

FINAL ETHICS PAPER PROMPT

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 6 (BUT SEE BELOW FOR DETAILS)

The setup of this assignment is different from the previous ones; please read it carefully, paying special attention to the due dates.

By now, you are familiar with the most influential ethical theories on the table, and hopefully you can utilize them to discuss some more everyday matters as well. In this assignment you are asked to do just that.

First, please find a writing that you think is *wrong* about some moral question. The writing can be a website, a blog post, an op-ed piece, something from a newspaper, or generally anything that is written for a non-specialist audience on a question of moral significance. The topic can range from questions in bioethics (euthanasia, genetic design, etc.) to environmental or social justice issues (refugee crisis, health care, etc.). Before you proceed to the next step, you will need to discuss your topic with me in person (see below for the deadlines).

In the first part of your paper, you should state the main claim of your chosen writing, and reconstruct its argument. You should try to come up with as charitable an interpretation as you can; this will make your overall argumentation stronger (don't argue against a strawman!). Why would someone think something like it? How does the author motivate his/her claim? What kind of implicit assumptions does the author rely on? Are these implicit assumptions consistent with each other? Do they express some commitment to either utilitarianism, deontology, or virtue ethics? In what way?

Second, you should show why the main claim of the writing is false. Are any of the implicit assumptions mistaken? If yes, why? If they follow from some ethical theory we have discussed, is that ethical theory mistaken as well? Why? If the implicit assumptions are correct, how is the argument unsound? Finally, you should state why you think the issue is an important one, and signal what broader implication your argumentation has with respect to the ethical theories we have discussed.

You will have to turn in the different parts of this assignment at different times, and at the end, turn in a unified paper. **Failing to accomplish any of the preliminary stages by the designated date will result in a full letter grade less for the final version.** Here are the dates:

Date	Assignment part due	Notes
Nov. 8	Topic selection	Bring the writing you will debate to class.
Before Nov. 22	First part	Bring it to my office in person and be prepared to discuss it.
Dec. 6	Full paper	Bring a hard copy to class.

Before coming to the office to discuss your selection and reconstruction, please make an appointment here: http://zitavtoth.com/2_teaching. This will ensure I stay in the office at the time.

If your selection is on a website, please bring the web address so that I can look it up on the screen.

The usual notes about philosophical writing apply here as well. Your main aim in the paper is to convince someone, *on philosophical grounds*, why the cited source is wrong about some issue. For that, you might need to explain some ethical concepts; don't assume your reader knows anything about ethics. Avoid *ad hominem* arguments and unfair representation of the view you don't agree with. Be as clear as you can.

The expected length of the paper should be however much you need to make your point. Probably about 4–5 pages.