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Ethics Module Summary
CLS 146/WGS 149: Sex and Gender in Classical Antiquity, Fall 2008

During Fall 2008, I included an ethics module for the first time in my course on Sex and Gender in Classical Antiquity. The course covers sex and gender in ancient Greece and Rome, with a strong focus on ancient gender hierarchies and the role of ancient women. For the ethics module, the class considered the following:

- 1) Is prostitution a just and ethical practice?
- 2) Can murder ever be just in a society?
- 2) Is ethics culturally relative?
- 3) Is there a code of scholarly integrity when writing and studying history?

In addition to readings, in order to consider the above, we performed the following exercises:

1) Role-played two ancient court cases over a period of three class sessions. One case involved a husband who murdered the lover of his wife. The second involved a woman accused of being a prostitute and passing her children off as citizens. The class of 32 students was divided into groups of three. Each group contained a prosecutor, a defendant, and a juror. I provided each group with a list of questions. The groups then debated the case as a whole class. This exercise was the most successful of the term.

2) Passed judgment on Medea, first with a modern viewpoint and then trying to adopt an ancient viewpoint. The character of Medea is most often recalled for having murdered her own children, after her husband abandoned her for a new bride.

3) Read theoretical articles on the integrity of writing history to support our more specific and practical discussion of ethics. The students wrote a short paper debating with the theoretical ideas. In class, we discussed how history gets written and studied. How does one write a history of a country, a time period, an issue? Who writes history? Who reads history and why?

Overall, the ethics module was successful, helping the students not only to consider ethics in the ancient world, but in their own world. They debated if their own code of ethics could be applied to different time periods and different societies. Such considerations are important for citizens in an increasingly diverse society.