values

Types of Values

Values are ideals that motivate certain actions or behaviors. For example, a man might refrain from stealing his neighbor's car because he holds in high esteem the idea that individuals have a right to property. Public policy issues arise when there is conflict between such motivating ideals. Nagel (1979) identifies five fundamental types of value that give rise to conflict: specific obligations to other people or institutions, general rights that everyone has, utility, perfectionist ends, and commitments to one's own projects or undertakings. Specific obligations are those that are acquired via a deliberate undertaking or special relationship (e.g., joining the armed forces or being a parent). Rights, as commonly construed in our

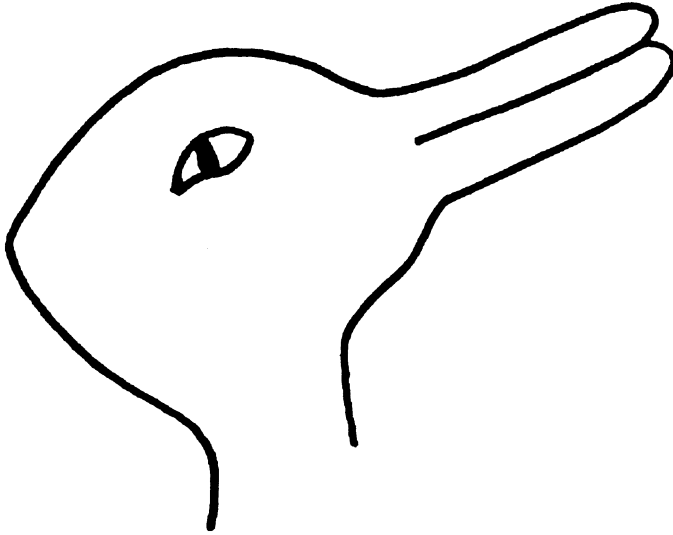


Figure 1. Is this a duck, or a rabbit? Each answer can be supported by sound reasons. The answers can neither be prioritized nor ignored. They reflect different perspectives grounded in different life experiences. Likewise, public policy issues involve different perspectives regarding how issues should be resolved; the perspectives should not be ignored or ranked.

society, are moral boundaries; that is, rights of individuals to do certain things or not to be treated in a certain way place moral constraints on our actions. Utility refers to the general welfare or general good; it includes all aspects of benefit and harm to all people (or all sentient beings). Perfectionist ends or values refer to the intrinsic value of something apart from its utility. Examples include works of art, ecosystems, and practices such as basic science or mathematics. Private commitments are values aside from the reasons that lead to making these commitments; that is, activities that take on substantial importance once initiated (e.g., pursuits to run a marathon or isolate and characterize a particular neuropeptide).

Conflicts in Values

Conflicts can arise both within and between these types of values (Nagel, 1979). The so-called animal rights debate is an example of a conflict within a value type. The issue here is not about competing values, but about what actions, policies, and practices will best serve a shared value. For example, Varner (1994) notes that researchers and conventional agriculturalists view the use of animals in terms similar to those of philosopher Peter Singer, author of

Animal Liberation, an important book for the animal rights movement. These groups and Singer are concerned about maximizing benefits and minimizing harms in the world. The disagreement between Singer and the agricultural and research communities involves different views regarding what is beneficial and (or) to what extent any benefits of these practices outweigh the harms. Singer asserts that the human benefits derived from animal agriculture and most research do not outweigh the resulting harms experienced by nonhuman animals. Agriculturists and researchers disagree but concede that procedures that are excessively painful or stressful should be employed only when the benefits to humanity appear to be great.

Thompson (1996) provides examples of environmental policy dilemmas that involve conflicts between value types. For example, a group of developers might be in direct conflict with a group of farmers regarding the use of a local water supply. The developers, seeking expansion of water and sewerage service to attract light industry, might rely on utility to support their position, arguing that the resulting economic growth will benefit the general welfare of the community. In contrast, farmers, who have traditionally used this water to support their agricultural enterprises, might argue that they have a right to use this water and that such a right places absolute constraints on what the government (or anyone else) can do with the water supply. The positions of the two groups are grounded in two well-known and generally accepted moral orientations. Both groups offer morally appropriate reasons for their positions, making each of these positions seem right.

