



# KEEPING THINGS REAL IN BIOETHICS EDUCATION – BENEFITS AND HAZARDS OF INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION IN TEACHING

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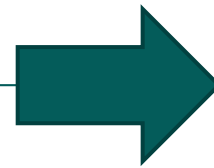


# Acknowledgement of country

**I am presenting today from the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of these unceded lands. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present, and I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and all other First Nations peoples participating in today's meeting.**

**To understand the role of interprofessional collaboration in bioethics education, we need to understand bioethics...**

# BIO ETHICS



Study of  
**contemporary  
ethical issues** relating  
to **biomedical**  
sciences, **healthcare**,  
technology, the  
environment, etc.

the scientific  
study of **life**



# BIO(LOGY) ETHICS

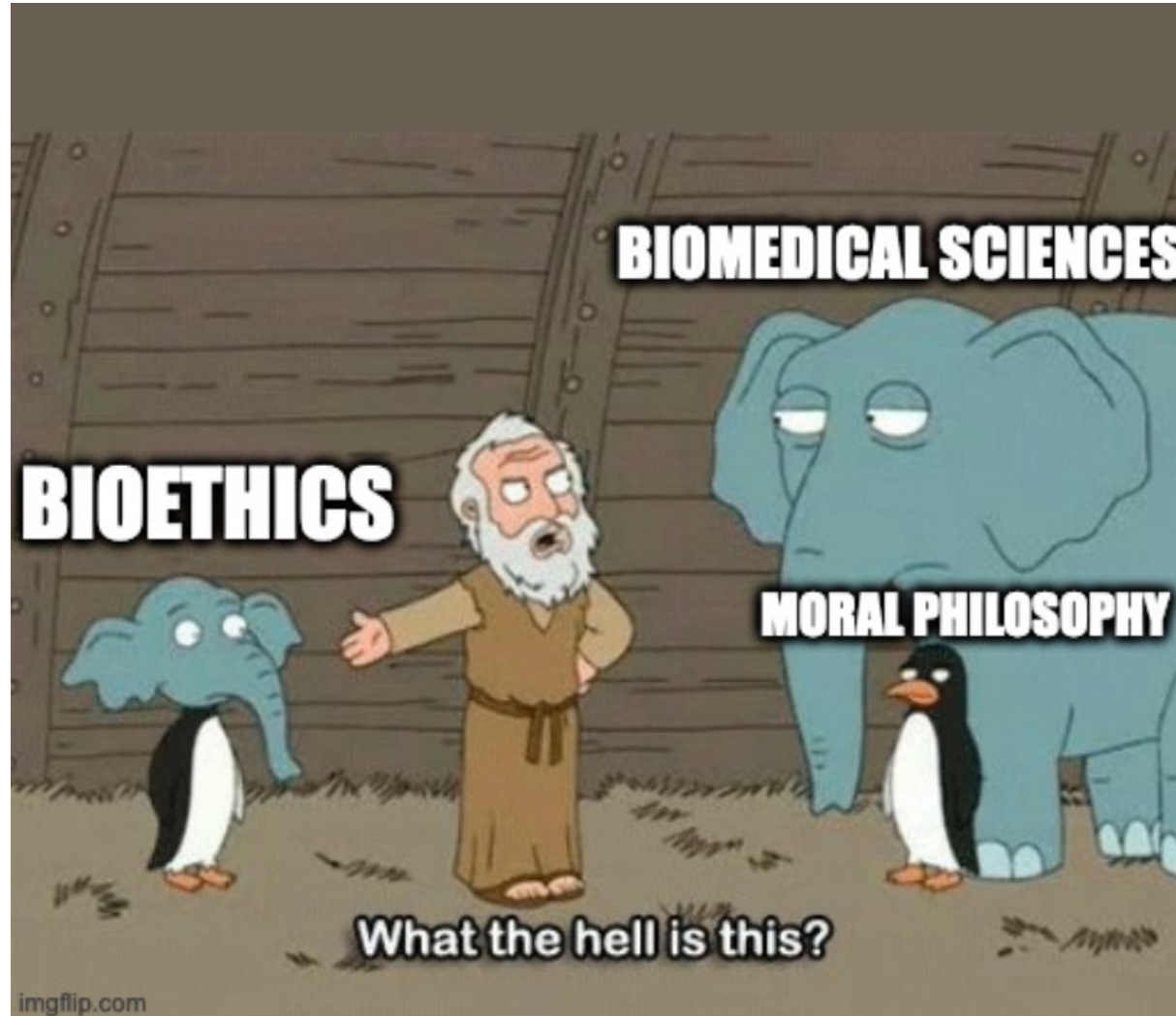
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“an enquiry.. [into]  
**what is valuable...**  
**how we ought to**  
**live”**

(Wittgenstein 1965)

