Guidelines for Position Paragraphs

Position paragraphs require concise, focused, and organized writing. Your assignment is to write a paragraph that analyzes one specific ethical idea from the current course unit. You choose the idea to write about; the point of the assignment is to reflect deeply on a topic that matters to you. If you need help selecting a topic, consult your instructor. In general, a good strategy is to write about whatever you consider to be the most important (or interesting, relevant, controversial, wrongheaded, or strange) point raised in the reading.

What exactly do you need to do?

**Review the supplemental materials.** Make sure you have read the assignment carefully enough to be able to make a considered judgment about your topic. Remember: Your Position Paragraph must focus on a single topic, so make sure that you have identified just one point to write about.

**Review relevant Discussion board discussions.** Take some good reading notes and try summarizing crucial points concisely and clearly.

**Reflect on what you have uncovered, with an eye to forming your own opinion about the text and about the topic.** Questions you might want to consider include:

- Of the issues discussed in the text, which topics are most important to you?
- How much ethical theory can you apply to your own experiences? Explain.
- After applying ethical reasoning, would you view the situation differently? If yes, how so?

These reflections will provide the raw material for your Position Paragraph. Your paragraph should be a carefully crafted distillation and summary of your reflections. Here’s one format you can try:

**First: A sentence that clearly and concisely identifies your topic.** Your sentence should be free of jargon (or it should explain any jargon that is absolutely necessary), and it should immediately get to the heart of the matter. Don’t start with a general introduction to your topic and then take four or five sentences to describe it -- your goal is to crystallize the essence of the topic in one excellent sentence. Concision, clarity, and focus are crucial.

**Second: A sentence that explains the philosophical significance of your topic.** You can explain how it fits in with the rest of this week’s assignment; how it connects up with other issues we have read about or discussed how it has affected you or your life or why you find it important or interesting. You may spend several sentences doing each of these things if you wish, but an excellent sentence focusing on just one of them is vastly preferred to a mediocre "kitchen sink" answer.

**Third: A sentence that sets out your opinion about this topic.** To maintain focus and clarity, it is best to write about just one evaluative point as concisely and carefully as you can. Space may remain to raise a second point, but only do this if you are sure that the rest of your paper is just right.
Fourth: A sentence that provides the ethical reasoning that would support your opinion or stance on the issue: This sentence should clearly demonstrate your understanding of the ethical theory used (Consequential – ethical egoism; ethical altruism; utilitarianism or non-consequential – Kantian Principles, absolute law, Divine Command, etc.) to support your position.

Fifth: A statement of conclusion. Your conclusion should tie your thesis (specific issue) to your stance or opinion through the ethical reasoning to conclude an ethical position.

Leave yourself enough time to rewrite, edit, and proofread your paragraph. (Hint: A sufficiently clear, focused, and concise paragraph should "sound right" when you read it out loud, and should be reasonably clear to a friend who is not in the class.)