

Ethics Alarms

Comment Policies

Revised, July 9, 2017

Ethics Alarms has now been active for seven full years, and there have been more than 160,000 comments on the posts here. It is time to revise the Comment Policies based on what I have learned, and based on what the blog has become and what I want it to accomplish.

This site exists to encourage an ongoing, rigorous and engaging inquiry about ethics, from the perspective of events large and small, in the United States and the world. Ethics evolves as societal standards and norms evolve. We accomplish that evolution, usually in enlightened directions, through advocacy, disagreement and debate, using logic, values, principles, systems and facts. The comment section should be a moderated colloquy among intelligent and open-minded readers, and me, as the host and moderator. I have learned a great deal from the site's readers, and hope to continue to do so.

Ethics Alarms offers the following 20 guidelines and rules to advance this mission:

- 1. Before you comment for the first time**, check the terms and concepts page if you can. It will avoid misunderstandings
- 2. I prefer full names attached to comments.** If you want to use a screen name, I have to know who you are. You can e-mail me your name at jamproethics@verizon.net, and it will not be divulged. You must enter an e-mail address, and it must be real. If you use a fake e-mail address, your comment will be deleted. No comment signed "anonymous" will be posted. Ever. (Well, hardly ever) If you use a URL as your screen name, I will treat the comment as spam no matter how trenchant your observations are.
- 3. I have to approve every first time commenter**, and as with bar associations and Harvard College, the standards used to screen applicants are tougher than the standards applied once you pass. If your initial foray here is gratuitously disrespectful, nasty, snotty, disparaging, obnoxious, or just plain stupid, your comment won't make it out of moderation. Similarly, non-substantive comments expressing approval or disapproval without more are worthless, and I'll reject them. Initiating your relationship on Ethics Alarms with snark, sarcasm, nastiness or ridicule is a bad strategy—as I noted above, you have to earn the privilege of talking to me like that. You may not get a second chance.
- 4. Regular commenters have special privileges.** They can engage in tough rhetoric bordering on insult, as well as brief comments that would not pass muster with a first-timer. But always remember that you are a guest here. Guests are obligated to prove their trustworthiness and good will before they are extended special privileges, and even those privileges have their limits.

5. Political rants are not welcome. In addition, efforts to muddle genuine objective ethical analysis by pressing ideological talking points and bombarding me with links are not appreciated, and won't be tolerated for long, if at all..

6. Keep comments as civil as possible. Ethics Alarms does, at its discretion, permit vulgarity and profanity for style and emphasis. I will show limited tolerance for rude and abusive comments and commenters, depending on the combatants. At my sole discretion, I may extend special dispensation for regular, substantive commenters here who have accumulated good will and trust, even when they cross lines that I would not permit to be crossed by a less-credentialed visitor [*See below*]. While a verdict of "you are an idiot," may occasionally be justified, I may ding comments that include gross personal attacks, subject to the exceptions noted above, unless it has an extremely impressive substantive argument accompanying it. In the heat of debate, Ethics Alarms will tolerate the occasional insult. If commenters become overly nasty and personal in their exchanges with each other or habitually so, I will intervene.

7. Ethics Alarms discourages text jargon and abbreviations. "LOL", in particular, is guaranteed to annoy me. Also disfavored are popular slang words designed to denigrate a belief, an individual or political groups, like "Repugs," or juvenile name-calling like "The New York Slimes" or "The Washington Compost."

8. I'm very likely to respond to your comments. Don't try hit-and-run tactics here, and don't think you can get away with an unsupported, badly-reasoned or purely emotional argument and not get called on it. On the other hand, if I don't respond, don't take it personally.

9. Re Links: Relevant links are appreciated. Irrelevant links will cause a comment to be deleted as spam. (*Remember that if you include more than one link, your comment gets automatically stalled in moderation.*) Links to your related blog posts must be supported by a substantive comment on the topic as well: this isn't your bulletin board. Similarly, the URL of your blog is not going to make it into the comment, and if you persist in trying to slip it through, I will start marking the comments as spam. I am happy to plug, including a link to your blog, if you write me first and explain why it is relevant and useful to Ethics Alarms readers, and I concur. Your comment, however, is not a vehicle for spreading your blog information around the web...not here, anyway.

10. Typos: I regret that WordPress has yet to install a good editing function for comments. Please proof yours. I will endeavor to fix obvious typos, and if you e-mail me a request to delete or otherwise repair a mis-typed section of a legitimate comment, I will try to reply. I will respect style choices like eccentric punctuation, capitalization, syntax or spelling, but comments that are careless and difficult to read or understand risk being rejected.

11. Me: I reserve the right to sharply express my annoyance with comments that I regard as careless, poorly argued, based on partisan hackery, stupid, unethical or ignorant. I am prone to be testy at comments that fall into any of the following categories:

- 1) *Those that say I should be writing about "more important things."* I do. But I don't have to write every post about the earth-shattering, and trivial incidents can still teach important lessons.

2) *Comments that include* “lighten up,” “calm down,” “get a life,” or anything similar. Please don’t presume to gauge my emotional state or dictate it.

