

WEEK THREE 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 the Week One Assignment, 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.
- Consider Specific And Relevant Objections To An Instance Of Ethical Reasoning.

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 Week One Assignment, 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. I will then raise the objection that this does not account for the possibility that the fetus, if it were to be born, might bring a great deal of good that outweighs the suffering of the mother, and that these unknowns make it difficult to adequately apply utilitarian reasoning to this topic."

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. This should be based on the primary text(s).

An application involves showing how general ideas about how to live and 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.

On the other hand, 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 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. See the Required and Recommended Resources, as well as the textbook and Instructor Guidance, for examples.

The Objection

Raising an objection is an important part of philosophical argument, *regardless of whether you agree or disagree* with the objection.

The objection should articulate a **plausible reason why someone might find the argument problematic**. This can be a false or unsupported claim or assumption, fallacious reasoning, showing how the argument supports other conclusions that are unacceptable, etc.

The objection should **avoid contradiction**. For example, if you argued that deontological theory supports X as morally right, your objection cannot be something like, “Someone may oppose this argument on the grounds that they believe X is wrong.”

The objection **cannot be that your original application was wrong**. For example, if your original argument is that utilitarianism opposes X, the objection cannot be that utilitarianism actually supports X. You need to get the application right the first time. (However, you may find that the theory equally supports contradictory answers, which would be a legitimate objection.)

The objection should be **explained clearly and charitably**, even if you don’t support the objection. In other words, express the objection in such a way that someone actually making that objection would be happy with how you expressed it.

Consider the **strongest objection** that you can, even if you support the conclusion arrived at in the earlier part of the paper. Remember that your own position is greatly strengthened when you show that you have engaged honestly and thoughtfully with the strongest argument for the contrary position.

For example, if you were writing on capital punishment, you might find that utilitarianism entails a certain position that you think is completely wrong, and so you may find the objection to be persuasive. Or, you may agree with the utilitarianism approach and think that ultimately the objection does not undermine it. Or, you might think that utilitarianism’s conclusion is right, but their approach is wrong (sort of like what Tom Regan thought regarding animal ethics), and so you think the objection is strong, even though you end up agreeing with the conclusion.

Checklist

This checklist can help you ensure that you have completed all of the assignment instructions.

Make sure that you

- ✓ Provide an introduction that briefly describes the topic and the ethical problem at hand, the theory you have chosen to apply to the problem, the conclusion that is best supported by the theory, and the objection you will raise.
- ✓ Explain the theory with sufficient detail to allow for a clear application to the problem.
- ✓ Explain how the ethical theory applies to the question you have chosen to arrive at a position.
- ✓ Show how the conclusion follows from the main tenets of the theory.
- ✓ Utilize at least one Required Resource that defends or represents the theory, drawn from the list of acceptable resources.
- ✓ Utilize at least one resource that pertains to the chosen topic, drawn from the Required or Recommended Resources in the course or from the Ashford University Library.
- ✓ Raise a relevant objection to the argument.
- ✓ Include a title page and list of references.
- ✓ Proofread carefully for mechanical and grammatical errors.
- ✓ Format the assignment in APA style.
- ✓ Write at least 1000 words.

Carefully review the Grading Rubric for the criteria that will be used to evaluate your assignment.