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Teaching Economics and Ethics

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Teaching economics and ethics

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Abstract: As an interdisciplinary field, economics and ethics has been taught in many different ways, including in my experience teaching the course over many years. This paper describes the challenges teaching this subject involves and the strategy I ultimately adopted for doing so after trying different approaches. This strategy was meant to address the needs of a heterogenous collection of students, many of whom had limited knowledge of economics and were likely not take many additional courses in it. The course was structured around four modules opposed to one another in two pairs:

(1) Ways economics influences ethics: The market vision
(2) Ways economics influences ethics: Rationality and efficiency
(3) Ways ethics influences economics: Moral limits of markets
(4) Ways ethics influences economics: Taming the market

Each module was built around real world applications. The course finished with a fifth module in the form of a capstone exercise – Rationing health care – that required students rank who had a priority for care from four individual cases of varying life circumstances drawn from Cookson and Dolan (2000). Students used the views they had developed in the first four modules to do this, and then explained and discussed both their rankings and the overall rankings that prevailed over all students. The course was taught both in person and online and in both long and short teaching terms, emphasized student interaction and openness to different views of how economics and ethics can be connected, and argued for democratic values in pluralist societies.

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Teaching economics and ethics

There is a great deal that has been thoughtfully written with great care about the subject of economics and ethics. Normative thinking has always been a significant part of economics, and the richness of ethics makes the relationship between the two fields complex and deserving of serious investigation. This paper, however, takes on a more modest task, namely, discussing how the subject of economics and ethics can be taught at the university level. This task is in some ways simpler and some ways more difficult than investigating economics and ethics itself because it both builds upon some fairly basic insights and ideas regarding how they are connected, but also in this selectivity obscures much of the complexity that connection involves. Both economics and ethics, of course, are many-sided fields of thinking with long, changing histories. We can say many things about each that are straightforward and stand without too much debate, but we also know that behind this are vast controversies and many unsettled, maybe irresolvable questions. Thus, how can one, ought one, teach economics and ethics?

The paper reviews my own experience teaching of the course over many years, and uses this experience to argue that *wha*t the subject involves depends importantly on *how* it is taught to students where this needs to take into account who they are. To begin, who they are in universities is almost always young people with at best a beginning understanding of the subject's two contributing fields. Given the complexity and depth of economics and ethics, this suggests that teaching a subject that puts these two fields together is as likely as not to be an unsuccessful venture. Yet, as I describe the different strategies I adopted to overcome the particular challenges its teaching raises, not only did a preferred strategy emerge, but I argue a specific understanding of the subject itself also emerged, not through foresight nor deep understanding of economics and ethics as a single subject but rather by grasping how students made their way to determining how they believed economics and ethics can go together.

In the first section of this paper, then, I begin by discussing how the challenges of teaching economics and ethics derive from its nature as an interfield domain of thinking. The second section goes on to discuss the first two sets of strategies I used in my teaching, together with what I believe I learned was problematic about them. The third section discusses at more length how I ultimately settled on teaching the subject based on what came out of my experience in the first two rounds, and provides some detail about the structure of course I taught for a number of years (both in person and online). The fourth and last section comments briefly on the overall pedagogical lessons I believe were learned in this evolution of my teaching the course, and links how we teach to how democratic, pluralist societies can hopefully function.

1 Economics and ethics as an interfield domain and its teaching problems

What is the status of economics and ethics as a field of research and investigation? That economics and ethics falls between two different disciplines makes it an interfield domain of research. This arguably creates special challenges for it that research within its two contributing fields does not face. First, as an interfield domain, economics and ethics is neither just economics nor just ethics, thus lacks a natural home in either field, and this can mean it gets seen as a lesser subject of investigation in each. Second, since it is generally pursued and investigated differently in its two contributing fields, though it is recognized as a single field of research, there is usually little consensus across these fields about what that involves. While some interfield domains of research are expanding and perhaps more dynamic than their contributing fields – biomedical engineering might be an example – economics and ethics seems to be more an 'orphan' field developing slowly at best and also not much prized in itself nor by its parents.

