Discussions: the Online Discussion Boards for Philosophy 104 Bioethics (Fall 2018)

This document contains a detailed explanation of how the online discussion boards work for our online class.

✓ The 15 questions we will discuss in this course are not very detailed questions, but my expectations for how we will conduct these discussions are very detailed expectations.
✓ Some of my expectations are about the mechanics of our discussions: since this informs how the discussions are graded, be sure you do each bit, each time, on time.
✓ Some of my expectations are about content of our discussions: be sure that you include certain concepts in certain discussions, no matter what conclusions you eventually reach.

Here is a reminder of what the syllabus said about discussions:

• Discussions (3 points per Part x 15 Parts = 45 points): For each Part, use the small group discussion board to make your own original post reacting to the target question by midnight Wednesday (1 point), your own ratings and short replies to each original post of each student in your small group by midnight Saturday (1 point), and your own two long replies to any two original posts of other students in your small group by midnight Saturday (1 point). Details in ’Discussions’ PDF.

Here is a detailed breakdown of how to earn each of the three available points:

• (1 point) Your own original post reacting to the target question is due by midnight Wednesday:
  o For each Part of our text Contemporary Debates in Bioethics, you are required to make one original post to your small group discussion board sharing your own reaction to the yes-or-no question that is the focus of the relevant Part.
  o Each Part of our text has an interesting debate on target questions by two authors. You may lean towards agreeing with the answer given by one of the two authors even if you do not agree with his or her arguments. Or you may be perfectly neutral or undecided or “on the fence” about the target question after doing the readings.
  o One way to get to your small group discussion forums is from the bottom left of the main menu: click ‘My Groups’ then ‘Group #’ then ‘Group Discussion Board’. Click on the relevant Forum. Click “Create Thread.” (Do not merely hit ’Reply’ to an existing post and put in your new title, since that will not display your message as an original thread in the list of original threads for your classmates and I to view).
  o Explain your answer to the yes-or-no target question in an original post of 200-300 words. Begin the title of your original post with a number from 1 (="No, for sure!") to 9 (= “Yes, for sure!”); the number 5 represents being perfectly undecided or "on the fence."
  o Please remember to include a bit of text in your title after the initial number to distinguish your title from other people's titles. This makes it easier for everyone (including you) to see who you have and have not already replied to.
  o Remember to keep an eye on your word count minimum—you must explain your answer to the yes-or-no target question in at least 200 words (and hopefully less than 300, although the maximum is less important than the minimum here). When you are done, click ‘Submit’.

• (1 point) Your own ratings and short replies to each original post of each student in your small group are due by midnight Saturday:
  o The rating element: Each rating should be either...
    ▪ one star (if the student author’s original post fails), or
    ▪ two stars (if the original post is adequate), or
    ▪ five stars (if the original post is the best original post in your entire small group for this part).
  o The short reply element: Each short reply to an on-time original post must...
    ▪ Begin by labeling itself at the top of the body of the message (not the title, but the message itself) as a “Short Reply,” and then skip a line by hitting enter twice,
- Continue by adding a salutation which addresses the student author you are replying to by using his or her preferred name ("Dear Jim," or "Dear Jenny," and so on), and then hitting enter twice,
- Contain at least one full sentence that clearly proves that you read the post of the student author you are replying to.
  - Here is an example of a Short Reply that does everything well format-wise:

  **Short Reply**
  
  Hi Anna,

  I like your post, but I would have to disagree with Kant when he says we have the right to do things without input from others, because most people who sell their organs are not doing it out of the goodness of their heart, but because they need the money. Good post!

  Lyuda

  - Here are several more details and reminders about ratings and short replies:
    - Remember this easy rule of thumb for all replies: **you should give each on-time original post in your small group either a short reply or a long reply (but not both)—and you should be sure to do at least two long replies for each part of the course.**
    - Give each original post in your small group a rating by clicking on its “Overall rating” scale.
    - Do not rate the post based on whether you agreed with it. Give each post exactly 1, 2, or 5 stars (no 3s, no 4s, no zeros). Only give one ‘5-star’ rating for each Part.
    - You should only rate the original posts of others in your small group. Do not rate their replies.
    - All students can see what **average “Overall rating” any given post has at any given moment. But no student can ever see what individual rating another student gives to any given post. (And you cannot rate your own post.)**
    - The professor uses these Overall Ratings to monitor online group discussions and to give extra credit. The top-rated post from each small group is put into a ‘Discussion Superstars’ forum so the entire class can view them (if there are ties for a group’s top-rated post, a content-neutral tie-breaking rule is used). The professor then picks what he thinks was the best-written post(s) in the entire class, gives its student author 1 point of extra credit, and gives each member of that student’s small group .5 points of extra credit for selecting him or her. Please think about this when you rate your small group members, and cheer on your small group members as they “represent” your small group in the Discussion Superstars. If you don’t want your original post to be shared with the entire class—even if your post gets the highest ratings from your small group—just signal that with an asterisk (*) at the very start of the text of your original post.

  - **(1 point) Your own two long replies to any two original posts of other students in your small group are due by midnight Saturday:**
    - Basic idea: Make at least two long replies of 100+ words to two original posts of others in your small group. Each long reply must choose a specific structure from the three options described below.
    - 3 options: Each long reply must begin by announcing the correct letter of the approach being taken ("A:" or "B:" or "C:" ) and must include the correct number divisions (like “A-1” and “A-2”) and so on:
      - **Approach “A”: Problematic.** Define your longer reply in terms of arguments and views of the original post’s student author that you find problematic. In your longer reply, show how the student author’s conclusion does not follow, either because (A-1) the student author’s reasons are false or (A-2) the student author’s reasoning is mistaken, or (A-3) the student
author has failed to make other important considerations that tend to undermine the conclusion.

