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A provocative article on a theological or ethical issue can be used to stimulate class discussion. First, it is important to select an article that might offer an unusual perspective or deal with a difficult moral dilemma. Second, students should be familiar with some of the issues involved.

I have used two approaches depending upon the level of the class. For a 100 level course, I might summarize the article and read excerpts from it to students in the classroom. This might take five to ten minutes. It might also be necessary to provide some background to the article and on the author and the particular topic. Then, I ask students to reflect on the position of the author. Students will then write their reflections, and I will write my own reactions as well at this time. Again, five to ten minutes should be sufficient. I then will ask for volunteers to begin the discussion. If there are no volunteers, then I will read my own written reflections. However, the disadvantage with this strategy is some students might think that they have to agree with their professor. Usually, if there are different reactions, students will respond to each other's positions, and a good discussion might take place. At the end, I usually offer my own observations about the various values that have to be balanced in coming to a conclusion. This approach works well in a Writing to Learn course and can be used as an in-class assignment.

For an upper level course, I will assign students a reading a few days in advance and then ask them to write their reflections in a brief paper for homework. It might be necessary to place the article into a theological context. The first part of the assignment will summarize the article, and the second section will consist of students' reactions. They will bring the reading and their own reflections to class. We then discuss the article and their reactions. It is presumed that students have had enough theological background to read the article or the professor can put the reading into a context when it is assigned. Their reflections are usually of a higher quality since they have read the entire article and have had more time to reflect on it. Often, they will see the difficulty of arriving at a simple yes or no solution and understand some of the conflicting values which render a solution difficult. We will then attempt to arrive at a solution in class.

This strategy would be most useful in discussing ethical and moral issues in philosophy, theology, literature or even history.