

Instructions:

Assign each student a philosopher to research.

When they come to class, they turn in a short paper on that philosopher's beliefs.

Then pass out the in-class assignment: a real ethics case.

They have to answer the main question the way the philosopher they researched might. I let them do this in small groups.

After hearing from all the philosophers, the students have to defend their own views using the philosophies they'd heard in class that day.

Examples I have used include: To Catch and Predator and David Rohde.

What Would Aristotle Do? Homework Assignment

Requirements: Research the philosopher assigned to your group. (Consult at least two sources in addition to your book.) Write a 500-word description of how his or her philosophies could be applied to ethical decision-making. Use in-text citations stating where you got your information. Argue on your philosopher's behalf when presented with an ethical situation in class.

Points possible: 10 (five for the paper, five for in-class discussion. You must participate in the discussion to get discussion points.)

What Would Aristotle Do? In-class Assignment

Background: In November 2008, the Taliban captured Pulitzer-winning New York Times reporter David Rohde, his driver and his assistant. The Times did not report the kidnapping, and editor Bill Keller asked other news organizations to also refrain from publicizing the incident. A news blackout ensued.

In June 2009, Rohde and his assistant slipped over the wall of the Taliban compound and escaped. His driver remained in captivity.

In a column explaining why the Times didn't report the kidnappings, Keller said, "As journalists, we all cringe at the idea of sitting on a story, but the consensus of experts we consulted—and the judgment of the family—was that a storm of publicity would at best prolong David's captivity by increasing his apparent value, and could well put him in imminent danger." Colleague Nicholas Kristof wrote, "a life is always more important than a news story."

Yet, many questioned the Times' actions, including Richard Vegh, a Times reader in Rochester, Minn., who wrote its public editor. He suggested that a kidnapping of a non-media insider would probably not get the same consideration.

According to your philosopher, is it ethical to keep information about a journalist's abduction quiet? Answer the following questions to help you decide. Remember to think like your philosopher. You will tell the class how he or she would feel about it and why. Afterwards, you will tell us how you feel about it.

Journalists have an obligation to report news in a timely manner, as well as to minimize harm. What's more important?

Historically, news blackouts have not been observed, or at least not for very long. What about the nature of reporting today could be changing the rules?

Does an “insider” like David Rohde get a benefit that a member of the public, such as a soldier, would not?