

## CULTURAL DEPENDENCY IN THE TEACHING OF ETHICS: THE CASE OF FINLAND

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**Abstract.** Besides pedagogical challenges, teachers of university ethics courses have to meet ethical questions related to the teaching of ethics. Two such questions are considered. First, I analyse objectives of ethics teaching in general and in Finland in particular. It is argued that usually the main aims of ethics courses should be purely intellectual. However, some behavioural aims are also acceptable. It is prudential to teach moral *prima facie* rules which are related only to the world of academia (for example research ethics) or to a certain occupation (for example medical care). Second, ethical issues related to ethics teaching in culturally homogenous environments are analysed. It is argued that homogenous environments create some special problems, which an ethics teacher should acknowledge and be extremely sensitive to. Moreover, special arrangements for fairness are needed, not just in diverse, but also in homogenous environments.

**Keywords:** ethics teaching, objectives, homogenous cultures, pedagogy, university, Finland

### 1. Introduction

Many ethical and pedagogical problems of teaching ethics are dependent on culture and society. For example, pedagogical questions related to ethnic differences do not arise in environments that are ethnically homogenous. Homogenous cultures, on the other hand, have problems that are quite foreign to more diverse ones. Moreover, due to cultural differences, the acceptability of pedagogical solutions may differ from a society to another. Although many ethical ideals behind teaching – like fairness and justice – are universal, their practical realizations may and often must differ from one society to another.

The following considerations are based on experiences of teaching ethics at the University of Turku in southern Finland. I will first discuss the aims of teaching ethics in general and in Finland in particular. After that I will more explicitly turn into ethical and pedagogical problems typical of teaching ethics in the Finnish

society. The most discussed feature of the Finnish teaching environment is its homogeneity; the students – and the teacher – typically share a very similar cultural and social background.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. General aims of teaching ethics

Teaching always means steering a student's life. Although studying at university is voluntary, there are restrictions within the studies, which affect the lives of the students. The moral justification of all educational restrictions and orders lies in their tendency to benefit students. This is also true about teaching of ethics. As Elias Baumgarten (1980:183) writes, "teaching of philosophy should benefit *students*". According to him, "[t]he work of philosophy [and ethics] teachers is thus a form of service to others, and it is open to ethical assessment according to the degree to which it benefits students, "those who are subjected to it"" (Baumgarten 1980:185).

Teaching ethics is beneficial to students for numerous different reasons. Broadly taken, the ultimate aim of teaching ethics lies in helping students and people related to them to lead happier and fuller lives (Caldwell 1995). This goal may be attained in several different ways. First, students taking part in ethics courses acquire new information. The courses provide knowledge of ethical theories and criticism of those theories (Annis 1992:189). In short, teaching ethics is beneficial because it extends the distribution of warranted beliefs among the students. Of course learning new facts is not always beneficial. For example, learning about efficient torturing methods may be harmful to the student and other persons (McClennan 1976:123). However, knowledge about ethics is usually considered beneficial – in practice and also as part of a comprehensive education (Honkala 1999:25).

Not many ethics teachers would be willing to limit the objectives of their ethics courses to knowing about different ethical theories. The common goal of ethics studies – besides teaching students about philosophy – is to teach them to do philosophy (Hare 1982:167). In other words, the aim of teaching ethics is to provide students with intellectual skills (Honkala 1999:25, Martens 1995) through which they can formulate reasoned positions (either as a guide to action or as a response to wonder) (Baumgarten 1980:185). These skills include (a) the ability to identify moral problems and formulate questions about ethics; (b) the ability to reason carefully about moral issues: to think logically and critically about ethical issues, to communicate clearly about ethical issues, to apply ethical concepts, principles and theories to new and relevant situations; (c) and the ability to clarify one's own moral aspirations (Annis 1992:190, Bok 1976:28).

However, sometimes the aims of teaching ethics do not end here. According to David B. Annis an ethics course can also have the objective

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<sup>1</sup> The claim about homogeneity is more carefully discussed in section 4.