Complexity of Values

Conflicts within and between value types are rooted in differences in perspectives. Neither type of conflict is easy to resolve, but it seems that those occurring within value types offer the best possibilities for convergence. Varner (1994) supports this view in his analysis of the animal rights debate. Conflicts between values are the most difficult to resolve because values, such as obligations, rights, utility, perfectionist ends, and private commitments, do not have a unitary source; i.e. they are formally different (Nagel, 1979). For example, utilitarian value is outcome- or goal-centered; it takes into account the number of individuals whose interests would be affected by an action. Rights, on the other hand, is an agent-centered value; it takes into account what may and may not be done to individuals, regardless of outcome. Different

points of view (e.g., those of developers and farmers) tend to lead to an emphasis on different types of value. Human beings can view the world from many perspectives, each of which can give rise to a different set of moral commitments (i.e. values) that can conflict. Sometimes an individual can view an issue from several perspectives. Frequently, a group of individuals share a common perspective.

The work of Gilligan (1995) supports this claim. In her original work, Gilligan reported a gender-based difference in the way individuals approach ethical questions. Whereas men are more likely to defer to universal principles of justice, women commonly take into account particular contexts and consider the possible effects of their decisions on the well-being of the involved parties. Gilligan (1995) refers to the former approach as a "justice" approach and the later as a "care" approach and attributes these differences to differences in experiences that typically characterize the lives of men and women in our society. Although later studies challenged the claim that these differences reflect only gender, the work is important because it demonstrates that perspective, or social location, influences values (Moody-Adams, 1991). More recently, critical race theorists have argued that moral perspectives are also influenced by race. For example, they suggest that the racist perspectives of those white men who developed our constitution underlie laws and policies that maintain the social subordination of racial and ethnic minorities (Minow, 1990; Matsuda et al., 1993).

Understanding Policy Issues

If public policy issues involve moral dilemmas rooted in different moral perspectives, then what type of knowledge is required to understand these conflicts? Certainly knowledge of many fields may be required to fully comprehend an issue such as animal rights. However, moral knowledge, or moral epistemology, is especially important because issues are grounded in competing moral values and their applications. One moral epistemology is foundational in nature; this is the view that there is an objective, universal set of moral principles applicable to all people, in all situations, at all times. However, this interpretation is incompatible with the view that public policy issues are moral dilemmas reflecting legitimately different moral perspectives. Although a unitary moral theory might exist, it has not yet been discovered (Nagel, 1979). Furthermore, policy issues are not settled by deferring to a single, well-established moral theory. In

fact, competing groups may not even be aware of the moral theories underlying their positions (Thompson, 1996).

A moral epistemology consonant with the view that issues involve fundamentally different moral perspectives is that an understanding of moral issues requires knowledge of the diverse historical contexts that give rise to the values of which these issues are composed. For example, an understanding of a Black student group's position advocating a ban on hate speech requires knowledge of the history of Blacks in our society (Matsuda et al., 1993). Likewise, the historic significance of agriculture in our society might provide insight into disputes between agribusiness and advocates of sustainable agriculture. This means that viable moral epistemology must be plural and contextual, based on actual life experiences, not singular and universal, based on abstract theory (Jagger, 1995). This is not to say that moral theories are useless, however. Moral theory works best as a resource for discussion making, not as a paradigm for moral decision making (Nagel, 1979). For example, familiarity with goal-, rights- and duty-based theories is a necessary prerequisite for identifying and assessing the morally relevant features of policy issues such as land use.

Resolving Policy Issues

Although achieving a moral understanding of issues is important, we want to go beyond this. Ultimately, society is interested in resolving issues in morally satisfying ways. Unfortunately, there is no algorithm for doing this. As we have seen, issues are much too complicated and contextual for such an approach. But if there is no universal method for solving issues, how can they be addressed in a morally responsible manner?

Respect for Diversity

Nagel (1979) argues that the moral perspectives of issues should be neither ignored nor ranked. Nagel appeals to logic to support this view; i.e. values are formally different and therefore cannot be prioritized. There are also epistemological and moral reasons for considering all pertinent perspectives and not making one subservient. In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1978) asserts that "if all of mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that person than he, if he had the power,

would be justified in silencing mankind." For Mill, the suppression of opinions inflicts a harm on the general welfare of the human race. Silencing opinions robs humanity of opinions that might be true as well as wrong opinions that might help clarify and (or) support existing views. Mill's view appears to presuppose that there is some objective moral reality. Although I am skeptical that this is the case concerning public policy issues, Mill's point is still important. All perspectives, including those held by the smallest minority, are necessary to provide a comprehensive view of such issues; i.e., an understanding of all views is a prerequisite for objectivity. For example, a global understanding of agriculture requires that we understand the diverse perspectives of both industrialized and agrarian societies. In addition to robbing humanity of an objective view, the exclusion of minority views also inflicts specific harm on the minority groups that hold these views. To trivialize or ignore a moral perspective is to trivialize or reject the life experiences and identities of those who hold such views. For example, Wendell Berry (1977) has argued that policies of the United States Department of Agriculture have favored the values embraced by agribusiness rather than those of rural communities, thereby contributing to the demise of the so-called family farm. Dealing with issues in a responsible manner requires that we adopt methods that are consistent with the pluralistic nature of morality.