# Studying bioethics



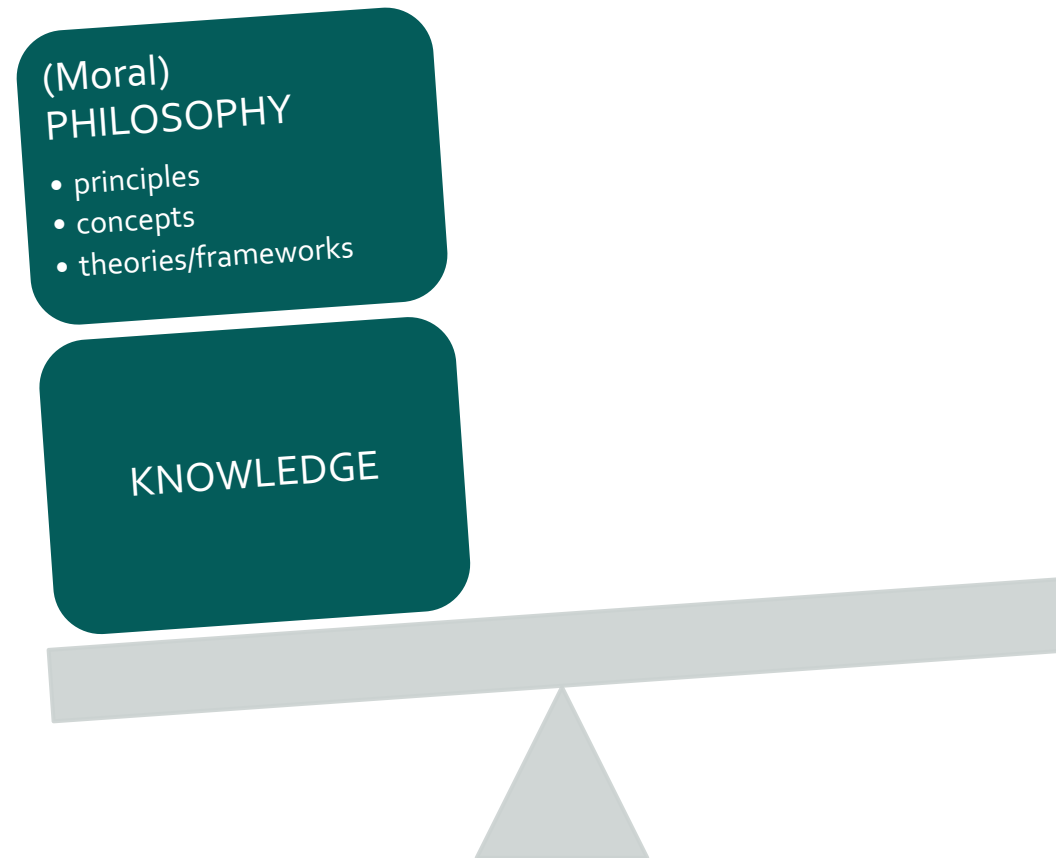
# Goals of bioethics education

Learning objectives vary according to curriculum context, but generally address a combination of...



