

Paper prompt

Your paper needs to be between 2,500 and 3,500 words. There are two ways to write the paper:

- You can argue that one of the papers that we've read so far involves a mistake. In taking this option, you need to focus on just one mistake, and argue that it's a mistake with as much care as you can.
- You can also apply either act consequentialism or Scanlon's contractualism to some contemporary moral issue. If you take this option, you must get my approval on the topic and on the theory that you'll apply. To get my approval, you must email me by this Sunday (2/17); I'll get back to you by the end of the day on Monday (2/18).

Your paper needs to have four parts:

PART I: Reconstruction of your target's argument

You need to provide a reconstruction of the argument in the paper that you're choosing to right about. That is, you need to explain each of the premises in the argument that you're writing about, and explain in your own words why someone might find those premises plausible.

[If you take the second option, Part I needs to be a description of the theory you're going to apply]

PART II: One criticism of the argument/ Application of the theory

You should develop *one* criticism of your target's argument, whichever one you think is strongest. The criticism that you offer should be similar to the sorts of criticisms that we have discussed in class. You can argue that the argument neglects an important distinction, or that the argument assumes a principle that has a counterexample, or that the argument does not use a word with a consistent meaning, or anything similar.

Your criticism needs to be more than just your saying what you think. Your goal is to give a reason that would help convince an impartial observer to agree with you, and to think that there is something wrong with the argument that your target is offering.

[If you take the second option, Part II needs to be where you give your basic application of the theory to the contemporary moral issue that you want to discuss.]

PART III: Anticipation of what your target would say in response/ Anticipation of an objection

You then need to explain what your target would say in response to your criticism. In evaluating this part of the paper, I'll be making sure that you do understand the assumptions that your target is making.

[If you take the second option, Part III needs to be where you consider the most compelling objection to your Part II – the strongest reason for thinking that the theory under discussion has different upshots than you say in Part II.]

PART IV: Critical discussion of what your target would say in response

Your paper needs to end with a critical discussion of what you anticipate in PART III – you need to attempt to explain what you think is wrong with the response. As before, your goal is to give a reason that would help convince an impartial observer to agree with you, and to think that there is something wrong with the argument that your target is offering.

General points

- Focus on examples! Use lots of examples in your paper to illustrate what you mean, and talk about lots of potential counterexamples.
- In this paper, I am asking you to give your opinion. But there are very tight constraints on the way that you give your opinion. You need to give reasons for your opinion that would help an impartial observer to agree with you, and to disagree with your target. You need to anticipate what your target would say about your argument.