- **Approach “B”: Agree.** Define your longer reply in terms of arguments and views of the original post’s student author that you basically agree with. In your longer reply, (B-1) consider ways in which the student author’s views might reasonably be criticized. Then (B-2) attempt to strengthen the student author’s position by showing how these criticisms can actually be met. If you use this technique, be sure you don’t consider criticisms that the student author actually does respond to in the context of their original post (unless, of course, you think that the student author has failed to answer the objections effectively).

- **Approach “C”: Interesting.** Define your longer reply in terms of arguments and views of the original post’s student author that you find interesting, but which you are currently disinclined to either fully accept or fully reject. (C-1) Carefully articulate the strongest considerations in favor of the student author’s view and (C-2) carefully articulate the strongest considerations against the student author’s view. Then (C-3) carefully explain why you remain undecided and (C-4) indicate precisely what sort of information or arguments would be required for you to be able to make up your mind.

  o Formatting specifics for Long Replies:
    - Begin each Long reply by labeling it at the top of the body of the message (not the title, but the message itself) as a “Long Reply,” and then skip a line by hitting enter twice.
    - Label each long reply with the relevant letter and the label for that type of long reply (either Approach “A”: Problematic or Approach “B”: Agree or Approach “C”: Interesting), and then skip a line by hitting enter twice.
    - Continue by adding a salutation which addresses the student author you are replying to by using his or her preferred name ("Hey Kylo", "Hey Luke", "Hey Leia", "Hey Rey") and then skip a line by hitting enter twice.
    - Then then skip a line before starting each of your required sections with its relevant letter-number letter combination: one section if Approach “A”: Problematic (either "A1" or "A2" or "A3"), two sections if Approach “B”: Agree (both "B1" and "B2"), four sections if Approach “C”: Interesting (all of "C1" and "C2" and "C3" and "C4"). Please start each of these sections by stating up front each letter-number combination (do not hide the letter-number combinations somewhere else in parentheses). If there are multiple sections, please skip a line between each section.

  o Here are three examples of Long Replies that do everything well format-wise:

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Long Reply

Approach “A”: Problematic

Hi Russell,

A1: I agree that money seems to be a major influence on the decisions that individuals make on a daily basis and could be a major incentive for people to donate but I do however, respectfully disagree with the last comment in reference to suicide and whether or not it should be 'prohibited' so to speak. As tragic and unfortunate suicide is and as much as I believe that it should not be the way to go about in attempting to save another’s life by taking your own life in order to donate, it is also an action and an option that an individual has the right to make and almost impossible to regulate. If an individual takes their own life and also happens to be an organ donor, there is no way of knowing their reasoning for ending their life and I don't think it would be reasonable for a clinic or hospital monitoring the organ transplantation process to deny perfectly healthy and functioning organs based on the cause of the donor’s death.

Erin
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Long Reply

Approach “B”: Agree

Hey Rob,

B-1: I agree with your conclusion that it is morally acceptable to buy and sell organs but I do not think you are considering the opposition to this view with enough respect. Were this to be implemented, there is a great possibility that it would impact poor people, exploiting their status and vulnerability. Much like predatory loans now take advantage of poor people's positions, so would organ vendors. They could be pressured into feeling the only way to get by would be to sell their organs which in itself could be bad but could also lead to them having medical problems in the future putting them into even worse financial situations. It could also lead to more people choosing to sell their organs rather than altruistically donating them, meaning poor people needing organs may not be able to afford to get them.

B-2: That said, I do still think it is morally acceptable. You focus on a very important part of the argument, human autonomy. If we have the freedom to do with our bodies as we please, selling our organs ought to be included on the list of permitted actions. Plus, although there might be pressure put on poor people to sell their organs, they still ultimately have the choice of if they want to do so or not.

Hannah

Long Reply

Approach “C”: Interesting

Danny,

You brought up interesting points in your post.

C-1: The “trafficking of the poor” is a valid point that should be addressed before creating a market to buy and sell organs. It is common for those at the top to make more profit than the poor in any sort of economy.

C-2: You mention the rich buying all the organs and there would be none left for the poor. However, in a regulated market system there would be base prices for these organs, not just whatever the buyer wishes to pay.

C-3: One of the reasons why I remain undecided is because I disagree with your point about the rich and greedy buying organs. I do not think it is greedy for anyone to buy something that could save their life or the life of a loved one.

C-4: Something that would help me make up my mind is that if you could offer more information about how the market would be regulated.

Grace

Here are two final clarifications:

- The Wednesday midnight deadline for original posts, and the Saturday midnight deadline for ratings, short replies, and long replies, will be enforced by Blackboard’s time-stamps.
When I review your discussion board participation, every person’s ‘Feedback to Learner’ field in my discussion board grading screen will be given an abbreviated grading rubric like this:

- Original Post (1@200+words): -1 point
- Ratings (1/2/5) & Short Replies (1 per post): -1 point
- Long Replies (2@100+words, ABCs & #s): -1 point

Here is an example of how the scoring would work for a given Part for a group with exactly 12 members in it (named A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, and L) when the following events unfolded...

...11 of them made their original post on time (A was late)...
...11 of them hit the word count on the original post (E was <200)...
...11 of them addressed the topic in their original post (G did not)...

...11 of them rated and made some reply to all the (on-time) posts of others (C did not give D any reply)...
...11 of them made all their ratings and replies on time (F made only a late reply to D)...

...10 of them made two long replies (J made none, K made just one)...
...9 of them didn’t follow the instructions on their two long replies (L made two but didn’t follow the structure)...

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<th>Long Replies</th>
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