An Outline for a Brief Teaching Demonstration: On the Distinction between Ethics and Morality

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Abstract: In this article, I outline a teaching demonstration that lasts approximately twenty-two minutes, which a candidate can employ when interviewing for a position in ethics. Since job openings in ethics, and especially applied ethics, are becoming increasingly common, I think that this outline will be helpful to many candidates deliberating about the topic and structure of their future teaching demonstrations. This demonstration is also especially well-suited to a search at a teaching institution, whether a community college, state college, or state university, where faculty and administration place more emphasis on success in pedagogy than success in research and publication. In the conclusion, I offer some suggestions for ways to adapt this outline for a longer teaching demo.

[T]he candidate is taken to a classroom and given time to set up for a teaching demo. (Candidates are informed before they come to campus that the visit will include a demo.) This is the heart of the hiring process. If a candidate engages the committee successfully, developing rapport and getting all members involved and even excited about the learning opportunity, almost any other faux pas will be forgotten. The hiring committee is looking for the best teachers, and this is the chance for a candidate to show what he or she can do. We are not looking for great lecturers; we want teachers who can draw students into the learning process.—Anne Breznau (Breznau 1998)

As Breznau reminds us, a teaching demonstration is distinctly different than a job talk. In addition to showing mastery over the subject matter (or the candidate's area of specialization), the candidate showcases her ability to engage students in the practice of learning. Also, preparing a teaching demonstration is decidedly different than preparing a class to teach, since the demo is designed to achieve a specific objective: viz., to secure the candidate a job. I am often asked by my friends and colleagues struggling to find a teaching position in the challenging philosophy job market just how to create an effective teaching

demonstration. My response is either to recommend that they consult with articles in this journal (*Teaching Philosophy*) or to offer them an outline of one of my own demonstrations. The difficulty of referring them to this journal is that most of the articles frame class or course-length exercises that rarely fit into the brief time slot typically afforded a job candidate to demonstrate her teaching abilities.

In this article, I outline a teaching demonstration lasting approximately twenty-two minutes, which a candidate can employ when interviewing for a position in ethics. Since job openings in ethics, and especially applied ethics, are becoming increasingly common, I think that this outline will be helpful to many candidates deliberating about the topic and structure of their future teaching demonstrations. This demonstration is also especially well-suited to a search at a teaching institution, whether a community college, state college or state university, where faculty and administration place more emphasis on success in pedagogy than success in research and publication. In the conclusion, I offer some suggestions for ways to adapt this outline for a longer teaching demo.

The topic of the demonstration is the distinction between ethics and morality. While this topic is not an obvious candidate for a teaching demo—indeed, it could be objected that a more applied topic would be better suited for an undergraduate philosophy course—there are some good reasons for choosing it. One of the most common questions undergraduates ask is "What is the difference between morality and ethics?" or "Why should I not learn ethics in church or home, where I am taught morals?" While these kinds of questions appear to undercut the legitimacy of ethics education in the classroom, they must be confronted head-on and dealt with if students are going to treat the subject matter of ethics as an area worthy academic study and inquiry. Also, differentiating the two is foundational to conducting more applied ethical inquiries. Distinguishing them allows inquirers to clarify their operative assumptions.

Outline

I divide the twenty-two minute teaching demonstration into five stages with approximate durations for each (in parentheses after each title). What should be kept in mind is that the operative goal of the teaching demonstration is two-fold: (i) to engage the students in the process of learning and (ii) to display the best of the candidate's teaching abilities in order to persuade the committee members to hire the candidate. Since there is a strategic objective (viz., to secure the position), most aspects of the demonstration should be designed to achieve that objective.

#1. Icebreaker (2 minutes)

Icebreakers, or opening words and activities that put an audience at ease, are usually reserved for speeches and workshops.[1] Since the candidate is usually asked to teach another professor's class or a group of students who have never met the candidate before, "breaking the ice" or putting the audience at ease proves helpful for facilitating later activities, connecting the candidate with the audience and showcasing the candidate's speaking ability. Due to the constraint of limited time, staging a group activity is usually not a feasible option. Fortunately, a brief anecdote, personal testimony or a question to the audience that establishes rapport can have the same icebreaking effect. In the past, I have related a humorous story about my trip to the campus. Alternatively, I have told my audience an inspiring story of how I came to believe that philosophy matters. At other times, I have asked which students use social networking computer sites and how they think it enriches their lives. In terms of the demonstration's objective, the point of the icebreaker is for the candidate to show the committee members that she can address a new audience with poise and confidence, setting the stage for productive future relations.