These challenges create two practical problems associated with teaching economics and ethics. First, students are confused by how its teaching either in economics or in ethics/philosophy programs can ignore the other contributing field where they understand it can also be taught. On the one hand, there seems to be duplication across fields where it is taught, but on the other what gets 'duplicated' also seems to be different because the subject is approached differently in different fields. I call this the 'duplication/something's missing' problem. Nominally there is one interfield domain of investigation, but it seems really there is not. Second, there is the fact that wherever in universities economics and ethics is taught this generally occurs at the introductory, undergraduate level. There, students have limited understanding of the field in which the course is being taught, so they are not in a position to judge either the foundations assumed in the field teaching it, or, also likely understanding «little of other fields where it may be taught, what other, different foundations there are for teaching it. I call this the foundations problem.

In my experience, many of the students who take economics and ethics courses are strongly motivated to investigate its subject matter.[1] They're intellectually curious and often have strong intuitions that economic life is not independent of ethical concerns, a view they also believe is contrary to what they think most people in the world believe. Thus, they're looking to develop their thinking, have identified themselves as having distinct views on the subject, and potentially see the course as personally valuable to them. The two problems above, then, risk disappointing them. The 'duplication/something's missing' problem may make them think they do not really understand the subject, because they got only part of what's taught about it. The foundations problem makes the subject seem more obscure than they thought, possibly causing them to lose confidence in their own views.

I taught economics and ethics at the undergraduate level in an economics department, and went through a number of different ways of delivering and organizing the course.[2] The changes in how I taught it were driven largely by my perception I was failing both in teaching the subject and in satisfying the students' interest. The two problems above only became clear to me over time, and the strategy I finally adopted later in my teaching of the course only gradually became apparent to me. Basically, they were the result of hearing years of student discussions, comments, reactions, and opinions, and wondering what was behind them. I'll come back to how the course I ultimately settled on addresses them but start with how earlier versions of how I taught the course committed those problems.

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[1] Some of course just think the course will be easy, neither too much of either economics or ethics.
[2] Though I taught in an economics department, that I was also trained in philosophy perhaps made the course I taught a bit more sensitive to the 'duplication/something's missing' problem.

2 From the beginning: Rounds One and Two

I began where it was logical for an economist to begin teaching economics and ethics, namely with the expert literature on the subject, which for me that was Daniel Hausman and Michael McPherson's *Economic Analysis and Moral Philosophy* (2006). Hausman is a philosopher and McPherson is an economist, but it is the former's knowledge of both economics and economic philosophy that determines the book's coverage and especially its level of discussion. It is not an easy book to understand and appreciate even for those knowledgeable about the field. The history of economics and economic philosophy coverage the book provides refers one to scholarly debates over the nature of neoclassical and standard economics that have a long history and make use of considerable specialized knowledge. Thus, the book as a teaching tool is really better suited for advanced students, particularly graduate students in economics or philosophy.

Indeed the book did not work very well for my undergraduate students. Though taught as an upper level rather than introductory level course, in many ways it went beyond what they could understand, and accordingly required that I continually repackage complex debates into more simple frameworks. For example, a fundamental issue for economics and ethics is the nature of preferences. There are many critiques of the standard view which often raise complex technical issues associated with the axioms said to govern them. The students I taught had taken intermediate microeconomics but most had never heard of these axioms. This meant I had to teach them or some equivalent, but since their connection to economics and ethics issues regarding the nature of preferences is complicated, I mostly had to reinterpret them in more common sense ways. Are they indeed susceptible to a 'common sense' reading, or are they better seen as theoretical devices that secure rational behavior, down-sloping demand, and other features of standard theory? Moving too far into questions such as this one only bored the students who were impatient to move on to what they thought were real issues.

The lesson I took from this was that I had chosen a book for the course that was too advanced, and thus I gave up on the book and moved to other types of readings. As a comment on the teaching dilemma involved here, let me report a backstory. I had used the first edition of the Hausman-McPherson book, and when they began to revising it for the second edition (2006), Hausman wrote to me about my experience in teaching it. My response was to suggest that a revision incorporate 'real world' economics and ethics issues to motivate the book's more theoretical arguments. As an example, I recommended that it somehow make use of Lawrence Summers' infamous 1991 World Bank trade liberalization memo that defended exporting developed country toxic wastes to developing countries on rationality grounds (Summers memo, n.d.). Hausman indeed did incorporate this memo (and other real world issues) into the second edition of the book. The book accordingly did shift toward a more real world focus, but the knowledge of economic theory it still presupposed remained beyond most of my students.

