

Abstract for the 2018 AK Politische Ökonomie and ZÖSS Conference on *New Economic Thinking* in Hamburg, Germany, 16-18 November

How to teach Ethics & Economics? – Experience from ‘Flipping the Class Room’

Abstract

My motivation and expertise to develop, design and teach my Ethics & Economics course originates in my PhD thesis (Kesting, 1999) on German discourse ethics (Jürgen Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action, 1985) in relation to economics and power (approaches by: Deirdre McCloskey, Douglas North, John Kenneth Galbraith, Gunnar Myrdal, Kenneth E. Boulding and Albert O. Hirschman).

The module content is based on two textbooks that deal with the subject (Hausman & McPherson, 2006 and Dutt & Wilber, 2010). The module offers students a variety of moral philosophy to be used as method or framework of thinking that enable them to analyse ethical dilemmata or morally tricky situations in their workplace as managers, business and economic consultants or as economic policy advisers and decision makers. They are invited to consider potential clashes or synergies between their ethical beliefs or values with what standard economic rationality demands in terms of optimising efficiency or maximising profits or individual satisfaction as consumers.

As this is a second year module, the students have already been introduced to core concepts in economics and I concentrate mainly on teaching them moral philosophy and then on relating ethics to economics and applying both to cases in economic policy and company business practices. While the pedagogy has been quite traditional at the outset in the first 3-4 weeks with lectures focusing on moral theory and textbook based learning, it takes a dramatic turn in the larger second half of the semester (7-8 weeks) where students are free to find and use their own case study for applying moral theory and economics and become much more actively engaged in the material. For the second half of the semester students discuss a number of key texts (academic articles and book chapters assembled in a reader) with me (one or two texts each week).

Vincent Roehling et al. (2010) argue that class discussions are particularly suitable to motivate and engage students of the Millennial Generation because they like to interact on an equal footing and find the mere provision of knowledge and information boring. However, as Vincent Roehling et al. (2010) stress, it is important to create a comfortable class atmosphere, to display enthusiasm for the topic and show respect for students’ opinions and arguments and to develop civil rules for discussion. An example for the latter is a session (the third) I ran last term where female students had a special privilege to talk first because I noticed that male students tended to dominate class discussion during the first two sessions.

This semester, I will have my lectures recorded (accompanied by the slides) and require students to listen to them on the VLE. I consider applying a flipped classroom pedagogy and will discuss the lecture content based on plays presenting typical behaviour according to virtue, deontological and consequentialist moral philosophy (*Antigone* by Sophocles and *Professor Bernhardt* by Schnitzler) to further enhance the course future. I will then have more interactive discussions in class (Freeman Herreid and Schiller, 2013 and Findlay and Mombourquette, 2014). This paper will report on how the interactive pedagogy of class discussion worked in this Ethics & Economics class.

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