#2. Setup for the Mini-lecture (2 minutes)

If the candidate immediately advances from the icebreaker to the mini-lecture, the teaching demonstration will appear to lurch from one moment to the next, thereby lacking flow (see the rationale section "Balance and Flow" below). So, it is necessary to set up the mini-lecture with an appropriate segue. I typically employ a brief story about a conversation with a colleague about the value of higher education. Though I relate the story, the candidate should consider substituting a story of her own, one that engages the audience and fluidly connects the icebreaker with the mini-lecture.

My colleague, an English professor, proclaimed that the value of higher education is in training undergraduate students to become skilled cocktail party attendees. Naturally, I was shocked at his claim. Not only did it seem to make the value of higher education appear trivial, it did not appear to explain the existence of philosophy majors. Philosophers ask big questions (e.g., about the meaning of life, the meaning of justice, or whether humans are truly free) and such "heavy" conversationalists seem out of place in the "light" conversations that typically occur at cocktail parties.

So, how do philosophers go about answering these big questions? First, they define what the object of their discussion (e.g., life, justice, or freedom) is *not*. Second, after having negatively defined the object, they proceed to determine what it is.[2] So, the candidate interrogates the

audience: If a philosopher were to find herself at a cocktail party and wanted to know what a martini was, what would she do first? Asking the audience the question invites participation and with typical answers (beer, wine, a cosmopolitan) confirms that they comprehend the first step in the philosophical method. Once the candidate has received this confirmation, she need not proceed to the second step because the first step will be undertaken in the mini-lecture.

#3. Mini-lecture (8 minutes)

At the beginning of the mini-lecture, the candidate must introduce the question: What is the difference between ethics and morality? Oftentimes people employ the two terms interchangeably, and often we have multiple names for the same things. However, trained philosophers, and especially ethicists, distinguish them. Why? Are they different in their meaning? Have non-philosophers been using them in a wrong way all along? In posing these questions, the candidate seeks to evoke curiosity in the audience, as well as the kind of unease experienced at the onset of a problem. In *How We Think*, John Dewey characterizes the desired response as a "felt difficulty": "The difficulty may be felt with sufficient definiteness as to set the mind at once speculating upon its probable solution, or an undefined uneasiness and shock may come first, leading only later to definite attempt to find out what is the matter" (Dewey 1997: 72). Proper framing of the problem entices the respondent to ask more questions, inquire further, and to develop an intellectual interest in discovering answers to these questions—to, in a sense, make the problem *their own*. In terms of achieving the strategic objective, framing the problem with a set of thought-provoking questions demonstrates to the hiring committee that the candidate is capable of effectively engaging students in the learning process.

The mini-lecture portion of the teaching demo is based upon Peter Singer's article, "About Ethics."[3] In the typical fashion of a philosopher, Singer tells us what ethics is only after he has defined what it is not. At this point, the candidate summarizes Singer's four things that ethics is not in four sections, ending each section summary with a question that invites audience involvement. The four things that Singer claims ethics is not are, as follows: (i) A set of prohibitions against sex, (ii) an ideal system that is acceptable in theory, but unacceptable in practice, (iii) something that only makes sense because of religion or religious doctrine, and (iv) relative or subjective. Rather than summarizing all four of Singer's negative definitions in the limited space remaining, I will instead summarize only one, the first, as a representative illustration. The candidate should begin by inviting the audience to think critically, or to take each of these negative definitions Singer offers and question whether they agree or disagree and why.

Here is a sample summary (in outline form) of Singer's first negative definition:

1. Ethics is not a set of prohibitions concerned with sex
   a. Sexual relations do not give rise to serious questions about what is right and what is wrong
   b. Issues of honesty, concern for others, prudence and so forth
   c. However, there is nothing unique about sex as an ethical issue, or that makes it the exclusive matter for deciding what is right or wrong
   d. Indeed, on Singer's reading, the choices involved in driving a car and the weighty consequences (e.g., environmental degradation and harm done to others by one's negligence) might have even greater ethical significance
   e. What do you think? Is Singer correct?