*[t]o help students improve their conduct and character when needed, to be morally better people. This involves obvious elements such as their not stealing, assaulting others etc, but also helping them to be more empathic, caring, and compassionate people (Annis 1992:193).*

James B. Gould and Ralph P. Forsberg agree. According to Gould (2002:1–2, 4), the ultimate aim of ethics courses is to make the students better people and to develop their specific traits and behaviour. Forsberg (2001:157) states that ethics is basically about character and excellence within a particular context. Morality is not a matter solely of what one does or which rules one follows, but a matter of what one is. Thus the objectives of teaching ethics should, according to him, be related to character improvement.

### **3. The objectives of teaching ethics at universities in Finland**

The ethics courses taught by philosophers at Finnish universities can be divided into the following two groups: (1) courses in theoretical and/or applied ethics given as a part of philosophy teaching, (2) courses in applied ethics given to a specific group of students (for example biomedical ethics to medical students or research ethics to students of social sciences). The main teaching methods are lectures and seminars. The evaluation of lecture courses is usually based on a final examination or a written work at the end of the course. In seminars learning happens through discussions based on written presentations of the participating students. It is relatively uncommon to combine the two methods, but on many lectures some amount of time is used for spontaneous discussion and answering questions of students.

At Finnish universities the teaching of ethics is usually quite strictly separated from moral training. The aims of moral training are specific and behavioural; the goal is to get the students to act in accordance with certain commonly accepted moral expectations (Moore 1982:96–97). Especially the philosophers teaching courses on normative (non-applied) ethics have usually been quite unwilling to give moral training to the students and it is uncommon to explicate certain conduct or character improvement as the objective of a course on ethics. The aims of courses have concentrated on providing knowledge and intellectual skills.

That behavioural improvements are not explicitly set as the aims of ethics courses does not mean that the educators believe teaching of ethics to be unimportant for the production of good conduct in the students. However, it is common to think that the improvements happen through acquiring knowledge and intellectual skills. With these “ethical tools” a student can identify ethical problems, analyze alternative courses of action and make an ethically well-justified decision for performing in certain way. It thus seems that the goals of the courses are at least sometimes, and in some sense, behavioural. If this is the case,

it may be asked why the right kind of conduct cannot be the explicit aim of the course in the first place. Why not simply teach students to act in the right way?

First, the situations a student will face in his/her future occupation (and non-occupational life) are complicated and changing. It is practically impossible to form any explicit and acceptable rules that would be easily applicable in all situations. There simply is no standard model of conduct that would cover all ethically important cases. Second, as Daniel Callahan (1980:71) writes, no teacher of ethics can assume that s/he has a solid grasp on the nature of morality as to pretend to know what finally counts as good moral conduct. It would be insensible to suppose that an ethics teacher could know what is the right action in any thinkable situation. S/he is very competent in analysing ethically complicated situations, but this does not imply that s/he is the beholder of ultimate moral truths. This may be because of some kind of moral relativism; maybe there are no absolute or objective moral truths. However, as Callahan (1980:71) points out, even an absolutist<sup>2</sup> needs not to assume that the teacher – or anybody – has a full grasp of final and ultimate moral truths. The existence of moral truths does not imply that we know them.

The advocates of specific conduct objectives have criticised this view even with respect to courses in non-applied ethics. According to them it is obvious that we know some moral truths and that it is an appropriate aim of teaching ethics to get the students to act according to these rules. David Annis criticises Daniel Callahan in the following way:

*Is he [Callahan] really suggesting that we don't have good reason for believing that the theft and destruction of library books and journals, that cheating on academic assignments and tests, and that lying about important matters are prima facie wrong? If we can't teach that these things are wrong and try to get students to change their behaviour, then I doubt that normative ethics has much serious content at all. No one is claiming to have a "blueprint" to moral conduct [...]. But this doesn't imply that there are no basic agreed upon values, that we shouldn't stress the importance of these values in an ethics course, and that we shouldn't try to get students to improve their conduct and character with regard to these values (Annis 1992:193).*

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<sup>2</sup> Absolutism is the view that there is one criterion for morality that is valid for all people at all times. By moral relativism I mean the view that morality varies between societies (Feldman 1978:162). Both moral relativism and absolutism have numerous varieties. Moreover, there are views that do not perfectly fit in either of the categories. One such view is, as the anonymous referee of this paper pointed out, moral objectivism based on *prima facie* rules. According to this line of thought there are objective (i.e. they apply to all people at all times) moral rules and obligations. Nevertheless, none of these moral rules is absolute (i.e. none of them is the only morally relevant rule). Rather rules are *prima facie* by their nature. A *prima facie* rule indicates an obligation that must be fulfilled unless it conflicts on a particular occasion with a stronger – i.e. more important – *prima facie* obligation. This type of metaethical view is very well compatible with the considerations of this paper.