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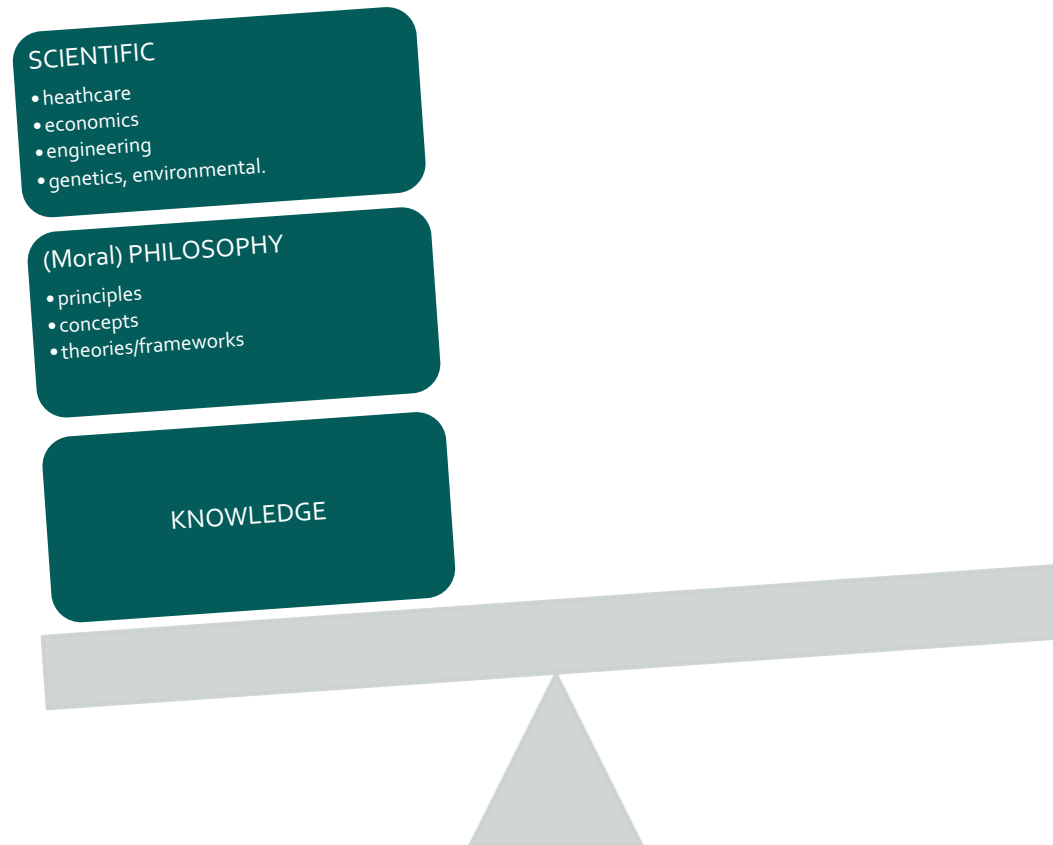
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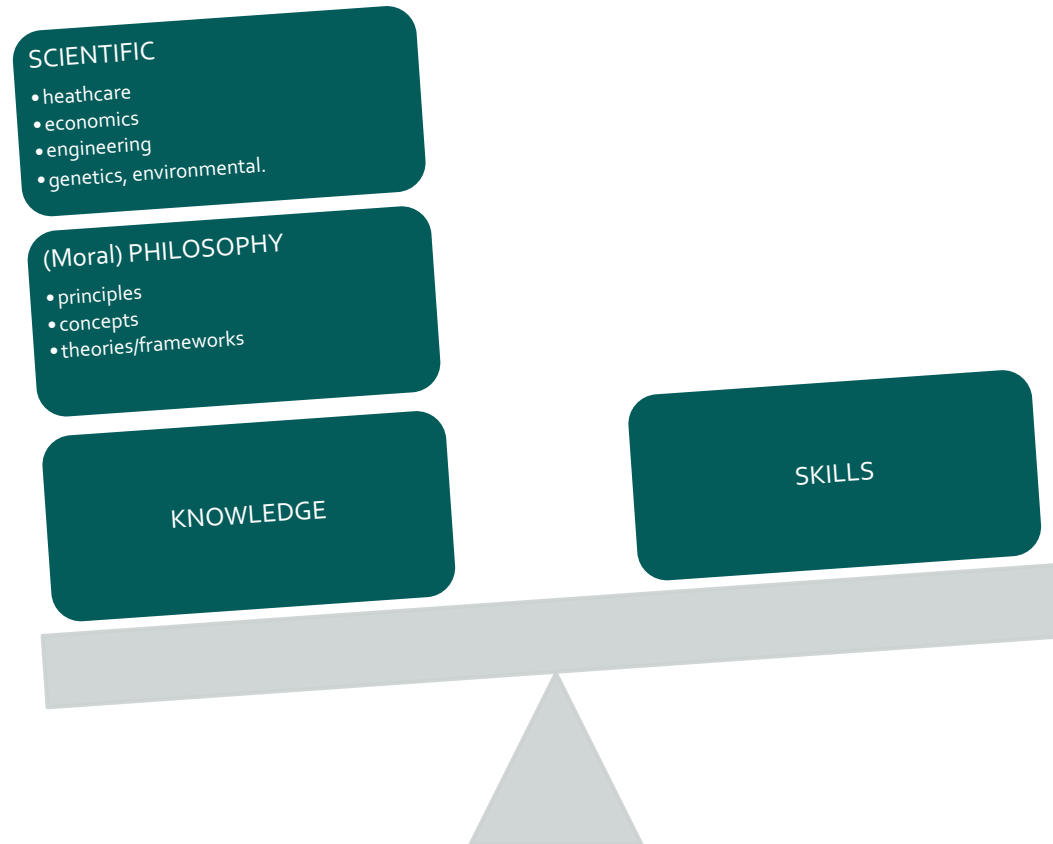
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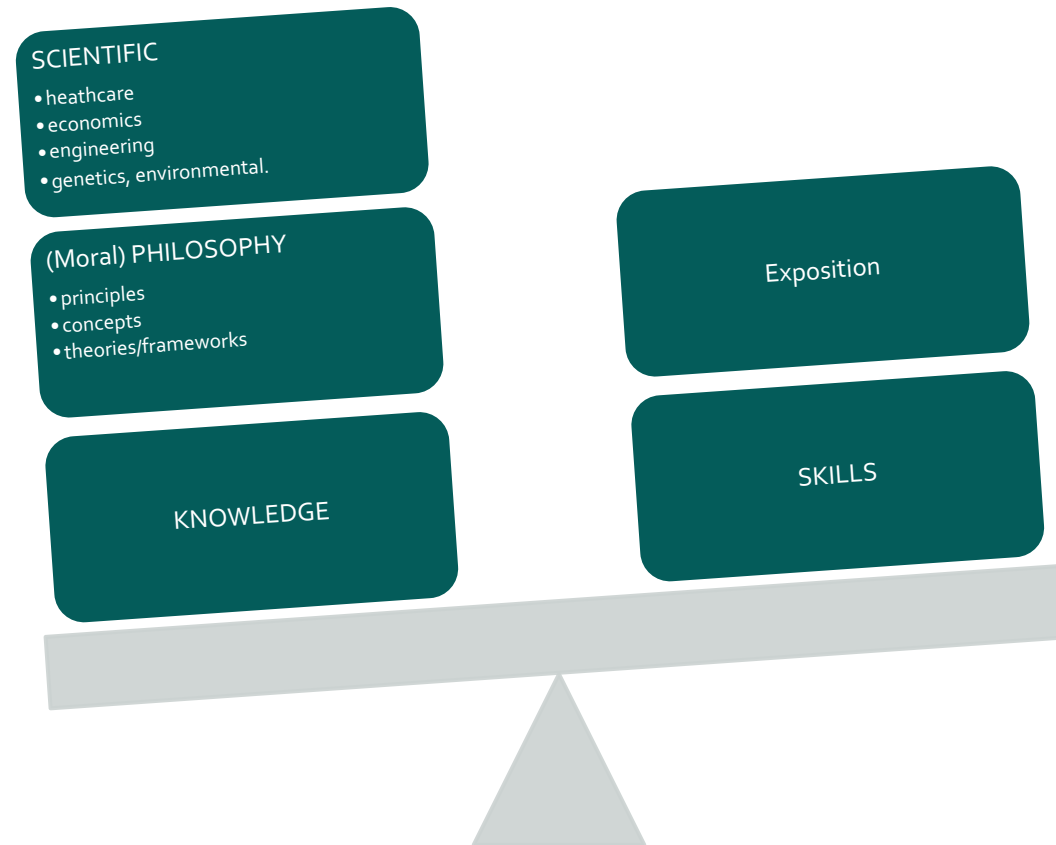
