

Theory — INTO — Practice



Moral Dilemmas

**MICHAEL
McPARTLAND**

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
FOR GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS
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**Geographical
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Introduction

The interest, in England and Wales, in values education in general and in spiritual, moral, social and cultural values in particular is reflected in the flow of publications from government agencies concerned with these matters (NCC, 1993; Ofsted, 1994; QCA, 1997, 1998, 1999). In relation to the moral domain it is clear what these reports are advocating:

- The need to reassert the view that the education of young people must involve addressing their values and attitudes as a response to what is perceived to be a decline in their moral standards.
- The need to define a set of core values that can then be promoted in school both on a whole-school basis and within the context of different subjects. An attempt to do this is made in two Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) documents, *The Promotion of Students' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development* and *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools* (QCA, 1997, 1998). The former tries to identify and classify such core values under four headings, which relate to:
 1. the self (e.g. develop self-respect and self-discipline),
 2. relationships (e.g. resolve disputes peacefully),
 3. society (e.g. promote opportunities for all), and
 4. the environment (e.g. accept our responsibility to maintain a sustainable environment for future generations).

The second document lists a set of values and dispositions which might underpin the concept of citizenship, e.g. judging and acting by a moral code.

In a report entitled *Preparing Young People for Adult Life*, QCA (1999) offers the view that the importance of personal, social and health education in the curriculum is signified by the way it helps students to identify their values and live up to them. This report stresses the importance of getting young people engaged in the process of moral reasoning through the medium of *moral dilemmas*, which is the main focus of this book.

Geography teachers are engaging with the discussions that have followed the publication of the QCA documents and, in particular, responding to the question 'How can the subject make a significant contribution to the moral education of young people at the beginning of the twenty-first century?' According to Proctor and Smith (1999) these discussions are taking place at all levels of geographical education. As geography is impregnated with moral values, a central task for geography teachers is to focus more explicitly on them. If ethics can be defined as the systematic reflection on moral questions or specific moral concerns, within defined geographical contexts, then all geography teachers are engaged in an ethical endeavour. Indeed, Lickona has advocated building an ethical dimension into all subjects, noting that a 'value centred curriculum mainstreams moral education, moving it into the very centre of teaching and learning' (1991, p. 26).



This book is founded, therefore, on the following interlinked propositions:

1. That the moral dimension to many of the issues examined in geography ought to have a more explicit focus in the teaching of the subject. As Wright states: 'There are moral and spiritual themes everywhere - it is only we, the geography teachers, who stop them emerging' (2000, p. 41).
2. That moral dilemmas provide a useful device for responding to proposition 1 (above) because they combine both content (linked to specific geographical and environmental issues) and a process of reasoning deployed in an attempt to resolve them.
3. That for this device to be effective, the moral dilemma should be embedded within a narrative structure. This provides the richly detailed and realistic context, particularly if the narrative structure relates to people, places and the environment within which the moral dilemma is located.
4. That by focusing on moral dilemmas not only will we be inviting young people to identify the moral dimension in the geographical or environmental issue and to make and justify moral judgements in response to it, but we will also be involving them in the process of moral reasoning. Pring has noted that 'the ability to reason about and to resolve moral dilemmas, and the quality of that reasoning, are quite clearly important aspects of personal development' (Pring, 1984, p. 77). In a sense this book is arguing that thinking skills in geography (Leat and Nichols, 1999) should also embrace the concept of 'moral thinking' (Wilson, 1990).
5. That an enhanced capacity for moral reasoning will be transferred into other contexts both within geography and other curriculum areas.

I will explore these propositions by introducing two moral dilemmas: 'Bali Bound' and 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek', both of which have been used in geography classrooms. The first, 'Bali Bound' (page 16), uses the theme of international tourism to illustrate the concept of a moral dilemma, and the second, 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek' (pages 28-29 and 33), focuses on the topic of international migration. It illustrates the nature and quality of moral reasoning linked to the use of a moral dilemma in geography.



5: Using moral dilemmas in geography

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This chapter focuses on how moral dilemmas can be used in the geography classroom and looks at the nature and quality of the moral reasoning linked to the use of 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek'.