Practical Wisdom

The plurality of issues poses a difficult problem for teaching issues courses, let alone resolving actual public policy issues. How can one remain respectful of diverse, sometimes incompatible views and hope to settle such conflicts? Nagel (1979) suggests that judgment allows us to make decisions that prove to be appropriate or correct but are not fully justified by general moral principles. According to the philosopher Aristotle (1985), this is a "practical wisdom"; a knowledge of particulars that comes from experience. It is a wisdom that reveals what is necessary for the good life. Those who possess a practical wisdom are skilled in making decisions regarding what is good for humanity.

Ethics is only one of many essential resources for making informed judgments about issues. Thompson (1996) asserts that some water use issues are primarily technical, not ethical. In support of this view, he notes that technical, not ethical, knowledge provides solutions to some disputes over water. For

example, construction of a reservoir would increase water supplies for community development, thereby enhancing the general welfare of the community while addressing farmers' rights to adequate supplies of water. If we consider any public policy issue, it becomes clear that many fields of knowledge (biology, chemistry, physics, economics, demography) are necessary for making informed decisions about issues. It seems unlikely, however, that policy issues can be resolved without being mindful of the underlying values at stake. The reason a technical solution is acceptable to competing groups is because it addresses their moral concerns. Furthermore, technology is not value-neutral; it presupposes some ideology. For example, a reservoir might be acceptable to those who value rights and (or) utility, but not to those who hold radical views about the environment. That is, groups with a more ecocentric value system might reject assigning human welfare and rights a higher priority than the intrinsic value of the ecosystem affected by the construction of a reservoir.

Deconstruction and Reconstruction

Aristotle (1985) views practical wisdom as a virtue of individuals; i.e., a person possessing practical wisdom is one who can deliberate on what is good and bad for humanity. Likewise, Nagel (1979) seems to emphasize individuals, implying that an individual can view issues from multiple perspectives and employ pertinent fields of knowledge to make judgments. I have doubts about the claim that one person can have an understanding of all relevant perspectives. It seems more likely that one's knowledge is limited by one's experiences. Therefore, it seems that informed judgments about policy issues should be made within communities of individuals possessing diverse perspectives and a wide variety of expertise.

Communitarians advocate a communal value system that arises from a collective understanding of the world. This is achieved via a process of deconstruction/reconstruction (Frazer and Lacey, 1993). Briefly, deconstruction involves a community-based analysis of a particular world-view, with the purpose of exposing implications of its logic for the community (Thompson, 1996). For example, feminist deconstruction of liberal ideology reveals that an emphasis on individualism and a corresponding emphasis on rights fails to address adequately the welfare of certain disenfranchised groups (Frazer and Lacy, 1993; Callahan and Roberts, 1997). Deconstruction is followed by reconstruction, i.e., restructuring an ideology to address some of the problems revealed by deconstruction. For

example, much feminist reconstruction of political theory down-plays the importance of individual rights, includes a greater emphasis on relationships among individuals, and promotes caring as an important value (Frazer and Lacy, 1993; Tronto, 1993). Deconstruction/reconstruction has potential as a means to resolve issues as well as a pedagogical approach for issues courses. However, several concerns are worthy of consideration.

First of all, some issues might turn out to be moral dilemmas that cannot be resolved. In other words, the perspectives of opposing groups might be so incompatible that a collective agreement is impossible. In this case, the only responsible solution seems to be to support the coexistence of the opposing communities.

A second and related concern deals with power. Within communities, how can we ensure that minority viewpoints are not marginalized or that those who hold such views are not excluded from the community to begin with? Also, how should our political system deal with the coexistence of competing communities? In particular, how can we prevent groups that espouse less-popular viewpoints from being subject to a "tyranny of the majority" (Mill, 1978)? More than toleration is required to sustain such a viable plurality. Groups that have been tolerated, but ignored or subordinated may require assistance so they can live their lives fully. For example, although most states have repealed laws forbidding homosexual behavior, homosexual marriages are not recognized formally by federal and most state governments. Therefore, homosexual couples do not have access to the same insurance or tax benefits as heterosexual couples (Callahan, 1999). Coping with multiple ideologies may require drastic changes in social and political policy. It is far beyond the scope of this paper to devise a political theory that treats diverse groups fairly. I mention these problems to highlight the challenge of dealing with the plurality of values embedded in public policy issues and to remind those of us who teach issues courses that consensus may not always be possible, or even desirable.