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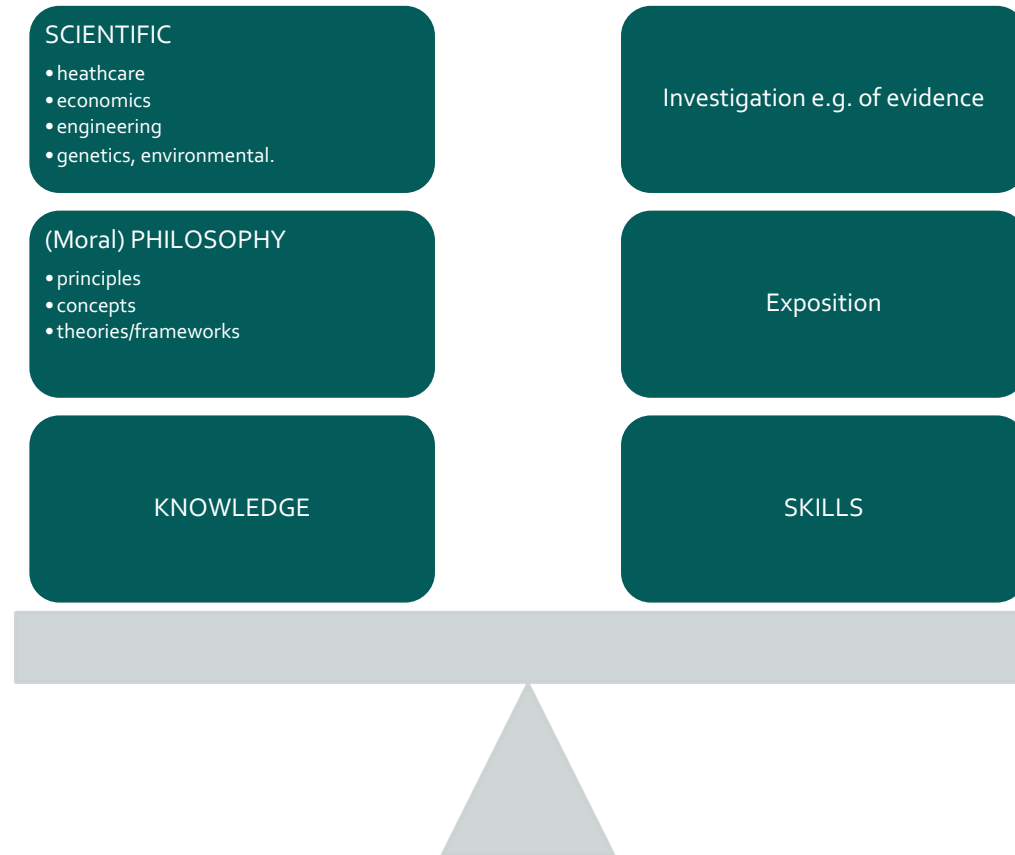
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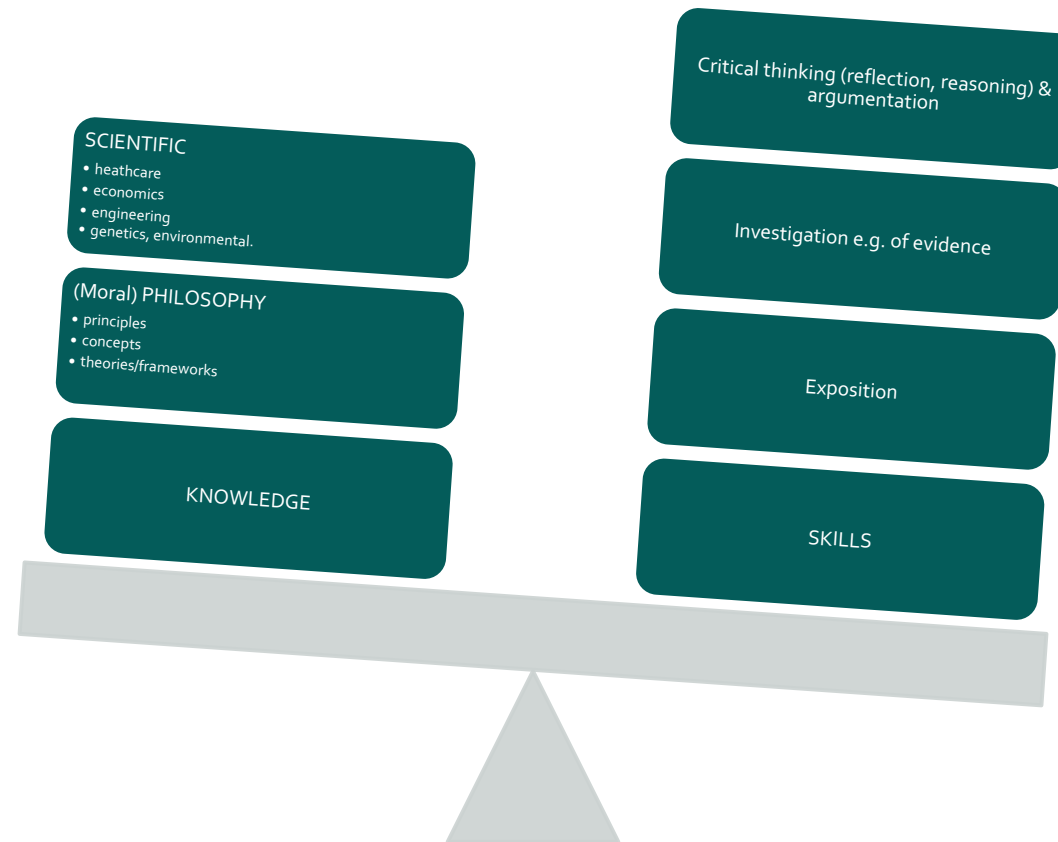
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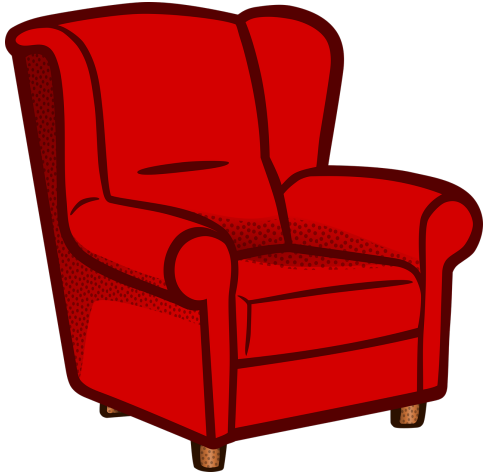
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# Understanding bioethics (education)



