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24.120 Moral Psychology
Spring 2009

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Text Presentations

In order to fulfill the requirements of the course, at least once during the semester students must do a close analysis of a selected passage in one of the assigned readings. The exercise will have three parts: a small group discussion with other students in the class, a 15 minute class presentation, and a 15 minute discussion. Assigned passages will be distributed around a week in advance.

Small Group Discussion

Everyone will be paired with one or more other members of the class. Each week, one group will meet outside of class to discuss the assigned reading. Their task will be to come up with an interpretation of the passage and to discuss their critical responses. They should expect to tackle such questions as the following:

1. What is the author trying to do in this passage, i.e., what are they saying and why?
2. What questions of interpretation arise about the author's meaning? Are there confusing passages, or ones that could have multiple meanings? What possible interpretations seem most reasonable and why? What difference does it make if the author is interpreted in one way or another? What evidence can you provide that your interpretation is the best one?
3. Is there an argument being advanced in the passage? If so, what are the premises and what is the conclusion? If there is an argument, you must be *very explicit* in stating what you take to be the premises and the conclusion.
4. On what background assumptions does the author rely?
5. How does this passage fit into the author's larger aims in the text as a whole?
6. What questions or criticisms occur to you about the author's line of thought?
7. How might the author (or one sympathetic with his or her view) respond to your questions and criticisms?

Class Presentation

The small group discussion will be the basis for 30 minutes of discussion. The designated group will begin by presenting what they take to be the strongest interpretation of the reading, followed by a commentary indicating what they think are the most interesting issues raised, what they found most puzzling, etc. Following this, their object will be to draw the rest of the class into a broader (and deeper?) discussion of the passage.

The rest of the class will be required to read the text carefully also, but the assigned group will be responsible for initiating and structuring discussion during the second half of the presentation period. Other students should come prepared to ask questions and contribute their ideas.