For me, then, what I learned was that my students wanted more material like the Summers memo. It was not only a real world issue, but the level of economic theory needed to understand it was at the intermediate microeconomics or introductory economics level. At the same time, since the memo uses basic marginalist reasoning, it sharply posed a conflict between standard economic principles and ethics that in my view were important to an economics and ethics course. Students taking the course sometimes expected standard economics and ethics to be consistent with one another. Others expected them to conflict. I believed this issue had to be part of the course. To be clear, I like the Hausman-McPherson book and think it is excellent, but I believe it works best for advanced economics students.[3]

Round Two in my teaching economics and ethics thus involved moving away from interrogating economic theory and concentrating more directly on real world economic issues that had clear normative implications. I still needed to present some economic theory beyond what students had learned in other courses, but this involved a more general characterization and appraisal of it that put aside much of the theory Hausman-McPherson reviewed.[4] Amartya Sen's *On Ethics and Economics* (1987) was good in this regard, particularly in its early distinction between two historical ways of thinking about economics (though much of the later parts of the book are challenging for many students). The cornerstone of my new course, however, was George DeMartino's *Global Economy, Global Justice* (2000).

The book clearly raises real world ethical issues and frames them economically. The ethical questions were also already ones that students were aware of, such as inequality, poverty, and the relationship between developed and developing countries, and the book's emphasis on justice was a great antidote to mainstream economics' all-but exclusive attention to welfare. As DeMartino stated at the outset:

> My purposes, then … [were] first – demonstrating that normative commitments lie beneath contemporary economic policy debate … that … must always be interrogated for their legitimacy and effects … [and] second – encouraging others to join the lively campaign for a normative overhaul within economics away from welfarism and toward international egalitarianism (2000, xi).

DeMartino also saw Sen's capability thinking as foundational in providing "a far better ethical basis for constructing new global economic policy regimes in a world of egregious and crushing inequalities" (*Ibid.*), a view I shared.

There were two advantages, then, to teaching economics and ethics in this way. First, in the 1990s, many universities including Marquette where I was began to emphasize globalization and international perspectives,[5] so DeMartino's focus was ideal. Second, being at a Catholic university meant that ethics was emphasized. So many students believed that economics ought to incorporate ethics in real world ways.

However, I also found over time that there were disadvantages to how I was teaching the course. Students soon learned that I was teaching a course critical of mainstream economics rather than just another upper level course explaining it (the implicit norm in most economics courses). This produced self-selection in who took it, where students who were already critical of economics

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[3] The book may also not be very useful philosophy department economics and ethics courses where students usually have only an introductory level economics background. Students in philosophy, politics, and economics programs may have difficulties with it as well.

[4] For example, welfare economics and game theory were both subjects students had not learned, and so were treated in a rudimentary way or set aside.

[5] One manifestation of this across universities was the explosion of study abroad programs.

took the course, and those either not or mostly interested in learning more about standard economics did not. For the first group, the course confirmed and deepened their pre-existing views. The second group, who I would encounter in other courses I taught, though they often took ethics seriously, had relatively unexamined views of how ethics mattered in economics but had not chosen to take economics and ethics.

This produced two problems for me in the way I was teaching economics and ethics, one for each group. For the first group actually taking the course, their views were mostly confirmed but not really tested, because the students who might disagree with them were not taking the course and challenging them. For the second group, their latent interest in economics and ethics remained latent, and like the first group their views were never examined or tested.

The lesson I took from this, then, was I needed to teach economics and ethics in a way that challenged both groups, which meant I needed both in my course, which meant that the course needed to be perceived by students as not taking any specific position regarding the relationship between economics and ethics. That is, I needed to appear neutral and open to what the exchange between students would produce regarding the relationship between economics and ethics (even if I myself was not neutral). Practically speaking, I needed to make the exchange between the students paramount, and let where these young people were ethically in their thinking determine outcomes in how course on the issues discussed. In effect, I had to sustain the tension in their competing views in order to make economics and ethics salient in their lives.