Pedagogical Considerations

A Role for Ethics

Contemporary issues courses are not courses in moral philosophy (ethics). However, it seems that if students are to understand and attempt to resolve such issues they must do some moral philosophy. What then is an appropriate role for ethics in teaching

contemporary issues courses? Ethics can serve two important roles in teaching issues courses. First, it can be used to help students recognize and understand the moral aspects of policy issues. Second, ethical principles can be used to help students deal with these issues in a morally responsible way.

Recognizing and Understanding Moral Issues

It would be inappropriate for issues courses to focus only on the analysis of various moral theories. Nevertheless, some familiarity with major moral orientations or frameworks is necessary if students are to recognize and understand the morally relevant features of issues. Thus, I recommend that students read and discuss moral theories that typically underlie public policy issues. If students are to identify values such as utility, rights, and duty, then they should understand what these values are and why they might be important. Exposing students to classic moral theories such as John Stuart Mill's theory of utilitarianism, John Locke's theory of natural rights, and Immanuel Kant's theory of moral duty will help them establish a foundation in moral thought.

It is also helpful if students read and discuss contemporary applications of these theories and be given opportunities to identify these moral orientations in current essays, editorials, and position statements. For example, Singer (1993) and Regan (1983) apply different moral principles (utility and rights, respectively) to support the conclusion that nonhuman animals should not be used for food or research. Students in classes I have taught have identified principles of utility in arguments supporting rural development, biotechnology and animal research as well as rights-based arguments in articles dealing with the use of various natural resources. Although it is helpful to provide students with a few good examples of such arguments, they gain confidence in their abilities when they are given assignments that require them to locate and analyze articles dealing with the issues that most interest them.

In addition to identifying the dominant values underlying such articles, it is important that students gain an appreciation for the perspectives that give rise to these values. Anecdotal accounts of issues are particularly helpful in this regard. These help students understand the relationship between personal life experiences and values. It is also helpful to encourage students to examine their own life experiences and attempt to relate these to the value systems they embrace. One approach (Merchant, 1992) is to have students reflect on their family

histories and discuss how these have influenced their own views concerning particular policy issues or how they relate to the environment.

Moral Imagination

A challenging goal is to help students gain insight into the viewpoints with which they might disagree or with which they are unfamiliar. This requires the development and(or) stimulation of moral imagination, i.e., the capacity to imagine what it feels like to be a person directly affected by a policy (Callahan, 1998). Such imagination not only helps students understand moral issues, but it sometimes allows them to see moral issues that were previously unnoticed. For example, imagining what it might be like to be a victim of violence might provide insight into the aversion one might have to the meat packing industry, and perhaps even the consumption of meat. The use of moral imagination is particularly important in classes where students are homogeneous regarding their experiences and opinions on major agricultural issues. Most students and instructors are more accustomed to the traditional liberal values that are dominant in our society; primarily the rights of individual humans. They are less familiar with alternative value systems arising from the life experiences of minority groups, e.g., those that might advocate the extension of rights to nonhuman animals, intrinsic value of ecosystems, or socialistic values. In order to address this problem, I incorporate readings that expose students to radical ideas that are critical of the dominant views in our society. For example, Carol Adams's *Sexual Politics of Meat* (Adams, 1990) and Carolyn Merchant's *Radical Ecology* (Merchant, 1992) highlight ecofeminist perspectives concerning agriculture and environmental policy. Daniel Quinn's novel *Ishmael* provides an opportunity for students to look at their culture from the ecocentric perspective of traditional tribal cultures. I use such readings to provide background for role-playing exercises that reveal the life experiences and moral perspectives that underlie certain issues.

Behaving in a Morally Responsible Way

In addition to providing the means for identifying and understanding the morally relevant features of issues, principles of ethics can provide guidance in dealing with issues. I recently argued that an important educational goal in animal science is to teach students how to make judgments (Schillo, 1997). This is an especially important skill in courses dealing with issues. Aristotle's notion (Aristotle,

1985) of a practical wisdom involves moral experience. Issues courses can contribute to the ethical development of students by providing opportunities for them to develop practical wisdom and encouraging them to make judgments about issues. We can expose them to a variety of particular issues, require them to research pertinent features, and consider the possible outcomes of proposed solutions. Obviously, students cannot fully develop practical wisdom in one course. However, they can begin to understand what is required to make an informed decision, and they can be encouraged to make and evaluate their own decisions. They can also learn from the work of other, more experienced individuals, who have made judgments for which the consequences are known and assessable.

