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# WHEN CREATIVE DIALOGUE IS NOT A SCRIPT: PLATO AS INSPIRATION FOR BIOETHICS PEDAGOGY



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### **When Creative Dialogue is Not a Script: Plato as Inspiration for Bioethics Pedagogy**

#### **Synopsis:**

A discussion of the creation of graduate-level bioethics case studies in dialogic form, after the example of the Dialogues of Plato; including the scholarly, ethical and creative imperatives of case study construction, dialogic or otherwise.

## **A Case Study on Innovative Bioethics Pedagogy, inspired by the Platonic Dialogues**

The *Dialogues of Plato* have for more than three millennia been justly regarded as essential to the canon of Western moral philosophy. But despite their enduring status also as works of art including the virtuosic use of dialogue they are not plays. Aside from the fact that they are not meant to exist in a theatrical setting (i.e., performed), they are clearly not meant to satisfy the function of a play, which according to Aristotle is primarily to evoke an unburdening, emotional response (catharsis) (Aristotle. *Poetics* VI:2; Butcher, S.H., Translator; 1895; rev. 1911; In *Criticism: The Major Texts* (Translated Version);

Bate, W.J., Ed.; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York, NY, USA, 1970; p. 20). Rather, the *Dialogues* inspire careful acknowledgement, reflection and analysis of difficult ethical questions, arguably made more accessible by the interactions of the works' discussants (characters) than by conventional rhetorical prose. This paper presents a pedagogical model inspired by the *Dialogues*, used in teaching bioethics in the Graduate Program in Bioethics at Wake Forest University (WFU).

The thirty-year history of this modern-day strategy is best documented in a 2017 paper (Robeson R and King NMP, *Healthcare* 2017, 5, 57; doi:10.3390/healthcare5030057) which traces its development from a health professions-to-community outreach project, to a medical school humanities and social sciences curriculum, to its current iteration in graduate bioethics education. The current proposal, however, is to describe how this ancient pedagogical device ethics case studies in dialogic form is reimaged for a setting in which it is commonplace that a given class roster includes aspiring students in medicine, law and the humanities; medical, law and divinity students via the graduate school's Joint Degree Programs; and also fully credentialed lawyers, physicians, social workers and chaplaincy practitioners. Now titled "Performable Case Studies (PCS)," this 700-level course has been highly regarded during the ten years that it has been offered at a Wake Forest University, within the Graduate Program in Bioethics, but also within the WFU community as a whole.

This paper is itself a case study in the imperatives (scholarly, creative, and ethical) and opportunities inherent in building a case study in general, but specifically case studies devoted to issues in bioethics, in dialogic form. Case examples include excerpts from the case studies produced on topics ranging from the ethics of human gene patenting, to access to putatively innovative biomedical interventions for intractable ailments, to the intersection of bioethics and public policy.