

# Week 3 Assignment Guidance:

## The Purpose of This Paper

- This paper is an analysis of an ethical theory and how it applies to a concrete issue; **it is not a defense of your own view on this issue.**
- This assignment, along with assignment 1, is intended to prepare you to write the final paper by helping you:
  - think deeply and critically about one of the main theories of ethical reasoning
  - learn how to reason about a concrete issue along the lines of an ethical theory

Again, to emphasize: **Your own position on this issue isn't really going to factor in to this particular paper.** You are to be solely concerned with the ethical theory and how it applies to the problem. The conclusion that the theory arrives at may or may not align with your own view.

## The Topic and Question of the Paper

You may either use the same topic and question you wrote on for the first paper, or choose a different one.

- If you choose to keep the same topic, you should take into account any comments your instructor gave you on how to refine or revise your topic and question.
- If you choose a different topic, you might benefit from going through the exercises of the first paper before working on this one.

## Introduction

Begin your introduction with the question that orients your paper, and provided a revised and refined version of the introduction you offered in paper one. Don't forget to introduce the theory as well.

Remember that the last sentence of the introduction should state what the theory would conclude, and why. For example, you might say something like "I will show how a utilitarian would argue that the suffering that a woman might experience by having to carry fetus to term can outweigh the suffering of the fetus that would be aborted, and thus that a woman should be allowed to decide whether or not to abort her pregnancy."

### **The Explanation and Application of the Theory**

Make sure that you first understand the theory that you are using to interpret the best answer to the issue that you identified in Week One. If you do not understand the theory, you will not be able to apply it adequately to the topic.

An application involves showing how general ideas about how to live an act ethically, when combined with the specific circumstances under consideration, lead to conclusions about how one should act in those circumstances. A very simple, non-moral example of such reasoning might start with the general idea that "if I'm hungry, I ought to eat," apply that to the specific circumstances in which "I'm hungry," leading to the conclusion that "I ought to eat." The application of an ethical theory to an actual moral problem will be much more complicated, nuanced, and detailed, but that should give you a sense of how to proceed.

For example, if you were examining capital punishment from a utilitarian perspective, you might start by explaining the general principle that we should do that which leads to the greatest happiness. You would then consider the effects of capital punishment, including not just the suffering and death of the punished, but also the positive and negative effects on other individuals and society as a whole. You could compare that

with the effects of abolishing capital punishment, and demonstrate which policy has the best overall outcomes.

**Remember that when applying utilitarianism, you want to explain the benefits and harms that would result from one action or policy, what the overall utility of that would be, and compare that with the same analysis of the available alternative action(s) or policy. Doing this carefully will allow you to demonstrate the utilitarian conclusion as clearly as possible.**

Alternatively, if you were applying a deontological argument, you might apply Kant's Categorical Imperative, examining whether a maxim that involved capital punishment could be willed as a universal law, or whether capital punishment treats persons as ends-in-themselves.

**Remember that when applying deontological theory, what you are looking for is a kind of argument that says that we have a duty to do or not do to thus-and-such regardless of the consequences. In other words, while doing something may indeed lead to a better overall state of affairs, that's not the primary reason why we ought to do it. Similarly, even if doing something leads to a better overall state of affairs, if it violates a duty we have not to do a certain kind of action, then we ought not to do it.**

You might show this by providing an explanation of Kant's Categorical Imperative, and an application of the "Categorical Imperative test". For example, you might consider the relevant maxim involved, and whether that is something that could be willed to be universal law; or you could determine whether people's humanity is being respected as an end-in-itself or being used as a mere means.

Or finally, if you were applying virtue ethics, you might explain how a certain action or policy would be just or unjust, courageous or cowardly, cruel or kind, etc., or you could

describe what it means to flourish as a human, as a society, or in a particular role or activity and evaluate the issues in light of that.