In my view, what was important to recognize is that people disagree and need to be able to disagree about what they think about ethics in economics and in economic life, because they inescapably have different moral visions. A pluralistic, democratic society preserves rather than attempts to suppress this disagreement, while still making it possible for people to interact and work together in dealing with shared concerns. Thus, I sought again to change how I taught the course, and the third round version of it aimed at first in a only vague way to replicate in the classroom how I thought pluralistic, democratic societies function.

3 Round Three

I began again with the decision about what materials the students would learn. Most of the students in my course, then, were economics majors students, though some were double majors with philosophy, some were just philosophy majors, and a few were other majors. A prerequisite for the course was an introductory ethics course, so to review this I began the course (the first module) with only a basic introduction to ethics to review of concepts and theories using Johan Graafland's *Economics, Ethics and the Market: Introduction and Applications*, which distinguishes and summarizes five basic ethical approaches: utilitarianism, duties and rights, justice, virtue ethics, and ethics of care (2006, pp. 150-242).

The next step was to create a sense of ethical ambiguity in life by having the students struggle with a paradigmatic ethical dilemma. I consequently assigned the students a classic ethics course dilemma, the famous Trolley Problem (n.d.), where a runaway train may either kill many people if no one interferes, or just a single 'fat' man is killed if someone throws a track switch that redirects the train. The point of the problem and its usefulness in teaching is that it places different ethical goals at irresolvable odds with one another. There is no 'right' answer to the problem because we have different ethical views about what is right that cannot be reduced to a single view. Nonetheless, a choice has to be made. Many people, then, argue on utilitarian grounds that someone should throw the switch and save many people at the expense of the single 'fat' man. However, others argue against this saying that throwing the switch is morally wrong even if more people are saved, usually on the grounds of justice.[6] (The 'fat' man part of the problem is meant to bring out issues of discrimination and social bias).

The students' assignment is then as follows: say what they think should be done, explain the ethical grounds their decision is based on, write a criticism of another student's position who disagrees, and answer another student's criticism of their own position. I've taught this both in-person and online, and the exchange between students works well in both settings.

The point of assigning the Trolley Problem should be clear in light of the motivations behind my concerns about my second strategy for teaching the course. That there is no 'right' answer means everyone's view counts, that everyone also needs to take responsibility for their view, that the 'society' the class models needs to address a shared problem, and finally, most importantly, that what gets decided, say by majority view, can still seem to be an ethically problematic, maybe uncomfortable outcome, both for those who disagree with the majority and often those in the majority as well.

It's worth noting that students, as young people who often seems more idealistic than older people, are able to accept this Trolley Problem process and result, and still maintain the friendly character of their community in the course They also often find themselves discovering new friends and allies without at the same time becoming unfriendly towards those with whom they disagree, even showing respect for those who argued against them. This, then, is the social basis on which the main part of the course to follow is built when it turns to issues in economics and ethics.

The main part of the course is structured around four modules opposed to one another in two pairs:

(1) Ways economics influences ethics: The market vision
(5) Ways economics influences ethics: Rationality and efficiency
(6) Ways ethics influences economics: Moral limits of markets
(7) Ways ethics influences economics: Taming the market[7]

The 'influence' framing is used to develop the idea that what we allow in the way of space in life for either economics or ethics depends on what we allow in the way of space for the other. My view is that these influence-constraint combinations reflect widely-held though not unanimous

[6] This is also how my students over a number of times teaching the problem divided over its solution.
[7] The ideas of moral limits of markets (outright bans on markets in certain cases) and taming the market (e.g., taxes, subsidies, floors, and ceilings to modify how markets function) represent two main types of policy toward markets (see Davis, 2019).

social beliefs. For example, in the case of (1), the market vision, the view many people have that markets are a fundamental part of human life, influences the space they allow to ethics in judgments about markets. Or in the case of (3), the view many people have that some things should simply be 'off limits' to markets determines the space where they believe market principles cannot be adopted.[8]