Annis is right in his claim that we seem to know some moral *prima facie* truths or at least share some moral values. Nevertheless, it may be questioned whether these values should be taught in ethics courses of higher education. According to Derek C. Bok (1976:30), we should assume – and most higher education ethics teachers probably are assuming – that most students have a sufficient desire to live a moral life. Moreover, at least in Finland, the rules for things like library use and examination behaviour are something a student can be expected to know. The cultural background of Finnish university students is highly homogenous and therefore it is prudent and acceptable to expect them to be aware of these kinds of rules. Teaching students in ethics courses to act according to generally accepted *prima facie* duties would in Finnish universities be a waste of time – and not beneficial – to most students.

However, we do not live in an ideal world; cheating, theft and vandalism do happen in Finnish universities. This may be either because people do not care about rules; in other words because they do not have “a desire for moral life”, or rarely because they do not know the rules. Whichever the case, philosophical ethics course does not offer a solution. The value of moral behaviour is embedded in ethics. In other words, ethical analyses and theories include a presupposition that people usually want to act in the morally good and right ways. No ethical theory or analysis can motivate amoral people to act morally. The generally accepted *prima facie* rules should be taught by other people than professional ethicists. Actually, people like parents and elementary teachers should have done the job long before students start their university studies. Moreover, if some university students require education in these matters, this can be best done outside academic courses, by such persons as library workers, examination supervisors and the police.

However, the courses on special professional ethics such as medical ethics are a different case. Some *prima facie* rules – for example rules concerning medical ethics and research ethics – are related only to certain occupations. Because of the limited scope of application of these rules, we cannot expect new students of the discipline to be aware of them. Therefore, teaching these specific *prima facie* rules is usually prudent and beneficial to students on the discipline in question. At ethics courses given in specific topics like research ethics and medical ethics, knowledge of certain occupation specific *prima facie* rules (as well as specific behavioural goals connected to them) may well be set as objectives. However, even then the courses should also aim into acquiring intellectual skills and knowledge; they secure the internalising of the rules and adequate behaviour in cases where the rules cannot be directly applied. Moreover, specific behavioural aims and teaching of *prima facie* rules should be limited to cases where there is a consensus about the rules. Similarly, objectives of character modification can be acceptable if the modified character trait is generally found desirable.<sup>3</sup> Acceptability of the

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<sup>3</sup> Ability to emotional engagement is an example of character trait that could be developed in courses. According to Beauchamp and Childress (1994:467) it is an important part of human relationships in general and in health care in particular.

character modification further requires that the student wants to develop him/herself in respect to that character.

#### 4. Teaching a homogenous group

Some facts about students form an interesting basis for the teaching of ethics at Finnish universities. The majority of students are women. In year 2005 there were about 18,000 students at the University of Turku. Nearly 12,000 of them were women.<sup>4</sup> The distribution, however, tends to differ between faculties. In the medical faculty the majority 1,600 of 2,300 students were women, whereas in the faculty of mathematics and natural sciences only about 1,800 of the total of 4,200 students were women (University of Turku 2006a). This means that in courses given to some specialized students groups the distribution between sexes is often uneven.

The cultural background of students at Finnish universities is relatively homogenous. As most of the teaching at Finnish universities is given either in Finnish or in Swedish<sup>5</sup>, the number of foreign students is low.<sup>6</sup> During the year 2005 only about 1000 foreign students studied at the University of Turku (University of Turku 2006b) and few of them came from non-European countries (University of Turku 2006c). Therefore, the great majority of students – in most of the courses, all –are native Finns or at least Europeans.

