Guidelines for Contemporary Moral Issue Presentations and Discussion Facilitation

You have each been assigned to a group (groups are posted on the website on the dates you will be presenting), which will give a presentation on a contemporary moral issue in the context of the ethical theories we’ve discussed throughout the semester. Each group will then facilitate discussion during the class following its presentation. All members of the group must be present for each of these two class sessions or the group will lose a full letter grade.

What should be in the presentation?
1. A brief summary of the moral issue. This should be brief, i.e., no longer than 5-7 minutes of the presentation. It should be a summary – a good, clear account of the major features that make this a moral dilemma. Remember from our first week that one should explain not only why there is a dilemma, but also what it is that makes this a moral dilemma. Everyone will have read the chapter as well, so you just need to highlight the key features in addressing that question. You are welcome to dig deeper into the nature of the dilemma and find other layers to the dilemma that aren’t presented in the Hinman textbook. If you do this, your summary may take a bit longer, but should not be more than 10 minutes of your presentation.

2. The majority of your presentation time should be devoted to an account of how a selection of the various ethical theories (at least 3) that we’ve discussed over the course of the semester would deal with this moral dilemma. Where would, for example, Kant position himself on the issue? What are the salient features of the dilemma in determining this? How would various theorists differ? Which do you feel has the best insights into sorting out the moral issues? You may also want to revisit our discussion of the role of religion and culture in morality as it is relevant to your particular issue.

3. Presentations should be 40-45 minutes overall, leaving me a window of 5-10 minutes to take care of class details, follow-up on points that need emphasis or the integration of an in-class writing. You may also suggest in-class writing topics yourself in conjunction with or in preparation for the discussion you will be facilitating in the following class session. If you chose to do this, someone from your group needs to consult with me in advance (i.e., the day before or earlier).

4. If you consult outside materials for either #1 or #2 above (or both), please, type up an annotated bibliography of resources consulted and turn it in to me at the time of the presentation.

And what is the discussion facilitation in the second class session?
Your job collectively during the second class session is to stimulate and maintain discussion of the ethical issue of the day. You can assume that everyone in class will also do all the readings in the chapter, so there’s no need to summarize formally unless there’s an article which is particularly difficult or sophisticated, in which case, briefly going over the argument will aid in facilitating further discussion. You should each be prepared with notes and questions for the articles in the chapter. Questions which link the articles in some way or address the articles in terms of the content of your presentation would be especially valuable.
It is your job to keep discussion moving – imagine that I won’t be there: how would you get everyone talking for 45 minutes about the readings/moral issue?

One resource I have available to you is a video with clips from Nightline. Your chapter may or may not have a clip associated with it. And if it does, you may or may not find it valuable. However, your group can preview the video clip at AV services. And if you choose to use it for discussion, please notify me at least 24 hours in advance so that I can be sure to have it cued up and picked up in time for class.

General Expectations:
I expect that your group will meet in advance of your presentation at least twice. The first time you will want to get to know each other – your strengths, ethical positions, and so on – and assign tasks for the presentation. Then a second (and possibly third) time to finalize the details of the presentation – the order, who’s going to say what, whether you need overheads and what will be on them. Use these second and third meetings to make sure you’re getting the theory right.

If you have questions about the theory you’d like to use, don’t hesitate to make an appointment to see me and go over it several days before your presentation is due. In fact, I would encourage this. Be sure to let me know specifically what you’d like to discuss in advance, so we can use our time together in the most efficient way possible.

I expect that everyone will participate in the presentation and that each of you will be equally prepared for the discussion facilitation during the following class. Note again: All members of the group must be present for each of these two class sessions or the group will lose a full letter grade.

If you have any AV requests, including the need for overheads, these requests must be made in a timely fashion.
  • Overheads need to be dropped off or e-mailed electronically by noon the day before. I can probably manage a single overhead or two the morning of a presentation if (a) I am expecting it (i.e., you’ve e-mailed or called me to notify me by noon the day before your presentation), and (b) it is dropped as a hard copy to my office by 8:15 a.m. that morning.
  • I need to know about video requests by at least noon the day before.
  • Any AV needs which require equipment not regularly in the classroom need to be made with me at least 72 hours in advance so that I have ample time for making the proper arrangements/requests. If you can let me know even sooner, that’s even better.

Your group will be graded on the basis of:
a. the clarity of the presentation of the moral issues involved in your topic,
b. how well you integrate a discussion of the theories discussed in the first part of the class into your presentation of the moral issues (i.e., is your characterization of the theory accurate?, do you adequately address the moral issue in terms of theory?, are you able to compare the merits of the various theories in the context of the dilemma discussed?, and so on),
c. whether each member of the group has contributed equally, and
d. the care with which you prepare for the discussion on the second day.