**Bioethics education aims to equip students with the skills to apply ethical theory in the analysis of contemporary issues ... in order to inform and guide ethical decision-making and practice.**



“without **doing** these [virtuous acts], no one would have even a prospect of becoming good.”

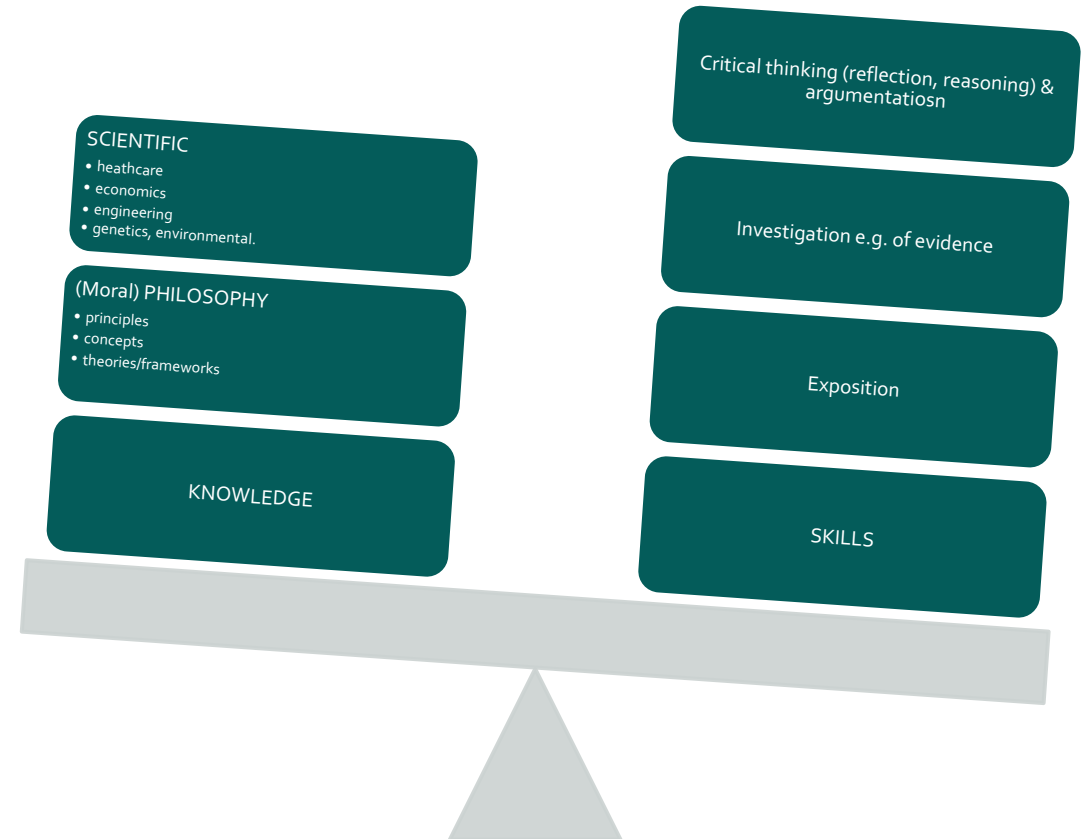
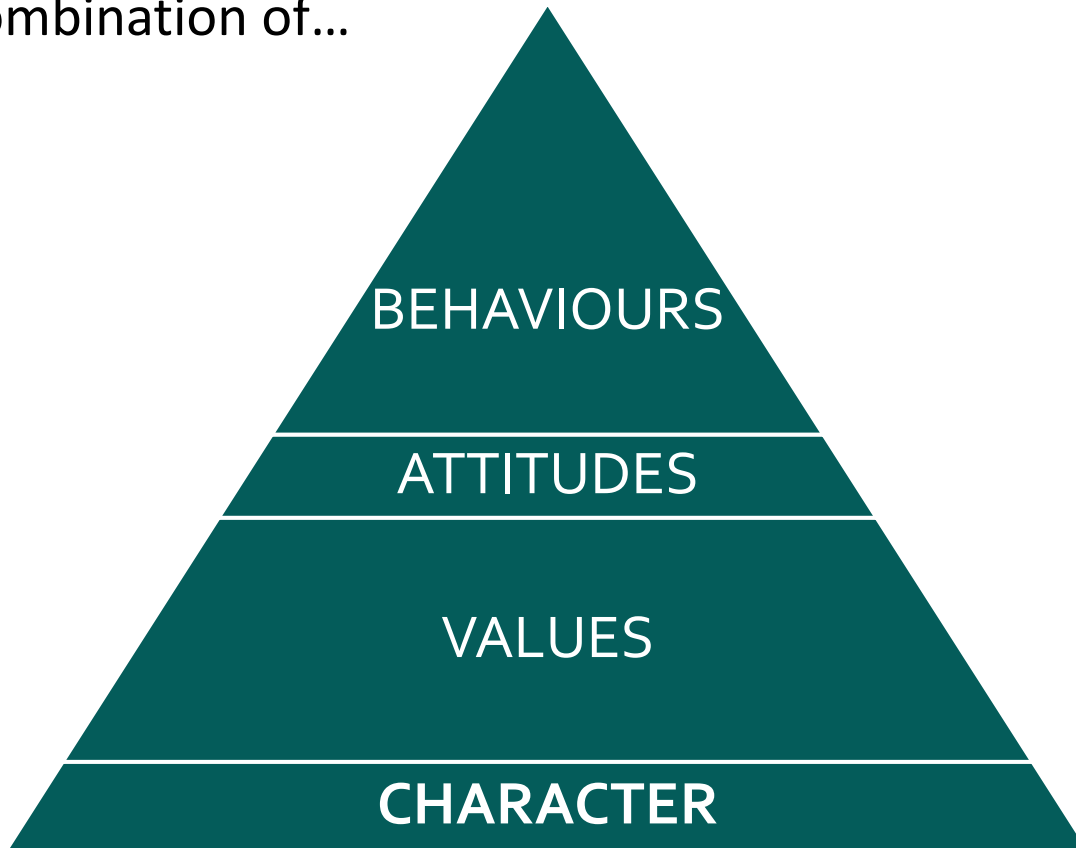
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“Nor is practical wisdom concerned with universals only-it must also recognize the particulars; **for it is practical**, and practice is concerned with particulars.”

(Aristotle 1954)

# Goals of bioethics education

Learning objectives vary according to curriculum context, but generally address a combination of...