However, the homogeneity of Finnish university students does not end here. The cultural background of native Finns is in many senses quite unvaried. Liberty of conscience prevails in Finland. Nevertheless, about 85% of the population belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. About 13% do not belong to any religious community, 1% belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church and only 1% of the population belongs to other than Evangelical Lutheran or Greek Orthodox religions (Tilastokeskus 2004). The students are also homogeneous in their studies preceding university. Children who are residents of Finland are required by law to complete the curriculum of compulsory education. It is relatively uncommon to do this in other ways than attending municipalities' comprehensive schools (Ojanen 2002:1–2). There are some private schools (often connected to some special form of pedagogy), but their number is low. Practically

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<sup>4</sup> There is no school of polytechnics in Turku and thus the numbers are more strongly biased than in higher education in general. The majority of polytechnics students are men. However, even when they are taken into consideration, women form the majority (53%) of the Finnish higher education students (Factsheet Finland 2002:5).

<sup>5</sup> Finland has two official languages: Finnish (93% of population) and Swedish (6% of population). There are separate universities for both of these language groups, but it is not uncommon to cross the language lines when choosing places to study.

<sup>6</sup> In year 2000 there were about 150,000 degree students in Finnish universities. Only 3,700 of them were foreign (Ojanen 2002:6).

all university students have, after finishing comprehensive school, continued their studies in the upper secondary schools of the municipalities.

The fact that students at Finnish universities form such a homogenous group, forces a teacher of ethics to face some ethical and pedagogical issues in his/her teaching. Students attending their first ethics classes already have some impressions about ethical matters. Without any previous education in philosophy, they already hold many moral beliefs and have made up their minds on some moral issues. They also argue for their views and somehow handle moral problems they are confronted with (Moster 1986:200). Some of their views are meta-ethical and many of them are culturally dependent. Cultural relativism is an undeniable fact. Moral views of people living in one society or culture differ from moral views of people living in another (Feldman 1978:161). For example, most Finnish people see no great moral difference in eating reindeer and eating cattle. However, many foreign people, who are perfectly happy with eating beef, find the habit of eating reindeer disgusting (not because of the taste of reindeer but because they think reindeer as cute animals not to be eaten). Similarly, certain forms of inequality between sexes, which are quite generally morally rejected in Finland, may be found morally unproblematic in some other countries. Thus, even though Finnish society is relatively open and liberal, and citizens are in every sense free to get information from international sources, people still share many common ethical views. They definitely do not agree on every ethical issue, but there are certain ethical views shared by basically everybody.

The teachers at Finnish universities are typically Finnish born and share the same cultural background with their students. This kind of a teaching environment may be easy in a sense that cultural differences do not complicate the communication. There are some common values on which to base the teaching and thus avoid the problem of “begging the question”, which Daniel Callahan (1980:63) finds typical of teaching in pluralistic societies. According to him,

*[i]n societies marked by a common set of assumptions and agreed-upon ethical principles and moral rules, ethical analysis and the making of decisions can proceed more easily – not everything needs to be questioned. Quite the opposite is often true in pluralistic societies. Even if most people would subscribe to the view that lying is wrong, and stealing bad, and murder immoral, no contemporary teacher of ethics can assume that his or her students know why they hold such views, whether they have reason to support them, and whether, for that matter, all students even accept such views without reservation (Callahan 1980:63).*

However, homogenous environments also create their own problems for teaching of ethics. Any teacher in a homogenous society needs to identify these problems and in his or her teaching proceed carefully in order to avoid them. I will next discuss some of these problems.

Whether a teacher of an ethics course should express his or her own ethical views about generally non-agreed issues, is a matter of discussion. However, it is widely held that a teacher should not try to persuade students by expressing his/her

ethical views in a hidden and implicit manner (Hanson 1996:34-35, Baumgarten 1980:187-188). If moral views are expressed, this should be done explicitly and argumentatively. However, totally neutral teaching of ethics is hard to attain (Hanson 1996:35). Teachers, like other people, are not constantly and consciously aware of all their views related to moral issues. They have hidden unconscious views or they base their considerations on the assumptions, which even if taken for granted by themselves, are not accepted by other people. Many of these views and assumptions are culturally dependent and becoming aware of them is more difficult for a teacher in a homogenous society where students and colleagues do not force them into it.