Rather than adhering closely to the text of her notes, the candidate should be open to improvising the presentation. She may write the outline of Singer's four negative definitions on the board, an overhead, or a PowerPoint slide. Yet, whichever method of presentation she chooses, the candidate should get out in front of the outline text and demonstrate that she can do more than read the board, overhead or slide. In this way, a teaching demonstration, especially at an institution focusing on pedagogy, differs dramatically from a job talk, where a prepared text is typically read, followed by a time for audience questions and the candidate's responses. Instead, the teaching demo is predominantly an interaction between the candidate and the audience, inviting participation from the students and committee members at multiple points along the way. While the candidate must display her mastery of the subject matter, that goal is secondary to engaging the students in the practice of learning. Recall Breznau's statement: "We [the members of the hiring committee] are not looking for great lecturers; we want teachers who can draw students into the learning process" (Breznau 1998).

#4. Group Exercise (8 minutes)

The next stage of the teaching demonstration is perhaps the most interactive and improvisational. The candidate should restate the original question, form the audience into groups made up of five to seven persons, and assign them the task of formulating an appropriate answer. Again, the question is: What is the difference between ethics and morality? Groups should be encouraged to push past an initial period of puzzlement (what in the Socratic dialogues is often referred to as "aporia") and to ground their answers to the question with reasons, illustrations and evidence. The recommended duration for the group

discussion is four to five minutes, with the remaining time reserved for group presentations.[4]

While the groups are deliberating about an answer to the question, the candidate should circulate through the groups and listen attentively. She should take note of which groups contain hiring committee members and which do not. The initial urge will be to spend more time interacting with groups containing committee members. However, this should be avoided. Assuming that the committee members will exert some influence over the group deliberations, those groups containing committee members will inevitably produce better answers to the question. So, it is better if the candidate spends more time with the groups containing only students, priming and encouraging them with strong clues. When the time comes for the groups to present their answers, the candidate should call on the groups with students *only* at the end. The committee members will be more impressed when students interacting with the candidate generate a good answer than when a group they participated in does the same.

Although this group exercise is analytically separable from the candidate's final summary or concluding remarks, in practice the two should fuse together. Why? The candidate responds to the group answers, interpreting and refining them in ways that will directly affect the content of the summary. Once again, improvisation is critical here. At this point, incorporating a visual aid can help—such as writing "ethics" and "morality" on the board and quickly listing the key words, concepts and ideas proposed by each group under the appropriate heading. Of course, there is a danger that the audience will receive the impression that the candidate has used too much license in interpreting the audience members' answers. In this situation, the committee members could conclude that the students' answers to the question have been set aside by the candidate in favor of one she finds more acceptable. Consequently, the learning objective—namely, ascertaining the differences between ethics and morality—has not been achieved. Instead, the candidate has imposed her answer on the students. If the committee members leave the demo with this impression, it could threaten to overshadow positive appraisals of the candidate's qualifications and performance. So, the secret to avoiding this pitfall is for the candidate to assist the audience members in taking charge of the inquiry—to in a sense, empower them. The audience should feel that the candidate is gently guiding them toward an answer, not forcing them to accept her favorite answer. One way to generate this feeling in audience members is to repeat their terminology in the group presentations. Another way is to ask a series of follow-up questions to the groups (if time permits). When successful, the audience will receive

the positive impression that both their answers and the refinements originate with them, *not* with the candidate.

#5. Summary (2 minutes)

The teaching demo's summary phase, as mentioned before, tends to fuse with the group exercise phase. The more the summary reflects the results of the group exercise, the more audience members will perceive the teaching demonstration as interactive and participatory. Still, I would like to acknowledge some stock answers which could inform the candidate's own answer to the question. Even if the students do not discover one of these answers themselves, sharing these insights with the audience is a way of demonstrating knowledge of the subject area. The two stock answers to the question of what differentiates ethics from morality come from Peter Singer and Nina Rosenstand.[5]

Singer's Answer

First, let's briefly examine what Singer's response to the question would be. In "About Ethics," he contends that ethics must have some relationship with reasoning, that is, the ability to formulate arguments or give reasons for and against particular positions. In this way, there is always a possibility of changing one's views independent of what the moral conventions, or dominant moral norms, of one's society are. So, ethics permits the individual to disagree with the morality of the majority of people (what is sometimes called the "moral majority"). Since that person can provide reasons in support of her dissident view, there is always a presumption in favor of her view being ethical. Of course, if her view appeals purely to self-interest or to an authoritative source purely in virtue of its authority, then the presumption would be weakened. However, if she can argue for her position from a near-universal vantage, showing that her position benefits the interests of all those affected, then the presumption is strengthened. In other words, she can criticize the moral values accepted by most people, and not be thought ridiculous, irrational, or unethical because what is right or good is always what the majority believe. Therefore, morality on Singer's view refers to the beliefs held by most people, and ethics to the reasoning by which dissident individuals may criticize and potentially uproot those beliefs.[6]

