Honors Ethics Oral Presentations: Instructions

Your initial presentation should be approximately 6-7 minutes and you should prepare for a 3-4 minute question and answer session following. Not all members of the team must talk, however all members of the team must contribute equally. Teams should be composed of 3 members, however it is possible, given current enrollment, that one team may have 4 members. The team presentation is worth a total of 50 points for each member. Should any member demonstrate insufficient participation, points will be taken off for that individual.

Mill Teams 1 - 3: present on the 3\textsuperscript{rd} of October
Kant Teams 1 - 4: present on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of October
Aristotle Teams 1 - 4: present on the 14\textsuperscript{th} of November

Answer your assigned questions thoughtfully and as completely as time allows – During the presentation, your team should respond to these questions in the order asked:

1. Present and explain the question. (5 points)
2. Present your thesis – the answer to the question. (5 points)
3. Defend your thesis. Note that this question carries the highest weight in points. (20 points)
4. Identify your resources in developing your thesis. It is expected that you will need to consult with secondary commentary from reputable and authoritative sources. All such “consultations” should be recognized in your presentation, though not necessarily presented separately from section 3 – these citations may be imbedded in your response in that section. (5 points)
5. Critically evaluate the target philosopher’s position on your question. (10 points)
6. Response to follow-up questions. Here your grade will depend on the depth of your preparation and deliberation on this case. I may invite guests to help with the questions and it is expected that your fellow class member will also ask questions. (5 points)
Questions for Group Presentations

Mill:

1. Explain Mill’s idea of self-sacrifice. Does he seem to argue that this is a moral ideal? How should our own interests be managed if in conflict with the interests of others, for Mill? Critically evaluate Mill’s response.

2. Explain Mill’s response to the following objection directed towards utilitarianism: “"Many utilitarians look on the morality of actions, as measured by the utilitarian standard, in too exclusive a manner, and don’t put enough emphasis on the other beauties of character that go towards making a human being lovable or admirable....”” Critically evaluate Mill’s response.

3. Explain Mill’s distinction between “will” and “desire.” What role does this distinction play in moral motivation according to Mill? Critically evaluate Mill’s response.

Kant:

1. For Kant, pure reasoning is essentially unconditional and theoretical while practical reasoning is more commonly assumed to be instrumental. Later, in the third section of his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant ties this concept to the freedom on one’s will. Explain Kant’s idea of “pure practical reason” and why he holds that it is the proper foundation of morality.

2. Explain Kant’s claim that, “To be beneficent where one can is a duty....” (p.14) How can this duty be consistently defended non-consequentially? Later in the Metaphysics of Morals Kant writes, “...as to the meritorious duty toward others, the natural end that all human beings have is their own happiness. Now humanity would be able to subsist if no one contributed to the happiness of others yet did not intentionally remove anything from it; only this is only a negative and not a positive agreement with humanity as end in itself, if everyone does not aspire, as much as he can, to further the ends of others. For regarding the subject which is an end in itself: if that representation is to have its total effect on me, then its ends must as far as possible also be my ends.” (p.48) Does Kant’s argument here remain consistent with the concept of non-consequential justifications?

3. Explain Kant’s concept of the *a priori* duty of friendship as independent of one’s experiences with one’s friends: “pure honesty in friendship can no less be demanded of every human being, even if up to now there may not have been a single honest friend, because this duty, as duty in general, lies prior to all experience in the idea of a reason determining the will through a priori grounds.” (p.24) Include in your analysis consideration of the following: “One can, if one wants, distinguish the ‘pure’ philosophy of morals (metaphysics) from the ‘applied’ (namely to human nature) (just as ‘pure’ mathematics and ‘pure’ logic are distinguished from ‘applied’). By this terminology one is directly reminded that moral principles are not grounded on the peculiarities of human nature, but must be subsistent a priori for themselves;
but from them human practical rules must be derivable, as for every rational nature." (p.27) Critically evaluate this concept of a priori duties.

4. Free will is a thorny but essential element of Kant’s moral philosophy. Explain the following quote: “Thus the question ‘How is a categorical imperative possible?’ can be answered to this extent: one can state the sole presupposition under which alone it is possible, namely the idea of freedom, and to the extent that one can have insight into the necessity of this presupposition, which is sufficient for the practical use of reason, i.e., for the conviction of the validity of this imperative, hence also of the moral law; but how this presupposition itself is possible, no insight into that can be gained through any human reason. Under the presupposition of freedom of the will, its autonomy, as the formal condition under which alone it can be determined, is a necessary consequence. To presuppose this freedom of the will is also not only (as speculative philosophy can show) entirely possible (without falling into contradiction to the principle of natural necessity in the connection of appearances in the world of sense), but it is also without any further condition necessary to impute to it practically all its voluntary actions, i.e., necessary as condition in the idea, to a rational being, who is conscious of its causality through reason, hence of its will (which is distinguished from desires).” (p.77)

Aristotle:

1. Explain the causative nature of behavior on our virtuous character for Aristotle. He writes in Book II of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, “Again, it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-players are produced. And the corresponding statement is true of builders and of all the rest; men will be good or bad builders as a result of building well or badly. For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to the differences between these. It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference.”

2. Explain Aristotle’s claim “(t)hat virtue, then, is concerned with pleasures and pains,...” (Book II) What is the relationship between virtue and those physical elements of pleasure and pain according to Aristotle? Do you agree with Aristotle’s position here?

3. In Book III of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, he discusses what constitutes a voluntary action. Why are acts done from ignorance involuntary? Why is voluntary action necessary for moral responsibility for Aristotle? Do you agree?
4. When discussing temperance as a virtue Aristotle writes in Book III of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, “The temperate man occupies a middle position with regard to these objects. For he neither enjoys the things that the self-indulgent man enjoys most—but rather dislikes them—nor in general the things that he should not, nor anything of this sort to excess, nor does he feel pain or craving when they are absent, or does so only to a moderate degree, and not more than he should, nor when he should not, and so on; but the things that, being pleasant, make for health or for good condition, he will desire moderately and as he should, and also other pleasant things if they are not hindrances to these ends, or contrary to what is noble, or beyond his means. For he who neglects these conditions loves such pleasures more than they are worth, but the temperate man is not that sort of person, but the sort of person that the right rule prescribes.” Explain this quote. Is Aristotle claiming that we should be temperate in our joy as well? Do you agree with his position? Defend your answer.