

# Final Paper Assignment: Critical Analysis of a Contemporary Issue Using a Philosophical Framework

## Overview

For your final paper, you will select a specific contemporary issue and critically analyze it using a framework from one philosopher we studied in this course (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche). This is your opportunity to demonstrate your ability to apply philosophical reasoning to complex, real-world problems and to critically evaluate how effectively the chosen framework addresses the issue.

Your paper should demonstrate:

- A solid understanding of the chosen issue and its significance.
- A clear and accurate application of the philosopher's key concepts.
- A critical evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the philosopher's framework.
- Well-supported arguments, incorporating evidence and examples from reliable sources.

## Detailed Instructions

### 1. Choose a Contemporary Issue

Your first step is to identify a contemporary issue that has significant ethical, social, or political implications. This issue should be complex enough to allow for in-depth analysis and philosophical reflection.

#### Examples of issues:

- **Social media and democracy:** Does social media strengthen or undermine democratic practices?
- **Artificial intelligence:** What ethical challenges arise with the rapid development of AI?
- **Climate change and responsibility:** How should we address moral responsibility for global climate change?
- **Economic inequality:** How should justice and fairness be understood in light of rising economic disparities?
- **Free speech in the digital age:** How do we balance free speech and harm in online spaces?

#### Tips for choosing a topic:

- Select an issue that interests you and that you feel motivated to explore.
- Ensure there are enough reliable resources (e.g., news articles, studies, or reports) to provide a clear understanding of the problem.

## **2. Select a Philosopher**

Choose one philosopher from our course whose ideas are relevant to your chosen issue.

### **Examples of potential pairings:**

- Plato's theory of justice to evaluate ethical dilemmas in AI development.
- Aristotle's virtue ethics to explore personal responsibility in climate action.
- Kant's categorical imperative to analyze free speech and moral duty.
- Hegel's dialectics to examine political and cultural conflicts in democracy.
- Marx's critique of ideology to assess economic inequality and capitalism.
- Nietzsche's critique of morality to explore issues of power in social media governance.

### **Tips for selecting a philosopher:**

- Review your class notes and course readings to identify philosophers whose ideas resonate with the issue.
- Look at other primary sources, and refer to secondary sources to guide your paper.
- Consider how the philosopher's methods or concepts (e.g., Kant's deontology, Marx's materialism) might shed light on the problem.

(Note: You may choose any philosopher you like, but if we didn't studying them in the course, you need to check with me first.)

## **3. Write the Paper**

Your paper should be divided into the following sections. Use the guiding questions and suggestions to structure each part effectively.

### **a. Introduction (1 page)**

Purpose: Introduce the contemporary issue and the philosopher's framework, and present your thesis statement.

Include:

- A brief overview of the contemporary issue. Why is it significant?
- The philosopher you will use and a short summary of their key ideas.
- Your thesis statement: A clear argument about how the philosopher's framework helps to understand and evaluate the issue.

### **Example Thesis Statement:**

"Using Kant's categorical imperative, this paper argues that current debates about free speech on social media reveal a deeper tension between individual rights and collective moral duties, and that Kant's framework provides a useful but limited lens for exploring and potentially resolving these tensions."

## **b. Contextual Analysis of the Issue (2–3 pages)**

Purpose: Provide a thorough and detailed explanation of the contemporary issue.

Include:

- The background of the issue: How did it emerge? What are its key aspects?
- Key stakeholders: Who is affected by this issue, and how?
- Ethical, social, or political questions it raises: What makes this issue complex or controversial?
- Supporting evidence: Use news articles, academic studies, or credible reports to illustrate the problem.

**Tips:**

- Be specific: Avoid general statements and focus on concrete details.
- Use at least three credible sources to support your analysis.
- Cite your sources properly to maintain academic integrity.

## **c. Application of the Philosophical Framework (3–4 pages)**

Purpose: Explain and apply the philosopher's ideas to the issue.

Include:

- **Key concepts and methods:** Summarize the relevant ideas from the chosen philosopher. For example, explain Kant's categorical imperative, Marx's notion of ideology, or Aristotle's theory of virtue.
- **Application to the issue:** Show how these ideas can be used to analyze the issue. What insights do they provide? What aspects of the issue do they clarify or critique?
- **Examples:** Use specific examples from the issue to illustrate how the philosopher's ideas apply.

**Tips:**

- Be accurate: Ensure you explain the philosopher's ideas correctly.
- Stay focused: Avoid summarizing the philosopher's entire theory—focus only on concepts relevant to your issue.
- Use examples to make your analysis concrete and relatable.

#### **d. Evaluation of the Framework (2–3 pages)**

Purpose: Critically assess the strengths and limitations of the philosopher's framework in addressing the issue.

Include:

- **Strengths:** What does the philosopher's framework do well? How does it help clarify or resolve aspects of the issue?
- **Limitations:** What does the framework miss or fail to address? Are there aspects of the issue that require other perspectives or approaches?
- **Alternative perspectives:** Briefly mention other frameworks or ideas (e.g., from another philosopher or a modern perspective) that could complement or improve the analysis.

**Tips:**

- Be balanced: Acknowledge both the strengths and weaknesses of the framework.
- Reflect on the framework's relevance to contemporary problems—was it designed for such issues?

#### **e. Conclusion (1–2 pages)**

Purpose: Summarize your main arguments and reflect on their broader implications.

Include:

- Restate your thesis and summarize your key points.
- Reflect on the significance of applying historical philosophical frameworks to contemporary problems.
- Consider any unanswered questions or areas for further exploration.

**Example Closing Thought:**

"This analysis demonstrates that Kant's categorical imperative provides a valuable lens for understanding the moral dilemmas of free speech on social media, but it also reveals the need for updated ethical frameworks that consider the unique challenges of digital spaces."

## 4. Submission Guidelines

- **Length:** Minimum 10 pages (not including bibliography), double-spaced, 12-point font
- **Citation Style:** APA, MLA, or Chicago—choose one and apply it consistently.
- **Sources:** Include at least 5 credible sources (e.g., course texts, academic articles, news reports)—website references DO NOT count.
- **Deadline:** December 15, 2024
- **Submission Method:** Moodle

## Evaluation Criteria

Your paper will be graded based on the following criteria:

1. **Clarity and Organization (10%)**
  - Is the paper well-structured, with clear transitions and logical flow?
2. **Depth of Analysis (20%)**
  - Does the paper provide a detailed and nuanced analysis of the issue?
3. **Philosophical Understanding (20%)**
  - Does the paper demonstrate a strong understanding of the chosen philosopher's framework?
4. **Application of Philosophy (20%)**
  - How effectively are the philosopher's ideas applied to the issue?
5. **Critical Evaluation (20%)**
  - Does the paper critically assess the philosopher's framework, considering its strengths and limitations?
6. **Use of Evidence and Sources (10%)**
  - Are examples and evidence used effectively and appropriately cited?