There is a real danger that a teacher, with students sharing the same cultural background, may freely present as self-evident some assumptions that could never – at least without strong reactions – be expressed in a multicultural environment. However, these kinds of statements work against the basic objectives of teaching ethics. The moral views implicit in teachers' talk are prone to strengthen students' culturally dependent moral views. Instead of developing critical skills of the students, they encourage them to accept certain dogmatic views. At worse, the students may notice the implicit and hidden moral statements and take them as an attempt of manipulation, which may lead to a rejection of the whole ethics studies. Therefore, a teacher working in a homogenous environment – such as typical Finnish university – needs to be especially sensitive in these matters and pay additional attention to the neutrality of the teaching.

Problems related to teacher's hidden moral views arise, for example, in the selection of examples for a course in normative ethics. In order to illustrate ethical theories a teacher often needs to give examples about morally good, bad, and neutral actions. The students get familiar with the theory and understand its implications better when it is explained how the theory leads into the moral views about certain actions. Similarly, examples may help to illustrate the weaknesses of the theory in question. Giving these kinds of examples a teacher does not aim to teach moral views. Yet, s/he is likely to make specific moral statements.

A student attending an elementary course on normative ethics gave me an excellent reminder about problems related to example giving. The aim of the lesson was to explain problems related to the basic form of act utilitarianism. One of the problems I wanted to illustrate was the problem of trivial actions: Utilitarianism passes moral judgement on every act. Therefore, some actions that are usually considered morally trivial are, according to utilitarianism, moral obligations or morally forbidden (Feldman 1978:50-51). I tried to illustrate this by giving the following example:

*A person's options for breakfast are yoghurt, sour whole milk and curd cheese (all three are common breakfast alternatives in Finland). She does not care very much which of the milk product she eats, although she will get slightly more pleasure from eating yoghurt than she will get from eating the other two alternatives. The situation is normal in a sense that no alternative has exceptional consequences for anybody. Therefore, since eating the yoghurt has*



*the highest utility, according to basic form of act utilitarianism, she is morally obligated to eat yoghurt for breakfast and morally forbidden to eat sour whole milk or curd cheese. This result seems absurd; the fact that the person might get slightly more pleasure from eating yoghurt seems morally irrelevant.*

The students seemed to understand the point of the example. However, on his written final exam one student pointed out that he is a vegan and that for him a breakfast is a highly ethical matter to the point that he would consider it immoral to eat any of the alternatives presented in the example. I had clearly but unintentionally expressed a strong moral view on a matter (the ethics of animal use) about which no ethical consensus exists. It is easy to believe that in a homogenous culture the preceding kinds of implicit ethical statements often go unnoticed by the whole group of students. In this case only one student of over 70 reacted. However, the implicit ethical statements do affect the moral views of the students even if they do not actively notice the moral nature of those statements.

Because of their common cultural and social background most Finnish students tend to accept some views – for example some theories of moral justice or views about just medical practices – more readily than others. They have a certain pre-theoretical intuitive and implicit conceptions of some ethical terms, and are sometimes quite unwilling to change their views let alone accept other possible conceptions as reasonable. Because the teacher usually shares the same social and cultural background with the students, he or she may also have a tendency towards the same views. In this kind of environment, where almost everyone involved has some prejudice towards certain competing views, the lecturer may really have to struggle to maintain a neutral view. This is especially difficult when students pose critical questions on one theory and at the same time leave its alternatives uncriticized.

The similarity of opinions may cause further practical pedagogical problems. How to discuss when everybody agrees? The argumentative discussion arises from a disagreement. If everybody shares the same view, either the real exchange of opinions does not happen at all, or it may turn in a listing of problems or advances of a specific views.