The use of moral dilemmas for promoting moral reasoning in the geography classroom has been advocated as one element in a whole repertoire of teaching approaches linked to values education (Maye, 1984). Slater (1982) has offered advice on how such dilemmas might be used in the classroom as part of a range of approaches for the interpretation and analysis of values in geography and, in a more recent paper, has demonstrated effectively the multiplicity of ways in which geography is permeated with values (Slater, 1996). There has, however, been limited empirical research on measuring the efficacy of using moral dilemmas to promote moral reasoning in a subject-based curriculum (Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975; DeHaan *et al.*, 1997). Two conclusions which emerge from this research appear to indicate that promotion of moral reasoning is most effective when it is integrated into subject-based teaching and when the strategies employed by the subject teacher encourage structured discussion in the classroom.

The moral dilemma 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek' (Figure 6 and Figure 7) was used with year 8 students studying migration within the context of a case study of migration from Mexico to the USA. The students had already discussed the concept of migration, types of migration, the consequences of international migration on the host and recipient countries and the importance of the push and pull framework for examining the causes of migration. The moral dilemma was introduced using a phased approach.

Phase 1: Presenting the dilemma

Copies of 'The Pilgrim at Topanga Creek: Delaney's story' (Figure 6) were handed out to the students. The teacher read the story to them and used an atlas and photographs to confirm the location of Topanga Canyon in relation to Los Angeles and to clarify specific concepts, such as 'canyon', 'creek', 'Spanish mission-style architecture', 'sagebrush'.

Each student was asked to consider the story and its attendant details carefully and to decide, as individuals, which decision (to give or not to give money) Delaney ought to make. The students recorded their decision and were asked to offer reasons to support their view.





Figure 6: A moral dilemma constructed using a narrative.

The Pilgrim at Topanga Creek

Delaney's story

My name is Delaney Mossbacher. I live at 32 Pinon Drive, Arroyo Blanco estate, a few miles west of Los Angeles close to the Santa Monica Mountains. I live there with my second wife Kyra, our son Jordan, our two terriers and a Siamese cat. The estate is located near the side of a ridge which overlooks a deep valley called the Topanga Canyon. It is a private estate. It has its own golf course, ten tennis courts, a community centre and 250 houses. All the houses are built in the Spanish Mission style. They are all painted in one of three shades of white and have orange roofs. Nobody is allowed to paint his or her house in a different shade.



Photo: Kathy Vilim.

I got up at seven that morning, as usual, to make Kyra's coffee, fed Jordan his fruit high-fibre bar and let the dogs out into the garden. It was a beautiful sunny morning. The temperature was about 30°C. I squeezed three oranges and, while Kyra sipped her coffee and washed down her 12 vitamin tablets with the juice, I made a cup of herbal tea and two slices of wheat toast for myself.

I am a journalist. I write a monthly column for a magazine called *Wide*

Open Spaces. I am an environmental journalist. I write about changes to the wild flowers and animals of the region, day by day, season by season. The column is called 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek'. I dedicate it to my late Aunt Dillard. She was also an environmentalist and like me she loved nature more than she loved people. In my column I often express my concern for the pupfish, the Florida manatee and the spotted owl because they may all disappear soon. I worry a lot about over-population, deforestation, global warming and the 5 billion people using up the limited resources of our planet. This morning I heard on the radio that there are only 75 Californian condors left on earth.

After Kyra had driven Jordan to school in her car, I decided to visit the recycling plant at the top of the canyon. So I loaded my new Japanese car, just washed and waxed, with a pile of newspapers and empty diet-coke cans and drove out of the estate. The road winds up the canyon. It was about 10 o'clock. I was driving along when suddenly a man appeared in front of my car. I felt a bump and knew at once that I had hit him.



I am ashamed to admit that my first thought was for my car. Was it dented? Would my car insurance rate go up? And then I remembered him. Who was he? Where was he? Was he badly hurt? Was he dead? I thought he must have been hiding in the bushes at the side of the road and had decided to jump in front of the car. Even now I remember the look of fear on his face, the flash of his moustache and his cry.