Using Deconstruction and Reconstruction

I recently advocated a learning environment in which students and teachers establish a learning community wherein members can safely question, explore, and synthesize ideas (Schillo, 1997). This is particularly well suited to issues courses and can take the form of deconstruction/reconstruction. In other words, students can identify the conflicting ideologies that give rise to issues and can examine the implications of these views on themselves and other groups that might be affected by these issues. At the very least, such exercises reveal and clarify the sources of the conflict and possibly reveal logical inconsistencies in some of the positions. Further analysis might reveal points on which groups could converge. For example, the revelation that two parties involved in an animal rights debate share similar values suggests that a compromise might be reached (e.g., adoption of more humane management practices or research methods). Alternatively, a solution might be realized that can address even diverse values. For example, a particular technology might offer a solution that preserves certain rights, while contributing to the general good of a community (Thompson, 1996). The development of solutions to address the morally relevant features of issues is reconstruction, i.e., creating and applying a new, collectively developed value system to the issue.

Deconstruction seems to be an attainable goal for issues courses. As a form of critical thinking (i.e., analysis and critical evaluation), this is a well-accepted and appropriate educational goal (Schillo, 1997). The extent to which students should or even engage in reconstruction is unclear. My own experience suggests that some classes can effectively manage reconstructive exercises and that these are viewed favorably by students. An effective reconstructive

tion exercise has the following features. First, it is important to establish a specific focus or goal. For example, my students in a recent class elected to analyze androcentric and ecocentric value systems, and to develop a collective value system that addresses their concerns about the environment. Second, students must have a moral understanding, meaning that they understand the nature of values, the perspectives that give rise to them, and their limitations and implications. Third, students must gather enough pertinent information to characterize the context of the issue. Such information might include demographic information regarding the parties involved with the issue, relevant scientific and economic data, specific case studies that illustrate or clarify the problem, or provide possible solutions. Fourth, students must be given ample time to develop a collective understanding of the problem and construct an approach to the problem based on this understanding. Thompson (1999) recently outlined the conditions necessary to facilitate this type of understanding. Briefly, there should be an environment that encourages open, interactive communication concerning a diverse set of views. If diverse viewpoints are not expressed by a class, then the teacher can employ role playing to bring into the discussion viewpoints that may be unpopular. Fifth, there should be some type of closure to the exercise. For the example I mentioned, students developed a written project outlining their goals, the methodology they employed, their characterization and analysis of alternative value systems, and their reconstructed value system. In this particular case, students succeeded in attaining a collective understanding of the problem and reached a consensus regarding their reconstructed value system. As I mentioned above, such convergence may not always be possible, especially when time is limited. In these cases, it might be appropriate for students to report the bases of their disagreements and to construct parallel solutions, reflecting alternative views. It seems unfair and unreasonable to require that students reach consensus on policy issues, when more experienced individuals have difficulties with this.

Rarely do judgments result in a complete resolution of a policy issue. There are usually so-called moral remainders, which are side issues that remain unresolved. For example, the construction of a reservoir might protect water rights of farmers while contributing to the general welfare of the community, but questions regarding where it should be constructed and who should finance construction persist (Thompson, 1996). When possible, it is beneficial for students to identify these residual disagreements. Such a

process permits closure yet outlines future work.

There is a risk that those who deal with issues will become frustrated by the failure to attain consensus. As a result of their frustration, they resort to a mindless relativism, in which the idea that policy can only be arbitrary, based on whatever view is most popular within a group. Failure to reach consensus does not mean that there are no right or best answers. It may be that more time and more discussion are required to work out an appropriate solution. Alternatively, there may be more than one right answer and that the focus of future efforts should be on preserving the views and the groups that hold them. The failure to reach consensus in the classroom does not necessarily mean that we have failed. Indeed, it might mean that we have developed a sophisticated view of the issue; one that is respectful of diverse viewpoints.

Implications

Courses dealing with contemporary issues offer an opportunity to enhance the ethical development of students. By portraying public policy issues as moral dilemmas, and teaching students to identify, understand, and critically analyze the morally relevant features of issues, students can begin to develop a practical moral wisdom that will help them deal with issues in a responsible manner. Although such an approach does not automatically prioritize the values supported by the animal agriculture community, it can make students more aware of and respectful of diversity.

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