The preceding problems raise a question about the teacher's role. In lectures s/he usually should maintain a neutral role and present alternative and opposing theories and views as neutrally as possible. However, it may be claimed that during seminars and lecture discussions he or she may sometimes have to adopt another – more biased – role. Supposing that (almost all) students present similar and strong opinions for one theory and against another, the teacher may seem to have a moral and pedagogical obligation to offer an opposing view and argue for that in the discussion. In order for the students to understand the problems of their own view and the merits of the view they are opposing, this is a wise strategy. The method forces the students into a genuine discussion where they have to present arguments for their view and face the weaknesses of it. Moreover, they have to argue against the view they are opposing and, if they cannot present acceptable counter arguments for it, accept its merits. As a matter of fact, this kind of

discussion may teach the students many intellectual skills that should often be the main objectives of ethics teaching.

However, the strategy also has its drawbacks. If a teacher uses the strategy often and in different incoherent occasions and the students take the arguments presented by the teacher as his or her real views, students may come to see the teacher as philosophically flimsy or even self-contradicting. At worst they may find him or her philosophically incredible or unbelievable and lose their trust in his/her honesty. On the other hand, some students consider teachers as philosophical authorities and may very eagerly – without analysis and critical thinking – adopt the views they believe the teacher to hold. Thus, the method of taking a biased role might sometimes have strong non-desirable effects on students' views about philosophical questions, about the teacher, and about ethics in general.

The problems do not form a sufficient reason for abandoning the method of presenting opposing views, though. However, they set some limits to the ways of using the method. Ideally a teacher is able to present the counter arguments and opposing views without losing his or her neutral position; that is without presenting them as his/her views. A teacher should argue in a way that enables students to understand that s/he is playing a role of their opponent, not defending his/her own ideas. Of course, the teacher should neither give an impression of supporting the view proposed by students; rather s/he should be taken as a neutral instructor of the learning process. The ideal may be reached for example by the careful selection of words. Instead of presenting the opposing views directly, the teacher may present them by starting his/her sentences with expressions like “your argument might be objected by pointing out that...”, “someone might argue that...”, “what about the claim that...”, and “how would you react to the argument that...”.

I do not want to claim that a teacher should never present his/her views and theories. Nevertheless, the views s/he does present as his/her own should be actual views s/he adheres to. Otherwise s/he would be misleading the students to believe something that is not true: that s/he holds views that s/he does not really have. Moreover, it is often pedagogically wise to present even one's own views in a neutral way. Neutrality often – especially at in the beginning of studies – offers the students the best possibilities for learning intellectual skills necessary for genuine philosophical analysis and argumentation. When a teacher does not offer answers but different ways of finding answers, the students are forced to do their own critical thinking and argumentation.

## **5. Homogenous groups and fair treatment**

Fairness and justice of the teacher are often presented as a moral basis of student evaluation.

*Given the importance of assessment of student performance in university teaching and in students' lives and careers, instructors are responsible for taking adequate steps to ensure that assessment of students is valid, open, fair, and congruent with course objectives (Murray et al. 1996:62).*

Fairness and justice do not only form a moral basis of student evaluation, but they are an integral part of all educational procedures. The students must be treated fairly and justly in respect to any assistance they may need in their work and in how they are treated in general; for example, in how their questions are answered during lectures. The very nature of education demands fairness (Rodabaugh 1996:37). This means that irrelevant features of the students, such as their sex and age, should never affect the ways they are treated.

It might be suggested that fairness and justice are more easily reached, if students form a homogenous group. It might even be argued that no special arrangements for attaining fairness are needed in culturally homogenous learning environments. Nevertheless, this is not true.

Whether a group is homogenous or not, is, in a certain sense, relative. The students of Finnish universities form a homogenous group in respect of many features that are highly diverse, for example, in many US universities. However, even in culturally homogenous group there are differences; no two people are similar in all personal features. Finnish students are a diverse group for example with respect to their incomes, age, personality and sex. Historically speaking some of the most serious forms of discrimination in education have been sex based and even today some teachers are biased by the sex of the student in their behaviour toward them.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in all universities students differ in respect of their previous study success – and even at the beginning of their first university course in respect of their success in the exam by which students are selected. Students will also look different and some may be found more attractive and interesting looking by the educators. Interestingly, people – and presumably teachers too – even tend to evaluate the intelligence of persons on the basis of their looks.