I was trembling as I turned the engine off. I got out of the car in a daze. The dust was still billowing in the air because I had braked so quickly. Other cars passed by but none stopped to help. Perhaps they thought it was a set up. There had been reports of gangs of Mexicans faking accidents and then attacking and robbing the drivers as they got out of their car. To the left across the road was the wall of the canyon; to the right the canyon fell away to the dry sandstone bed of Topanga creek many metres below. I couldn't see anything other than sagebrush and treetops but I guessed the man was down there among the scrub oak and the manzanita bushes. I remember thinking why did this have to happen to me? What had I done to deserve this?

And then I heard a low moan. I looked into the bushes at the side of the road and there he was lying on the ground with blood coming from his mouth. One side of his face was badly bruised. He was still holding a plastic bag with some tortillas in it. He said something in a foreign language. I suddenly realised he was speaking Spanish and that he was probably an illegal immigrant from Mexico. He was probably living at the bottom of the canyon. Was he one of the Mexicans, I wondered, who mowed the lawns of the estate? I have lived in Los Angeles for two years but this was the closest I have come to a Mexican. Where had he come from? What did he want? Why had he thrown himself under my car?

I asked him slowly if I could help him. And then he smiled or tried to. A film of blood clung to his jagged teeth, half hidden by his moustache. He licked the blood away with his tongue. I asked him what he wanted. And then he whispered 'Money, money' rubbing the fingers of his undamaged hand.

Question: Ought Delaney to give him some money?



The Pilgrim at Topanga Creek

Candido's story

My name is Candido Rincon. I was born in Tepoztlan in the south of Mexico 33 years ago. I have a girlfriend called America. She is 17 years old and she is expecting our first child in four months time. She was born in a small village not far from Tepoztlan. I have known her since she was four years old. She is the youngest sister of my wife, Resurreccion. She was a flower girl at our wedding.

A few years ago I spent some time working in the potato fields of Idaho. In nine months I made more money than my father had made in his leather shop all his life. Most of the men in my village had gone north to the USA to work in the fields, tired of sitting all day in the cantina drinking beer. A few men stayed behind – the rich and the crazy and the men who stole your wife while you were away in the north. This is what happened to me. I came home to find that my wife had left to go and live in Cuernavaca with a man called Teofilo. She was six months pregnant and she had spent all the money I had sent her. America was the one who broke the news to me. I was so ashamed. I wandered the hills of the Sierra Juarez sleeping in my clothes. I tried to cross the border but the US immigration caught me and put me in prison in Tijuana.

When I came out I had no money. I danced for people in the street. I begged from the turistas. I stole a can of kerosene and became a tragafuegos – a streetcorner firebreather – earning a few centavos. One day I met America in the street. She was sixteen and she looked just like her sister only much better. I told her I was going to take her with me when I go north again. One month later we crossed the border at night and made our way to Los Angeles – the City of the Angels.

We had no money to rent a place to live. The streets of the city are dangerous and so we decided to live at the bottom of a canyon. We had a sandy bank near the river to live on, wood for a fire, a stream for drinking water and for washing and when it rained a tarpaulin sheet hung between the trees kept us dry. America was worried about the snakes and the spiders. Each day I left the canyon to look for work. It was not easy but at least in the canyon we were safe from la chota – the police – and the immigration. I managed to find some work building walls or clearing sagebrush from ravines. We had very little money.

One morning in August I decided to visit the small shop close to the canyon to buy some tortillas. America had built a small fire. The hot sun climbed above the canyon walls. America said she would make some tea from the manzanita berries. We always boiled the water before drinking it since the rainwater had drained through the septic tanks of the large houses of the area before entering the creek. I made my way up through the canyon to the road. I kept my eyes down, not wanting to look at the gringos on their way to work in their cars. To them I was invisible. I reached the Chinese grocery after about half an hour and bought a stack of tortillas to go with the pinto beans.

I returned along the road thinking of America. Was she alright deep in the canyon among the chapparal and the oak trees? At first I did not know what hit me. I was flung into the bushes at the side of the road. I was in great pain. My face seemed on fire and my arm was hurting badly. I soon realised I had been hit by a car – a gringo's car. I saw him standing over me. He asked me if he could help me. I knew this was my big chance and I smiled with happiness. 'Money', I said, 'give me money'.