Rosenstand's Answer

Even though the terms "ethics" and "morality" are often employed interchangeably in everyday discourse, Nina Rosenstand insists that there is a subtle, though no less significant, difference between them. Ethics comes from the Greek word "ethos" meaning character. Mo-

rality comes from Latin word "mores" meaning custom or habit. So, morality signifies the moral rules and principles we follow, as well as the values we have and share. Ethics, on the other hand, means more generally the theories about these rules, principles, and values. Ethics interrogates and justifies the rules, principles, and values we live by. If in reasoning ethically, we can find no rational warrant for them, then we may have to abandon them. To put it another way, whereas morality tells us what our norms and values are, ethics invites us to critically inquire about whether they are the right ones; to question and revise the content of our morality. The candidate can also draw attention to how Rosenstand and Singer's views converge. In many respects, ethics is just another form of critical thinking or inquiry into the subject matter of morality (Rosenstand 2006: 11).

Rationale

In this penultimate section, I justify the design of the above outline for a brief teaching demo. Although many of these reasons have already been mentioned, it is still worthwhile to rehearse them. Why? They are important to consider in designing any effective teaching demonstration. It should also be noted that no rationale should dominate the design process to such an extent that it crowds out all others. Indeed, one of the features to be discussed in the next sub-section, balance, should also apply to the entire design process.

Balance and Flow

In any speech, dance, song or other public performance, a stilted or unbalanced delivery can result in the performance having a less-than-favorable impact on the audience. A balanced form is as important as intellectually stimulating content. Time for audience participation should be balanced with time spent lecturing. Time for asking questions should be balanced with time for answering them. Even though more cumulative time is devoted to the non-group exercise stages (# 1, 2, 3, and 5, at 14 minutes) than to the group exercise stage (#4, at 8 minutes), all four of the former stages also contain interactive elements. Besides balance, a teaching demonstration should also flow from one activity to the next. For this reason, the candidate should not leap from the icebreaker to the mini-lecture, but should instead spend two minutes setting up the mini-lecture. In order for a candidate to improve the flow of the demo, she must practice, preferably in front of an audience that can provide constructive and critical feedback.

Knowledge of the Subject Area

Of course, demonstrating mastery of the subject area should not be entirely discounted. For this reason, I provided two stock answers to the question of how morality and ethics differ from two prominent ethicists. Being equipped with some stock answers is just as important in a teaching demonstration as it is in an interview or job talk. It is possible that committee members could raise their hands and ask challenging questions to test the candidate's knowledge. Also, students may demand that the candidate justify her position relative to the literature in her field. In giving this same teaching demonstration, I once had to respond to a professor who questioned why I thought Peter Singer was an authority in the area of ethics, given his controversial positions on such issues such as infanticide and bestiality.[7] Obviously, the professor was not a fan of Singer!

Student-Centered Teaching and Participation

The candidate should demonstrate that she cares about the interests of the students. Of course, this does not mean that she must pander entirely to those interests (e.g., teaching about pop culture instead of philosophy). Nevertheless, she should teach in a way that entices the audience's interest, evoking curiosity and concern about the topic at hand. Although there is an extensive literature on student-centered pedagogy, I would like to draw attention to a classic text on participatory education: *The School and Society*.[8] In this work, John Dewey argues that teachers must *both* discipline and entice students' "native impulses":

> A question often asked is: If you begin with the child's [or student's] ideas, impulses and interests, all so crude, so random and scattering, so little refined or spiritualized, how is he going to get the necessary discipline, culture, and information? If there were no way open to us except to excite and indulge these impulses of the child, the question might well be asked. We should either have to ignore and repress activities, or else to humor them. But if we have organization of equipment and of materials, there is another path open to us. We can direct the child's activities, giving them exercise along certain lines, and can thus lead up to the goal which logically stands at the end of the paths followed. (Dewey 2001: 25)

The student is more likely to achieve her "goal" (or what Dewey elsewhere terms an "end in view") if the teacher "directs" the student's "activities" in positive ways. For the candidate, her goal in conducting the demo is to engage students in the process of learning. To accomplish this, she must orient the students' natural inclinations and interests towards the objectives of gaining a fuller understanding of ethics (including how it is distinct from morality) and exercising

their critical faculty of reasoning. In order to showcase the student-centeredness of her teaching abilities, the candidate should focus on the way in which questions and problems are framed. Humorous and inspiring stories are, in this respect, extremely helpful. In addition, students should be encouraged to participate throughout the teaching demonstration. As stated above, participation should not be limited to the group exercise phase. At several points in the demo, the candidate should solicit questions from the audience. If the limited time for the demo expires, the candidate ought to invite students to approach her afterwards with follow-up questions.