The rationale behind the 'influence' framing is to elicit the deep beliefs that students have about economics and ethics which set boundaries on how they will think about each. These beliefs are complicated and not infrequently cut different ways. For example, a pro-market person may feel strongly about what is 'off limits' to markets. Or, a person who builds their life around their moral principles may see markets as a means to their realization. Students are often surprised, then, that though they may have thought of themselves as favoring economics or ethics, find that particular issues lead them to judge differently. Thus, from 'the influence' framing students not only learn that their own ethical views can conflict (as in the Trolley Problem), but also that their beliefs about economics and ethics can conflict.

Each of the four modules to follow is then structured around having students explain what the influence in question involves (requiring that they explain market vision, moral limits of markets, etc.), how that influence is embedded or operates in the world, and what policies, social and economic, exist to maintain or reinforce this influence. That is, the aim is to move to a real world economics and ethics framework of competing visions of each, including debates over real world policies.

Each module is accordingly built around a controversial issue with pro and con readings giving opposed sides of the issue drawn from economists and philosophers. (In addition to the primary readings, there are secondary readings on each subject as well.). These are the examples of issues I have used.

1) School vouchers[9]
2) Exporting toxic wastes to developing countries[10]
3) Prohibition of certain kinds of markets, e.g., slavery, organ sales, surrogate parenting
4) Minimum wages, rent ceilings, and climate change

For student interaction, the same exercises used for the Trolley Problem are adopted in each module. On a question posed about the issue (e.g., should there be school vouchers) students must: (i) take a position pro or con; (ii) justify its basis in your beliefs about both economics and ethics; (iii) criticize another student's position and argument; (iv) respond to another student's criticism of their own position.

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[8] This 'off limits' idea is famously associated with Michael Sandel's 'what money can't buy' view (2012).

[9] In the U.S., school vouchers are government payments to private schools. Historically this was prohibited since it was argued to violate a provision in the U.S. Constitution that banned public support for religion, and many if not most private schools are religion-based. Hausman-McPherson also discuss school vouchers in connection with their treatment of welfarism (2006, pp. 23ff).

[10] The Summers memo.

Again, there are no 'right' answers, only an exchange of thinking built on students' deep beliefs about the role and nature of the economy in life, about where ethics applies, and what sort of arguments apply according to the issues at hand. That exchange is productive in that students both strengthen, modify, and sometimes change their views, and in that they learn to integrate economic and ethical reasoning. It is also productive in that in the 'society' the course models, they become aware that they differ and still get along with others despite their differences. More strongly, they see their differences and tolerance towards others as natural – a view they often do not have before the course began.

I recognize that a university course is an artificial environment from which we cannot infer too much about its possible effects on social interaction outside the university. Yet I believe that the practice of reasoned exchange between students on difficult issues such as arise in economics and ethics can teach some students life lessons, particularly about tolerance and pluralism. But what about democracy?

Democracy goes beyond social attitudes to actual governance, and how people reach decisions affecting society that they must all live with. The real world, then, is also where things happen and get done, drawing upon people's deep beliefs and social attitudes, and, as in the case of the Trolley Problem, there often people need to live with there being no completely 'right' solution.

Consequently, the course finishes with an political interaction module that is a bookend of sorts to the first:

Capstone exercise: Rationing health care

The organization of this module is different from the previous four in which exchange is between individual students. In this case, the students are randomly divided into four groups who will role-play as family members and friends of four different people who have competing health care needs, not all of which can be addressed when health care is rationed.

The four different people with competing health care needs are taken from Richard Cookson and Paul Dolan's "Principles of Justice in Health Care Rationing" (2000), which lays out ethical reasoning that may enter into decisions health care systems make when they cannot address all people's possible health care needs, and constructs four types of imagined individuals who have different social characteristics, personal histories, and types of health care needs.