Figure 7: Extending
'The Pilgrim at Topanga
Creek' moral dilemma:
Candido's story.



Phase 2: Analysing the dilemma

A teacher-led discussion on the alternative decisions made and the nature of the reasons advanced then took place. During this discussion students were encouraged to justify the alternative choices they had made, specific aspects of the story were clarified and, for the students, the complexity of the issue was explained.

Groups of three or four students, who had made a similar decision, were then asked to choose and justify the best reason for Delaney giving or not giving the Mexican some money, and to share their views with the rest of the class.

Phase 3: Extending the dilemma

The moral dilemma 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek' has two parts: the first part (Figure 6) tells the story from the American, Delaney's, perspective - culminating in the request for money by the Mexican. The second part (Figure 7) tells the story from the perspective of the Mexican, Candido - culminating again in his request for money.

Copies of Candido's story were handed out and read by the students. The students were then asked (individually) if, in the light of Candido's story, they had changed their mind as to whether Delaney should or should not give Candido money. They were, once again, encouraged to offer reasons to justify their decision. This information was recorded and debated during a teacher-led whole-class discussion.

Phase 4: Reflecting on the contexts

Finally, the whole-class discussed the economic, historical and political contexts in which the dilemma was embedded. The students and teacher considered the ways in which these contexts might be changed to eliminate the dilemma.

Investigating the moral reasoning

We can immediately ask:

- What was the nature and quality of the moral reasoning which accompanied the use of the first part of the dilemma in the classroom?
- How might we classify and interpret the nature of the response to the dilemma?

It is necessary to use some kind of framework for the analysis and implementation of the responses made. Wilson (1990) evaluates the nature and quality of the moral reasons advanced in response to moral conflict according to certain attributes or components, on the grounds that during a classroom activity such as the one described above, we are not looking for the 'correct' response but for the quality of the student's moral reasoning - i.e. the extent to which the student is being morally reasonable in the decisions he or she makes. Figure 8 lists the main components of Wilson's framework and uses a simple code to indicate what each one means.



Code (see below)	Main component
Phil (HC)	Having the concept of a person
Phil (CC)	Claiming to use this concept as a universal, over-riding and prescriptive moral principle
Phil (RSF) (DO) and (PO)	Having feelings which support this principle either of a 'duty oriented' (DO) or 'person oriented' (PO) kind
Emp (HC)	Having the concept of various emotions
Emp (C) and (UC)	Being able in practice to identify one's own emotions and other people's both at the conscious and unconscious levels
Gig (KF) and (KS)	Knowing the relevant facts and sources of facts
Gig (VC) and (NVC)	'Knowing how': a skill element in dealing with moral situations both in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication
Krat	An alertness to moral situations and to make moral judgements and implement them

Phil is an attitude which regards others as equals, accepting their interests as equally important.

Emp is an ability to know what oneself and others are feeling and what their interests are.

Gig relates to the attainment of knowledge of the facts relevant to any moral choice and an ability to know how to perform effectively in any social context.

Krat relates to the motivation to draw upon these other moral components and act upon a moral judgement made.

Figure 8: Wilson's moral components.

The student's responses to the 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek' activity were classified according to the degree to which they exemplified Wilson's components. The degree to which they do so is a measure, according to Wilson (1990), of the quality of that student's moral awareness and moral thinking. This framework can also be used to identify both a hypothetical response for each of the categories and, in most cases, an actual response to the 'Pilgrim at Topeka Creek' dilemma presented to the year 8 students (Figure 9).

Wilson's list of moral components has been criticised because it emphasises the form of reasoning but neglects the context within which that reasoning takes place (Bottery, 1990). I would argue that the value of using moral dilemmas in geography in a narrative context, rich in detail, is that it links precisely the form of reasoning to that context.