Getting the Job

As Breznau noted, teaching institutions are rarely looking for good lecturers. Instead, they are searching for exceptional teachers who possess that special talent or ability to engage students in the practice of learning. Putting that ability on display is what differentiates a teaching demo from a job talk. The objective of securing the job should be a factor, but not *the* sole factor, in designing the teaching demonstration. Indeed, this is the factor that separates the activity of preparing a teaching demo from the activity of preparing a daily teaching lesson.

Conclusion

If the candidate is afforded more time than twenty-two minutes to conduct the demo, then the natural temptation will be to present additional material and thus to show mastery over a wider domain of subject matter. I strongly advise against this course of action. Instead, the candidate ought to lengthen the period of deliberation during the group exercise and ask the groups additional questions during the group presentations. In other words, she should emphasize student-centered and interactive, *not* instructor-centered and didactic, teaching methods. Thus, a longer teaching demo should provide the candidate with greater opportunity to highlight her ability to engage the students in the practice of learning, not to showcase her subject matter knowledge.

To conclude, I would like to share one caveat about the final rationale (viz., getting the job). If the strategic objective dominates the design process, this fact can become transparent to an observant member of the hiring committee. If the candidate will go to any lengths to win the job (so the reasoning goes), then what else is she capable of once she has secured the position? So, it is also important for the candidate to be forthcoming and to share a bit of who she is during the demo. To that end, the above outline should be treated as a flexible set of guidelines, not a fixed template, for a brief teaching demonstration on the topic of distinguishing ethics and morality.

Notes

1. Indeed, the first speech in many public speaking groups is called an "icebreaker." Also, the first section of a speech, especially when the speaker is introducing herself to a new group, is normally designated the "icebreaker." (Donahue 2005.)

2. Some philosophers take the completely opposite view as to the ordering of definitions, viz., that positive definitions ought to be advanced prior to negative definitions. Rather than grapple with this question, I would rather set it aside because it is not completely germane to the present inquiry. Indeed, the candidate could reverse the order with little difference in the presentation. So, the dispute could boil down to a mere difference in style. Negative-positive (or positive-negative) definitions closely resemble definitions by genus and difference (also termed "definition per genus et differentiam"). In Takashi Yagisawa's account of this definition type, "When an expression is said to be applicable to some but not all entities of a certain type and inapplicable to all entities not of that type, the type in question is the genus, and the subtype of all and only those entities to which the expression is applicable is the species: e.g., in the definition 'rational animal' for 'human,' the type *animal* is the genus and the subtype *human* is the species. Each species is distinguished from any other of the same genus by a property called the *differentia*." See Yagasawa 1999: 214.

3. The essay "About Ethics" originally appeared in P. Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–15. I will cite the reprint of the essay in Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life* (New York: Ecco Press, 2000), 7–17.

4. If there are three or fewer groups, five minutes permits enough time to present their answers in the remaining two to two-and-a-half minutes. If there are four or more groups, the time should be reduced to four minutes, leaving three to three-and-a-half minutes for presentations.

5. Rosenstand is the author of a major ethics textbook, *The Moral of the Story: An Introduction to Philosophy*, 5th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006). These two stock answers are not intended to be exhaustive of the possible answers. The candidate may customize the answer given the *sui generis* character of her own philosophical views.

6. Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life*, 12–17. Of course, Singer's utilitarian view should not be presented as the final word on this matter. Indeed, it should be noted that there are several competing accounts of ethics, e.g., Kantian, Aristotelian, and others. Still, given the severe time constraint, doing more than merely mentioning these competitors may not be feasible.

7. On Singer's controversial positions, see Ruderman 2008.

8. Among the many works on student-centered pedagogy (too extensive to comprehensively list), see Shor 1992, Glasgow 1996, and Blumberg and Weimer 2008.

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