What Makes a Good Discussion!

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What a good discussion is not!

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Every bioethical dilemma we will study in this class will touch a deeply held moral belief of one or more members in the group. We will by the nature of the topic have several difficult high stakes discussion. They are important and we need to address these issues so we can live good lives. It is important that in our discussions we support each other as individuals while we seek the truth. It is important that the knowledge and beliefs of all participants are considered and that we not alienated so that everyone can speak what is true to them while we seek to discern our own truth. We need to create and atmosphere where we can challenge ideas while not challenging the person.

Groups can investigate a question in one of three ways. They can debate discuss or have a dialogue. In most classes or study groups use discussion format to investigate and explore a question. I believe it is worthwhile to look at the nature of each of these three styles of communitative interaction. Debate is oppositional where sides attempt to prove their view is right and others are wrong. The goal is to convince others to your view through forceful opinion and argument. Debate works from the premise that there is one correct view. Discussion is the process of talking about something in order to reach a decision or to exchange ideas. In discussion members present there ideas and listen to others to seek answers and solutions by sharing ideas. The goal is still to come to one correct answer in most cases and therefore persuasion and enlisting others to one’s view is still a component of the exchange. Dialogue is an
exchange of ideas with a view to reaching an amicable agreement or of understanding and respect for others’ view while still disagreeing. In a dialogue exploring differences, leads to suspending judgements, evaluating assumptions, and introspection on one’s own beliefs. It is open ended and invites participants to deal with paradox and ambiguity. In this class my goal is to incorporate a hybrid of a discussion/dialogue format. The end goal of our “discussions” is to help each participant to understand the question and to build a coherent ethical response that speaks truth to them.

Community Discussion Agreement

Discussion is essential for the success of this course. Discussion will help you to reach a more critically informed understanding about the ethical issues we are considering by enhancing your self-awareness and capacity for self-critique, to help you to foster an appreciation among for the diversity of opinion that emerges when viewpoints are exchanged openly and honestly with others, and for it to act as a catalyst to help you take informed action in the world. For this to occur we need to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaborative inquiry in our discussions. I propose that we embrace the following agreements.

1. Listen respectfully to others without interrupting.

2. Criticize ideas, not individuals.

3. Allow everyone the chance to speak.

4. Listen actively and with an ear to understanding others’ views.

5. Understand that others will come to these discussions with different experiences from yours.

6. Commit to learning, not debating