3) *Comments that accuse me of ignoring topics* or not making arguments when in fact other posts on the site *covered* those topics and *did* make those arguments. I don’t require that you read everything, but do not make allegations when a simple key word search on the site would disprove them.

4) *Putting words in my mouth*, or ascribing opinions to me that I have not stated. I hate that.

5) *Being snotty about typos*. I make mistakes, and appreciate being told about them. Nicely.

6) *Mockery without substance*.

7) *Racist, misogynist and otherwise bigoted rants*.

12. On occasion my annoyance may cause my reply to seem excessively severe. In such cases, please point this out, and I may well apologize. I may not, too. If a comment is especially ignorant or dumb, I have been known to bluntly describe it as such, and diagnosis the commenter as the kind of individual inclined to so express himself or herself. I will continue to do so. This is part of my effort to elevate the discussion through negative reinforcement. This is not a site where you can just dash off a barely considered statement and get away with it.

13. DO NOT accuse me of an *ad hominem* attack if I judge your intellectual prowess or ethical proclivities based on the quality your post, and state that judgment. That’s not what an *ad hominem* attack is, and I’m sick of explaining it.

14. If and when I break my own rules, please call me on it. Politely. I reserve the right to break my rules, but I don’t want to do it unintentionally.

15: Ethics Alarms Discipline: Discipline for inappropriate comments is meted out in several ways. If you cross a line, you will usually be warned not to do it again. Occasionally I will insist on an apology to avoid some form of discipline.

16. Banning: If you obliterate a standard here, you may be banned. If you are banned, you can apply for reinstatement by contacting me off-site and sincerely apologizing. Again, I reserve the right to decide who is banned and when. Am I entirely consistent? No, not always. Since the blog launched in 2009, the following offenses have resulted in commenters being banned:

....Repeating the same arguments over and over again while not acknowledging or rebutting counter arguments from others.

...Relying on partisan talking points

...Exhibiting racism or other bias

...Insulting me, in particular by questioning my integrity, honesty, objectivity, intentions, motives, qualifications, or credentials

...Denying the assumptions of the blog, which are that there are ethical standards, that we all have an obligation to help define them, and that right and wrong is usually not situational and subjective.

*...Violating **the Stupidity Rule**, which holds that some people are just too ignorant or stupid to take part in the discussion here, and interfere with the orderly exchange of opinions and ideas.*

...Ignoring warnings

...Lying, or using fake authorities and sources.

17. Other Penalties: Ethics Alarms also has more limited punishments. If it is clear that a commenter is obsessed or over-heated on a certain topic, indicated by repeated re-statements of the same points, I may ban them from posting any more comments on that topic. This is a “**time out.**” I am also, with this revision, instituting a **suspension policy**. A suspension of commenting privileges, usually for 30 days, will be issued when I deem a comment from a regular commenter so disrespectful and outrageous that my head explodes.

18. Three Strike Rule for Regulars: Occasionally an esteemed commenter will make a comment that embarrasses him or her with uncharacteristic excess. Their status here earns them three such mistakes, unless it is so egregious that I feel it requires immediate redress. This usually occurs when the comment insults me.

19. Grandstanding: If you make grand and indignant exit, and announce your permanent withdrawal from the blog, you are gone for good. An e-mail to me with an appropriate apology and a request to be reinstated will occasionally work if you change your mind. Maybe. Don't count on it.

20. The Comment of the Day: Especially excellent or provocative comments are sometimes re-published as a “Comment of the Day.” Whether such a comment is actually awarded this distinction is somewhat arbitrary and dependent on too many factors to list. Many wonderful comments do not get selected. Again, if yours is one of them, don't take it personally.

Finally, PLEASE don't write comments on this page. Nobody will see them. If you have a comment on the comment policies, e-mail me directly at jamproethics@verizon.net, or make them on a current post, where I will see them.

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2 responses to “*Comment Policies*”

Myron DaMan

July 29, 2016 at 11:55 am



I regret using an alias but my identity was pirated by an irate female a few years back. Neither my name nor my visage can appear anywhere on the net....since that time. (A bogus profile was created using my name and face on a Dutch based BDSM site). I merely wanted to say I stumbled upon your site when Googling some of the hi jinx of the recent conventions. You are real relief, to my Globalist-worried mind...a site that plays no favorites, non-partisan and lucid in your approach. No matter what you might think of me or my reply, I found your thoughts and views worth while.

[Reply](#)

dbp49

December 18, 2016 at 5:11 pm



Just wanted to say that having just recently come across your blog, it has become an interesting, and even anticipated addition to my daily read. I obviously have enough of your earlier material to keep me busy until I die, so comments are pretty much unlikely after this one which was designed basically to let you know that I appreciate what you have to offer. In the event that I do, however, find need to comment, I shall endeavor to meet with all the guidelines, although those which have to do with identification are probably all met in my email address which includes my entire name (the initials stand for David Brian), and were I to violate those rules which have to do with how I engage with others, my mother, now dead over 45 years or so, would probably find her way back, just to cuff me a good one upside the head. So no worries about that one either. Have a great day sir.

[Reply](#)