In terms of the quality of moral reasoning, a high-quality response would embody some of the following attributes, demonstrating that the student:

- possesses some idea of what constitutes a person and accepted that certain rights flowed from that recognition;
- understands that these human rights must apply in all similar circumstances;
- is aware that such feelings as anger, remorse, pleasure, disapproval or sorrow are linked to the acceptance or rejection of these human rights;
- has an appreciation of the ways his or her own emotions and those of others are inextricably bound up with the situation;
- is using judgements that are informed by the known facts relating to the situation;
- understands that there are certain acceptable ways of proceeding:



Moral components	Hypothetical response	Actual student response
Phil (HC)	'The man is a human being with distinctive needs.'	'Even if he was an illegal immigrant he was still a human being and he needs help.'
Phil (CC)	'An illegal immigrant must be subject to the rule of law and be deported.'	'He is an illegal immigrant and he should not give him money because he was not, by law, supposed to be in the USA and he would be helping somebody who should not be in the country.'
Phil (RSF) (DO) and (PO)	'It is Delaney's duty, being rich, to help meet the needs of the poor Mexican.'	'The man was in trouble and in need. Delaney should give him money because he could be alone and have no friends and family.'
Emp (HC)	'I would feel frightened getting out of a car on a lonely road.'	'Delaney should not give the Mexican money because he might have deliberately run into the car so that Delaney would feel sorry for him.'
Emp (C) and (UC)	'I would feel sorry for the poor Mexican especially as he would be suffering great pain from his injuries.'	'I am annoyed that Delaney thinks first about his car and not the injured Mexican.'
Gig (KF) and (KS)	'There is blood coming from his mouth and therefore he requires immediate medical treatment.' 'If the accident was reported to the police he would certainly get deported.'	'He could pay the man's medical bills for him.' 'Delaney should not give the Mexican money because he might be an illegal immigrant and Delaney could get into trouble for it.' 'He needs to see a doctor because he has blood in his mouth.'
Gig (VC) and (NVC)	'I think Delaney should get out of the car, apologise to the poor Mexican for running him down, show sympathy for his position and arrange for an ambulance.'	
Krat	'Delaney ought to help the poor, injured Mexican in his situation. It is his moral duty.'	'I think Delaney ought to give him money for food, for his family and for proper shelter.'

Figure 9: 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek' and its moral components according to one group of year 8 students.

- possesses an awareness of the moral dimension to the situation and a willingness to make and defend a moral judgement.

The extent to which a student's response does not demonstrate or only partially demonstrate these attributes would be, for Wilson, a measure of the quality of his or her moral thinking.

By using a moral dilemma, such as 'Pilgrim at Topanga Creek', as the focus of geography class work, the teacher will be making explicit the moral dimension to the topic of migration, raising the awareness of the students to the arguments which can be advanced to support or reject the moral decision made by Delaney, and inviting the students to revise their views in the light of the whole-class discussion and further information from Candido's story. This process will help enhance the quality of student's moral reasoning, evidenced in this case by the extent to which this reasoning embodies these moral attributes.

Theory — INTO — Practice

The aim of *Theory into Practice* is to take aspects of current research into geographical education and deliver them directly to the classroom practitioner. Geography teachers from across the professional spectrum will be able to access research findings on particular issues which they can relate to their own particular context; thus students will benefit from new and well-informed approaches in the classroom, whilst teachers will keep their own professional development fresh and up-to-date.

A key element in the series is to encourage teachers to reconsider their thinking about teaching and learning in geography; we hope to reinvigorate the debate about how to teach geography and give teachers the support they need to revisit essential questions like:

- Why am I teaching this topic?
- Why am I teaching it this way?
- Is there a more enjoyable/challenging/interesting/successful way to teach it?
- What, how and why are the students learning?

The books in the series will provide a framework both for challenging current assumptions about the nature of the subject in schools, and for answering these questions in new and well-informed ways.

Each book in the series has been contributed by acknowledged experts in their particular fields.

Moral Dilemmas

MICHAEL McPARTLAND

This book focuses on the role and value of moral dilemmas in the classroom.

It demonstrates how they may be used to explore the moral dimension to issues in geography and thus make a contribution to the moral development of the student. Although primarily aimed at geography teachers this book will be of value to teachers of other subjects.



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