Finnish universities are not totally homogenous even in respect of religious, ethnical and cultural factors. There are students who differ from the majority in these respects and because they form an extremely small minority, they will most certainly be noticed. Since very few persons differ from others in any such way, there is a chance that much more attention may be attributed to the differences than in more diverse environments. The difference may even become the first and only thing others remember about the person in question.

The university teaching system in Finland introduces some specialities to methods that are meant to guarantee fairness in evaluation. In lecture courses with big audiences, which are typical at the beginning of studies, the teacher usually

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<sup>7</sup> Teachers are inclined to ask female students factual and male students analytical questions. Moreover, teachers tend more often to interrupt females than males. They are inclined to listen more carefully and give more room, when a male is speaking than when a female is speaking. Nevertheless, this is often done unintentionally and teachers usually believe that they treat all students without any systematic sex-related differences (Sunnari 1997: 86–87).

does not know the names of the students attending the course. Even when there are discussions during lectures, they are usually carried out spontaneously and anonymously and do not affect the grading. Since the evaluation of lecture courses is often based solely on final exams, the teacher may see the names of students for the first time when s/he begins grading. Thus, the teacher has no way to relate names to individuals. However, this does not mean that hiding methods are unnecessary. Some information that may lead into biased evaluation is embedded in the students' names alone. An obvious one is the student's sex. It is also typical of Finnish culture that the popular first names given to children change over the years. As a result some names are very common in certain age groups and quite rare in others.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the teacher may often be able to make a good guess about a student's age based on his/her name. Both age and sex might be sources for biased evaluations and, therefore, grading systems, that blind the teacher from knowing the students' names, may be valuable tools even in courses where the teacher does not personally know the students. In these kinds of evaluation situations the most simple blinding method may be to cover the names in exam papers, for example with a removable tape.

Contrary to elementary courses, the number of attending students in advanced courses is often very low. Moreover, the same students take part in the courses of the same teachers many times. This is due to the small number of both students and faculty members and leads to the teachers knowing the students very well even to the point that students may be recognized from their handwriting or style of expression. In such cases, no external methods can hide the identity of the student from the teacher. The same is, even more clearly, true about seminar courses. The fairness of evaluation can then be reached only by a teacher's devotion to justness and attention paid to the importance of fairness.

## 6. Conclusion

A teacher of an ethics course has to meet both pedagogical and ethical challenges. Sometimes the two are closely connected and it is hard to say whether we are dealing with pedagogy or ethics. I have considered questions connected with the objectives of teaching and questions typical of teaching in culturally homogenous environments. The discussion about questions is carried out from the viewpoint of a teacher at Finnish university. Conclusions are the following.

Usually the main aims of ethics courses should be intellectual in a sense that students acquire new academic information and learn analytical skills. However, some behavioural aims are also acceptable. It is prudential to teach moral *prima*

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<sup>8</sup> For example, there are about 31,400 women named Sari living in Finland today. Over 26,100 of them were born between years 1960–1979. Similarly, the total number of men called Jorma is about 36,500 and nearly 23,400 of them were born during the years 1940–1959. Between years 1980–2006 only a bit over 800 boys have been given this name (Väestökisterikeskus 2006).

*facie* rules which are related only to the world of academia (for example research ethics) or to a certain occupation (for example medical care).

Second, in homogenous teaching environments students and colleagues do not force teachers to acknowledge their culturally dependent moral views. Since presenting moral views as self-evident truths works against the basic objectives of teaching ethics, the teacher needs to be extremely sensitive in these matters. Pedagogical skills are also needed when students, because of their common cultural background, have a very strong tendency to favour one view against another. In such cases the teacher may occasionally have a moral and pedagogical obligation to offer arguments for an opposing view. However, even then s/he should often maintain his/her neutral role.

The relative homogeneity of the environment does not remove the need for special arrangements for fairness. Since two individuals are never similar in every respect, there are certain forms of diversity that are present in every student group. Fairness and justice are the most important moral bases for all education and no society has features that would allow the educators to ignore its importance and the need for methods for its achievement.

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