# Why consider interprofessional collaboration in bioethics teaching?

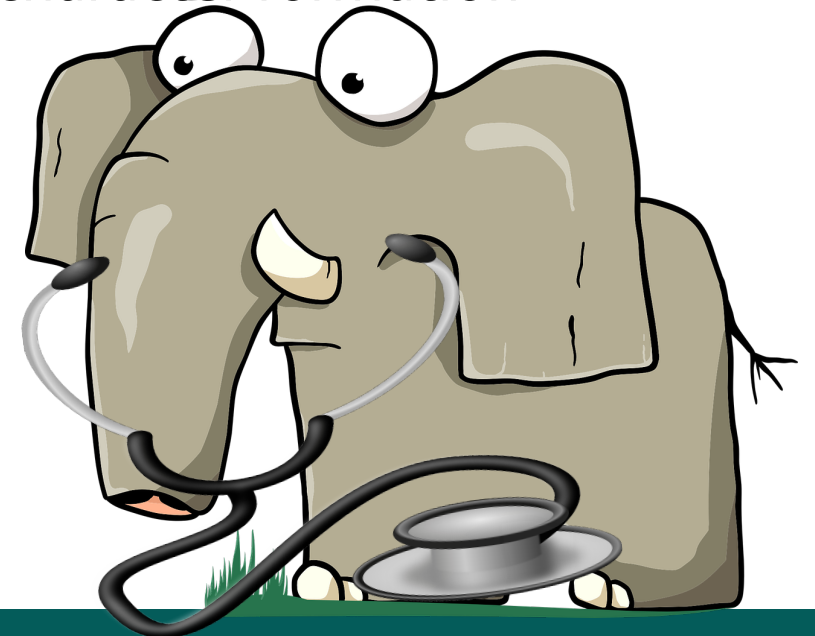
# Why consider interprofessional collaboration in bioethics teaching?

Each professional/scholar typically has

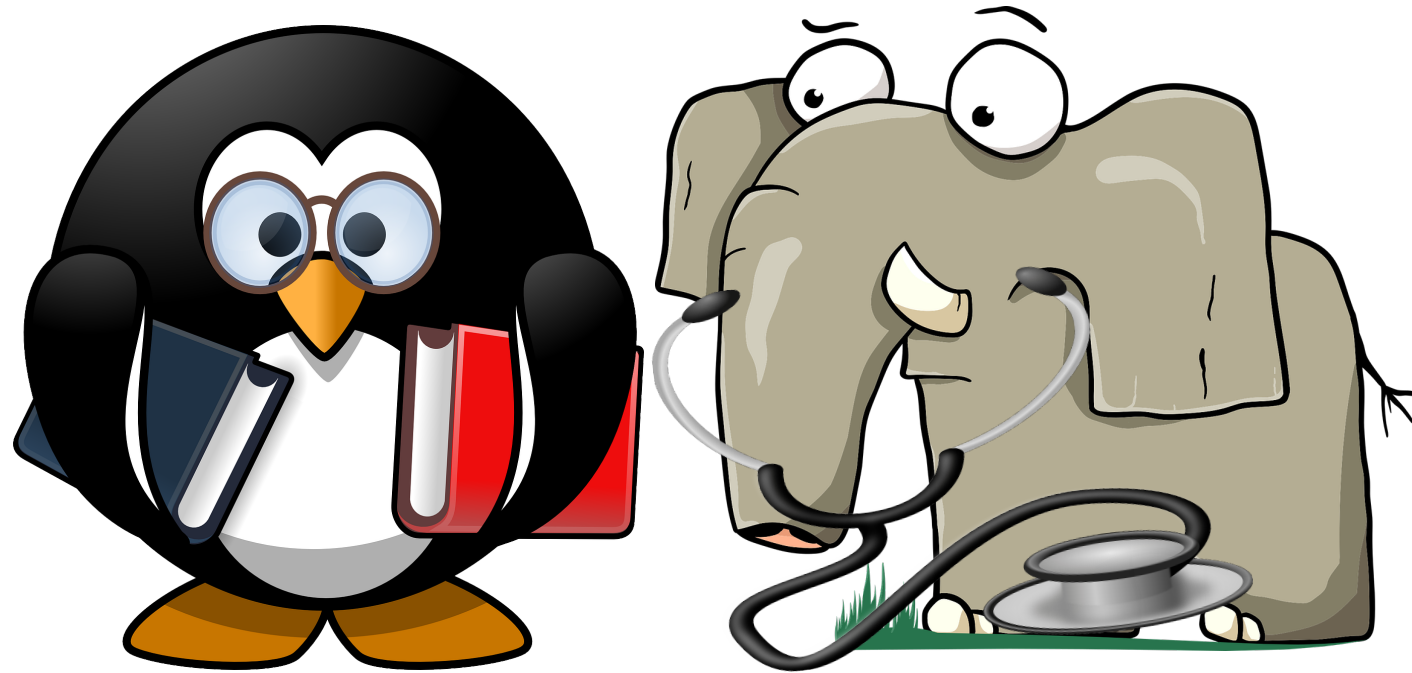
- Relevant theoretical/empirical knowledge and perspectives...
- Common skills (albeit applied in different contexts) e.g., communication, problem analysis, reasoning, management of decision-making in uncertainty



Learning may take place in a range of professional settings:  
→ Practical placements may be required for skills development or character formation



# Why consider interprofessional collaboration in bioethics teaching?



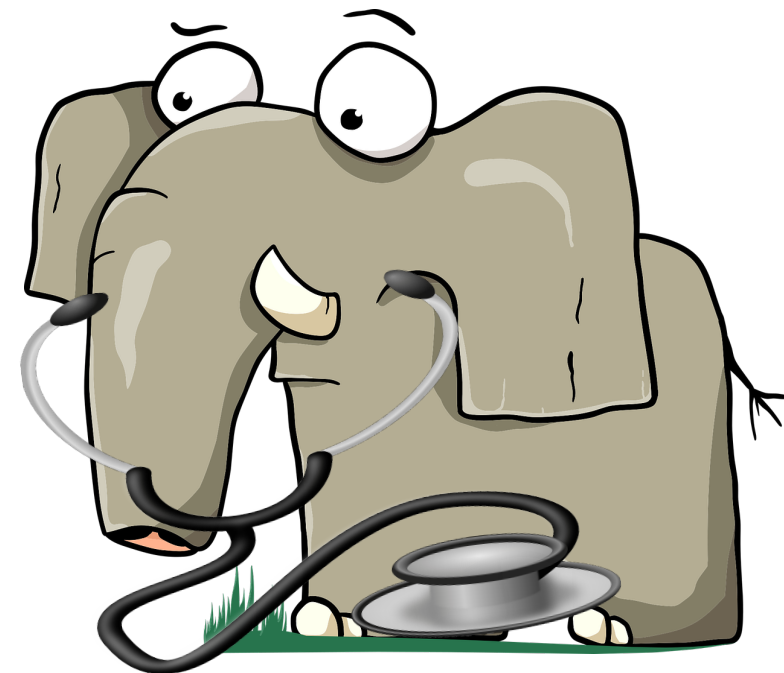
Effective collaboration:

