

Basic Instructions for Ethics Essay Competition

A. Writing the Essay:

1. In sharpening the focus of your essay, you may wish to consider the following examples in which rights seem to conflict:

Adoption

Should adopted children have the right to contact their biological parent(s) even if they had been promised their identities would not be revealed?

Divorce

When one parent loses parental rights, should his/her parents - the child's grandparents - lose their rights as well?

Same-sex couples

When one parent is a biological parent and the other is not related to the child by blood, should they both have the same rights?

Surrogate mothers

If a woman has signed a contract to carry a child for another couple, should she have the right to change her mind and keep the child, and if so, what rights, if any, would the biological father have?

Infidelity

If a married woman becomes pregnant by a man not her spouse, what rights should the biological father have?

Other situations

Should children who were conceived by artificial insemination have the right to obtain information (for instance medical information) about their biological parent(s), or even sue them for support, though sperm or egg donors are promised that their identities will remain secret?

2. There is a distinction between *legal* questions and *ethical* questions. The questions above are intended as ethical questions. (You can see that there is a difference between legality and ethics when you consider that not everything that is legal is ethical: e.g., slavery in Southern states in the 1850's. In fact, laws themselves are sometimes criticized on ethical grounds.)

3. You should present *ethical reasons* for your position. The issue cannot be resolved by mere reference to certain individuals—or even a large group or majority—who support a position (or not). What matters are the reasons—*ethical reasons*—people have for supporting the position (or not). Ethical reasons may relate to the moral value of the consequences of action(s) that the position calls for (whether they would be beneficial or harmful, for example); or the fairness to all concerned of recommended action; or recognition and respect for individual rights; or the values promoted in undertaking the recommended action (such as freedom or responsibility), for example.

4. Try to imagine what an *intelligent* opponent would say and then respond appropriately. Talking with or reading articles by people who disagree with you is very helpful. This can help you identify weaknesses in your own arguments, so that you can correct them.

5. Write more than one rough draft, put each aside and come back to it later. If you do this, you will be able to see things that need to be fixed or changed that you would not otherwise see. For example, you'll be able to see whether some parts of the paper conflict with other parts, whether some passages are unclear or ambiguous (and need to be re-phrased), etc.

6. The essay must be your own work (although you may discuss ideas and drafts with others). See Clemson University's academic integrity policies; the undergraduate policy is here: http://www.clemson.edu/ugs/academic_integrity/index.html and the graduate policy is here: <http://gradspace.editme.com/AcademicGrievancePolicyandProcedures#integrityphilosophy>

7. Any sources you have consulted in writing the essay must be cited. (Citations should not be included in the word count of your essay.)

8. Be especially wary of online sources. Don't use them uncritically. Some are good, but many are not. (Citations from most government sources, university sites, large newspapers, etc. may not be problematic, but citations from Joe Blow's parental rights website generally need to be supported by some reasoning as to why we should pay attention to what Joe Blow says.)

9. Some resources are available below.