The four groups of students in the course must each advocate for one of these four imagined individuals. Their advocacy is meant to reflect how we ourselves support and defend those to whom we are close by family or friendship. Closeness to small numbers of others involves a social principle most students recognize but often underestimate as a determinant of their own personal choices until faced with circumstances that make them choose things or others. Indeed, in my experience students are sometimes surprised when they find themselves choosing things for others they personally oppose.[11]

[11] In social identity theory, these relationships are called relational social identities as opposed to group social identities.

As we know and as the students learn, then, those people we advocate for may sometimes not be as deserving as others. Nonetheless, it can turn out to be our responsibility by the ties we have to them to advocate for them. Thus, this module injects a kind of social partisanship into the previous modules' more elevated investigations.

It does so, moreover, in the module's specific, concrete institutional setting (though health care systems of course differ across countries and within countries), which determine the rules and limitations affecting health care provision. The real world consequently ceases to be an abstract idea and becomes one in which real outcomes affect people differently.

Students, then, know all four types of persons, and construct the case as a group for the person for whom they advocate, knowing not only that person's social characteristics, personal history, and health care needs, but also the other persons' social characteristics, personal histories, and health care needs. This means that the ethical ideas and theories they draw upon for the person they defend are both tailored to that individual and contrasted to the ethical arguments and defenses other groups may make for the persons they defend. This produces a competition of different ethical arguments bound by group partisanship.

Some people who teach economics and ethics, or even just ethics, may reject this set-up because they see it as making ethical argumentation opportunistic and insincere. I believe this ignores how many ethical arguments are made in the world, how interest and values interact, and limits understanding of how people appropriate ethical reasoning. First, each student advocacy groups ends up making the best ethical argument they can for their case, and do not claim other ethical arguments used for other persons are wrong. They've learned that what ethical arguments prevail in the world depends on the issues and circumstances at hand, and realize their own arguments will not always carry the day. Second, when the exercise moves to determination of which of the four individual's health care is prioritized, students learn something additionally important about how ethics is embedded in the world, namely, that how people live together influences what society sees as ethically required.

The steps in the exercise, then, are as follows:

- Each team organizes an argument for their patient/family member/friend regarding why ethically speaking he or she should get the limited healthcare resources;
- All teams present a single, integrated statement of the case for their family member;
- Each team makes two arguments critically commenting on another team's case;
- Everyone individually votes for first, second, third, and fourth place for which patients should get the healthcare resources;
- Everyone individually makes one argument why the overall ranking turned out as it did in terms of which ethical arguments prevailed.

The result is that the students see how a democratic process determines which ethical arguments are most important, where this reflects on the particular social characteristics, personal histories, and health care needs of the individuals for whom they advocate. One thing they learn is how the particular social characteristics and personal histories of the people involved influence what ethical arguments are successful. For example, one of the four people in the Cookson-Dolan paper used drugs at a young age. There is nothing in this person's history that leads us to believe that drug use affected the person's later health. Yet this generally comes up in students' discussion, justifiably or not. The point, then, is that you cannot expect such matters as this to be set aside in the real world. That is, people have a variety of values about each other that they may have thought do not come into play. But they do, and this exercise brings them out into the open.

It is interesting, then, which of the four people has gotten the highest prioritization for health care from one class to the next. Though the overall rankings move around from one class to another, the top individual has always been a young boy, a person of color, whose health care would like produce a long life but who could die without it. Space here does not permit me discussing the students' views of all four persons, but suffice it to say they sometimes express what many would regard as prejudices against some of the people involved. In student discussion there can be push back against this, but sometimes students hold back and do not say what they know some are thinking. My interpretation of this is that students recognize the different values about others their peers have, and choose sometimes to contest them and other times not.

A lesson the course ends up emphasizing, then, is that economics and ethics in the real world is not only conceptually complicated but also socially complicated. I hope an inference the students draw from this is that people need to be tolerant of one another and that a democratic society needs to secure the social conditions that make this possible, even if sometimes this is unpalatable to some.

These six modules, the first and last and the four influence modules, are the main part of the course, but depending on overall time given to the course they can be supplemented with a variety of additional activities.[12] For example, to again make the real world part of the course, students in each module need to find stories in the news media that bear on the current topic, and say explain their relevance. I've also had term projects for research teams that investigate local urban questions with economics and ethics dimensions. What these other types of course activity do is increase opportunities for student involvement beyond the module-based exchange.