→ enriched knowledge, dialogue, perspective, curriculum alignment across different learning environments → better understanding of issues that are value-laden and shaped by empirical facts and possibilities → normative analysis informed by evidence

# Why consider interprofessional collaboration in bioethics teaching?



Mutual  
distrust,  
antipathy  
or  
contempt?



# The clinician “ethics expert”

Bioethics = “four simple principles”

- Get consent
- Don't hurt people
- Always give medication
- The fourth principle only matters if you work in public health

*What really matters is the law – it tells you clearly what you can and can't do, ethically speaking.*

The real dilemma here is clinical rather than ethical in nature – which treatment would be best for this patient?



# The philosopher “clinical ethicist”

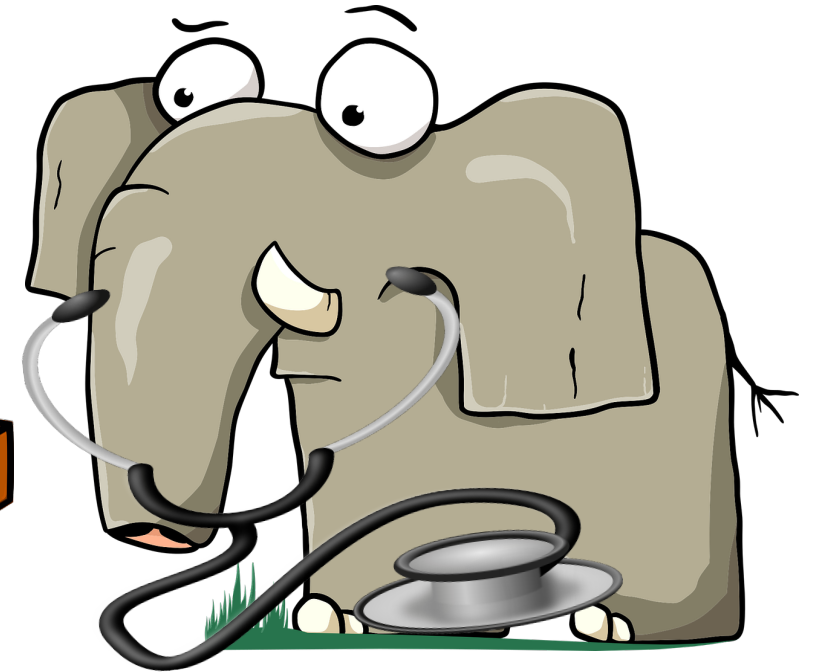
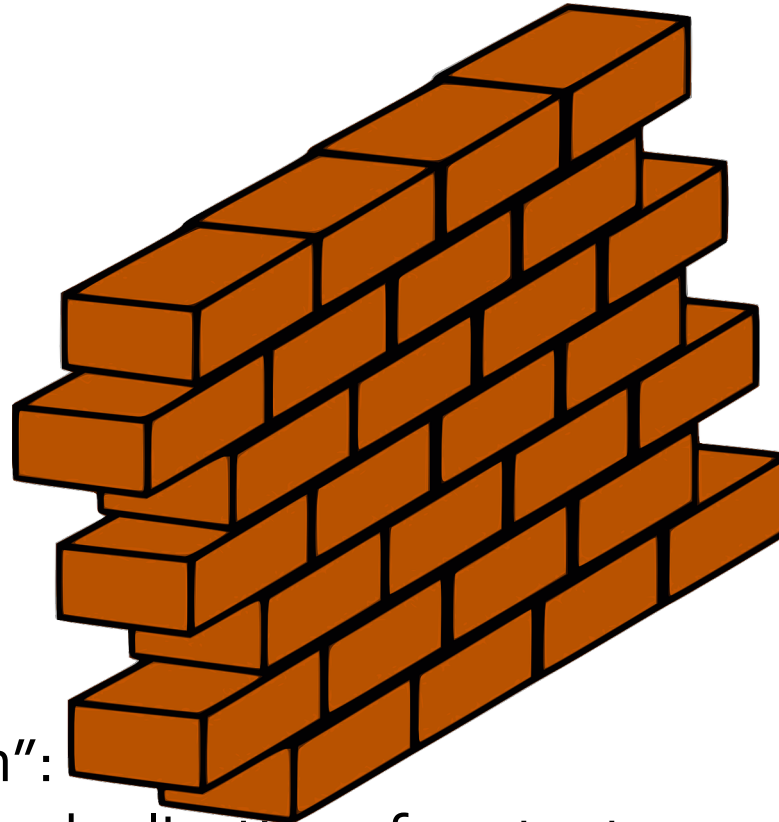
Bioethics = extensive and substantive philosophical exegesis of hypotheticals...

*What really matters is the theoretical grounding and conceptual clarity; the law is irrelevant and your obsession with “real world” details is an irritating distraction.*

The real dilemma here is whether you’ve employed and consistently applied a Kantian approach in which the categorical imperative is satisfactorily elaborated to determine whether in principle we might consider possibly giving this patient a kidney under specific conditions that shall subsequently be elaborated.



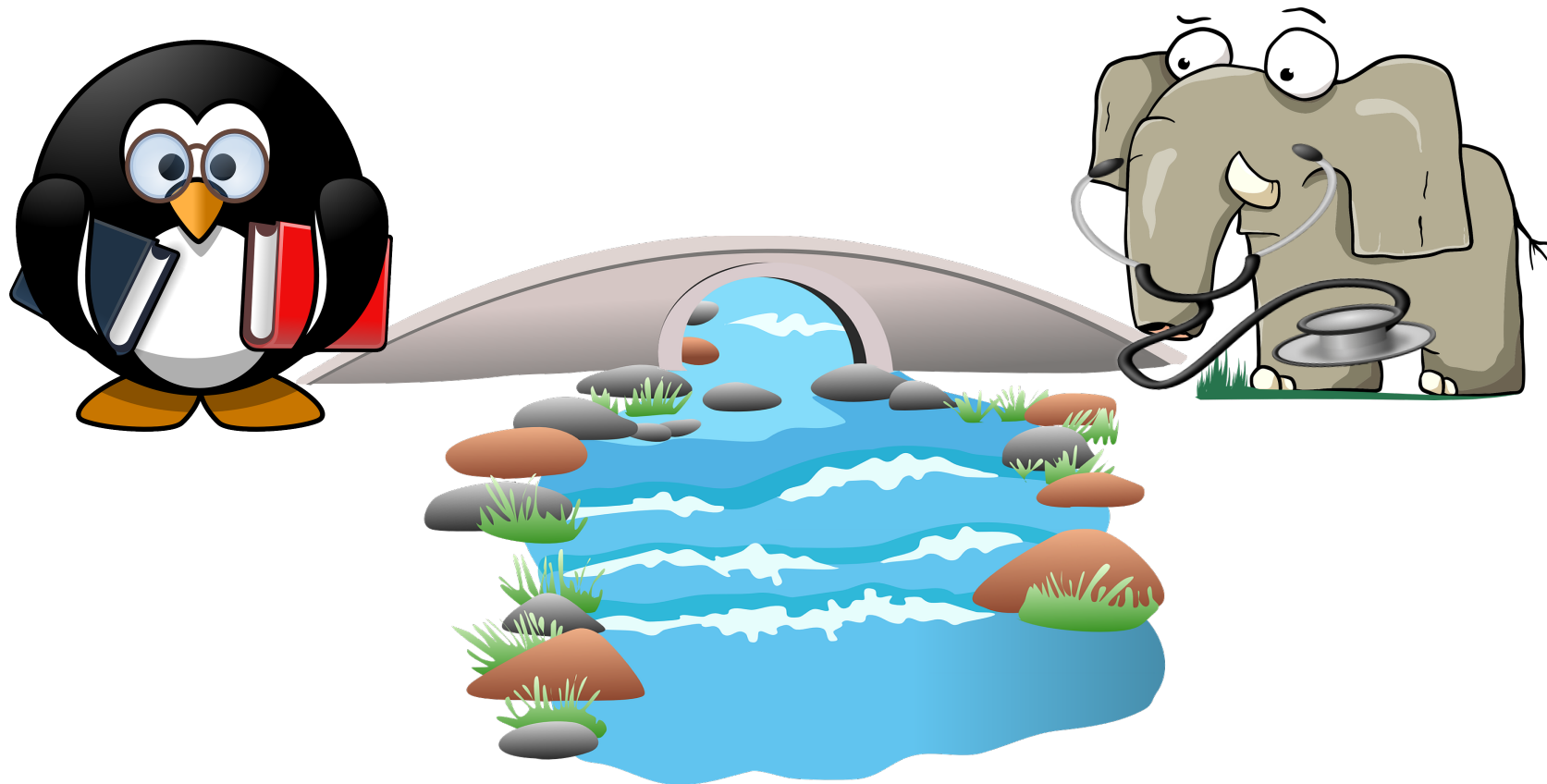
# Why consider interprofessional collaboration in bioethics teaching?



Ineffective “collaboration”:

- Siloing within curricula, duplication of content
- Learner confusion, conflicts, disparagement of disciplines
- Wasted resources

# Potential strategies to support interprofessional collaboration in bioethics teaching





# Potential strategies to support interprofessional collaboration in bioethics teaching

- Involve a “third party”, or, ideally, people with training in more than one discipline
- Be prepared to **compromise**, e.g., on curriculum priorities → Recognize that something (or someone!) sometimes has “got to give”
- Adjust expectations, few people are intentionally ignorant...
- Foster **interdisciplinary understanding**, e.g. by providing foundational ethics training for clinical staff, and introducing non-clinical staff to foundational aspects of clinical care; by encouraging collaboration on research
- Pay attention to **practical barriers** to collaboration in teaching, e.g. if clinicians can’t come to campus, can philosophers go to the clinic?
- Focus on the **end goals of learners**, e.g., when, where, and how are they likely to apply their bioethics skills and knowledge in future careers?
  - Learning should be designed to best support achievement of these goals.
- Provide high quality bioethics learning experiences for future professionals who will have responsibility for teaching.

# Four easy examples of interprofessional collaboration in bioethics teaching

- Interprofessional panels in case-based discussion
- Co-design and/or delivery of classes
- Interprofessional peer review of curricula, learning resources, assessment tasks etc
  - E.g. clinically authentic case scenarios, clear guidance for assessment of ethical knowledge/skills
- Conversations about teaching and learning



# Conclusion

- Bioethics is fundamentally interdisciplinary – this complicates curricula design and delivery
- Professional/disciplinary expertise in teaching is valuable – but may require interprofessional collaboration to provide all relevant expertise
- Ineffective interprofessional collaboration can undermine achievement of learning goals
- Approaches to interprofessional collaboration in bioethics should be designed with regard for local professional cultures, available expertise, practical and pedagogical constraints, and always centred on the end goals of students.



# References

- Aristotle. 1954. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ross D (translator). Oxford University Press: London.
- Wittgenstein L. 1965. I: A lecture on ethics. *The Philosophical Review*. 74(1), 3-12.

**Thank you!**

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