From a pedagogical point of view, student evaluation is based on whether students actively participate (with simple measures of 'actively') instead of the examination-based approach to evaluation used in many university courses.[13] This still produces a distribution of grades but the logic of it as an evaluation system is that people participate in a set of shared activities rather than compete individually to do better than one another.[14]

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[12] My course was always a U.S. semester course of 15 weeks, but my design was intended to be usable in shorter terms courses of even half that time.

[13] Each module, however, is preceded by a low weight content quiz to make sure students are prepared to participate.

[14] How, it should be asked, do students evaluate the course? I've had higher evaluations for this course than any other courses I've ever taught. In their comments, students emphasize such things as how people worked together as opposed to how much they learned – the more standard learning outcome idea.

I return then to the how this sort of course addresses the challenges an interfield subject such as economics and ethics faces.

4 Economics and ethics in the future

I began by suggesting that economics and ethics as an interfield subject of investigation faces special challenges associated with it being neither quite economics nor ethics – an 'orphan' field not much prized in itself nor by its parents. Those challenges are associated with the disciplinary organization of education in most universities, or its silo organization in terms of how most educators train and credential themselves within single disciplines. This system is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, so the constraints it imposes on economics and ethics and other interdisciplinary fields need to be managed as best possible.

A learning bias this system sustains is that it gives rise to a professor/teacher-student hierarchical social structure. This top-down, authority system encourages building courses around authoritative texts and lectures as determined by the expertise of the professor/teacher. The means of student evaluation is primarily examinations of course materials the professor/teacher chooses and secondarily at best 'participation' in other ways. Examinations generate 'hard' student evaluations; 'participation' generates 'soft' evaluations. Given that student evaluation is paramount in universities, 'participation' occupies a second-class status in how courses are organized.

Many professors/teachers recognize, however, that 'participation' is where much student learning takes place. It's a cliché that students quickly forget what they memorize for exams, but reports from them about 'what they got out of the course' regularly emphasize how they learned to think about its issues when they were actively engaged. Thus a good case can be made that the social organization of education is generally inconsistent with the learning goals of education. Further, in interfield courses such as economics and ethics which do not fall neatly within the traditional boundaries of a discipline, this case is perhaps even stronger since a standard way to handle combining two different fields is to deliver content in each and test on its comprehension even though mastering many unfamiliar puts more weight on memorization.

My own movement from Rounds One and Two in teaching economics and ethics was driven by my perception that students' needs were not being addressed. Inadvertently, re-organizing the course as a less expertise-based and a more open, exchange-based sort of course made clear to me, when I observed it, how students learned when they engaged in dialogue with one another. My reflection on this led to an enlargement of my thinking about how dialogue might be further developed in the course, and this resulted in adopting the health care rationing capstone exercise which implemented dialogue through student group role play.

One of the lessons I've thus tried to emphasize above is that exchange, particularly as took the form of back-and-forth discussion in which in each module students commented on each other's arguments and responded to others' comments on their own, showed that there is a 'magic' in dialogue, which Daniel Yankelovich (1999) has argued has the capacity to transform conflict into cooperation. How? As educators Ann Baker, Patricia Jensen, and David Kolb (2002) have argued, students need to have the actual experience – perhaps new to them – of talking together about issues that concern them all in order to understand that where they might have thought themselves inalterably opposed (and even hostile) to one another, the experience of dialogue demonstrates to them that they can get along quite well.

Professional educators have long known these lessons, but the silo organization of modern higher education distances field practitioners from those with special expertise in education itself. Moreover, most university teachers are trained to do research, and rarely trained to teach. Unfortunately, there is no obvious remedy for this state of affairs, and accordingly the route to more successful teaching and student progress toward more effective learning is unclear. Perhaps interfield subjects such as economics and ethics, because they are especially difficult to teach, hold some promise for improvement compared to other courses. Thus, those who teach economics and ethics, who are in a continual struggle over how to teach the subject, may be different and find ways to communicate with their students who share the same passion for the subject they do.

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