

Introduction to Ethics: Expository, Evaluative, and Adjudicatory Essays

Rationale for the Assignments

Our ethical discourse is in disarray. There is fundamental disagreement between conservatives and liberals, pro-lifers and pro-choicers, hawks and doves, and so on. There exists a wide variety of opinion on the ethical permissibility or desirability of abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, health care reform, public welfare, and so on. People, after all, differ widely with respect to their personal background and experiences, their family values, and their cultural history. The prospects for resolving these debates through careful, impartial, rational discussion are bleak. Appeals to emotion, tradition, political power, and legal minutiae rule the day.

There are two standard responses to this situation. The first is intellectual apathy, a flat refusal to stake a claim about controversial issues or to assess opinions that differ from one's own. The second is intellectual obtuseness, an inability to understand how sensible people could sincerely, and with good motives, assent to opinions that differ from one's own. Neither of these responses takes seriously the idea that, even though justifying some moral opinions as correct and others as mistaken is difficult, those opinions make a difference in the real world and, in many cases, significantly affect the lives of many people. Moral disagreement is not something we should ignore; nor is it something we should take lightly.

Engaging in a serious moral dialogue with other people requires humility and flexibility, the willingness to interpret competing opinions in a charitable way and to probe beyond the perfunctory platitudes propagating through the public sphere. The point of these assignments is to challenge you to practice doing these things by applying what we've been learning about ethics. The assignments ask you to think like a philosopher, to move beyond the catch-phrases and one-liners in order to examine the reasons and values that fuel people's opinions.

These assignments build upon each other. The second is a continuation of the first, and the third is a continuation of the second. This means that you have the opportunity to improve your writing and reasoning skills, by taking into account the evaluation of prior essays. There is a grading rubric for each assignment; consult this rubric in order to discern how to improve your second and third essays.

Paper #1: Expository Essay

Select an issue, *any* issue, about which there is reasonable disagreement. You might choose a "hot button" issue, like abortion, assisted suicide, immigration, or off-shore drilling. You might choose a "warmer" issue, such as the permissibility of using Tasers on civilians who do not comply with law enforcement, eating meat, or drinking bottled water. You might even choose an issue from your personal life. Whatever. Just make sure it is an issue about which there is *reasonable* disagreement: there are at least two opposing stances a person might take on the issue, and there are reasonable things one might say in trying to justify each stance. (A useful way to identify an issue is to formulate a question to which disputing parties give different answers (such as "yes" or "no"). The test for whether the disagreement is reasonable is to ascertain whether, for each answer, our common sense morality offers any values or reasons that support or justify the answer.)

Recommendation 1: If you're having trouble selecting a topic, write about the issue from your group presentation.

Your assignment is to write an expository essay in which you report the reasons that fuel disagreement about your selected issue. Expository essays typically have two main parts.

There is an **introduction**, in which the author states the issue to be discussed in the paper. A *good* introduction manages to capture the issue in a single, clear, concise statement (either declarative or interrogative) and illustrates some circumstances for which a stance on the issue is important. A *bad* introduction, in contrast, captures the issue with a phrase or slogan and laboriously sketches the structure of the essay.

Recommendation 2: Ignore what you were told about introductions in high school. That advice makes introductions *boring*.

There is an **explanation** of why there is reasonable disagreement about the issue, in which the author states the main competing stances toward the issue, presents some of the key values and reasons that support those stances, and offers examples to illustrate why those values and reasons are reasonable. A *good* explanation is one that reports the views of others in a way that proponents of those views would find to be fair and sympathetic, presenting the strongest possible case for each stance. A *bad* explanation is one that reports the views of others in a biased manner, or that offers only the most superficial of reasons as the support for a particular stance, or that explains the rationale for a stance in a way that can be conclusively dismissed in a few sentences. Good explanations require authors to imaginatively place themselves in the shoes of other people, to search out the strengths of those people's stances and construe the justifications for those stances in the best possible light.

Recommendation 3: If you have trouble imagining how a sane and intelligent person could have a particular opinion about some issue, talk to some people who have that opinion. Also, consult Chapter 4.2, on understanding fact-to-value arguments.

Your assignment is to write an expository essay with the following components: an introduction; a clear statement of two competing stances about that issue; for each stance, an explanation of two arguments that support the stance (for a total of four arguments). These arguments should be ones that advocates of the stance would consider reasonable, and they should not be enthymematic (see Chapter 4).

Paper #2: Evaluative Essay

Your assignment is to revise your expository essay and add an evaluation. Evaluating a dispute involves discussing the comparative strength of each stance's supporting arguments. This involves, first, criticizing arguments by either disputing factual claims or adducing exceptions to general connections that appear in those arguments; and, second, evaluating which arguments seem to be strongest in light of the preceding criticisms.

Recommendation 4: If you have trouble imagining how a sane and intelligent person could object to an argument, talk to people who deny the correctness of the

stance for which that argument provides support. Also, consult Chapter 7.6, on responding to persistent moral disagreements with an appeal to reasonableness.

Your assignment is to write an evaluative essay with the following components: a revised introduction; a revised exposition; one criticism for *each* argument that appears in the exposition (for a total of *four* criticisms); an argument for why one of the stances is more reasonable than its competitor (see Chapter 7.6).

If you dispute a factual claim that appears in an argument, be sure to provide a citation to a respectable research publication that supports your criticism, to explain the content of that research, and to explain how that research shows the factual claim to be false. If you dispute a connection that appears in an argument, be sure to provide examples that support your criticism.

Paper #3: Adjudicatory Essay

Your assignment is to revise your evaluative essay and add an adjudication, in which you act as a third party to the dispute over your selected issue, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the competing stances and defending a resolution to the dispute that avoids as many weaknesses as possible while embodying as many strengths as possible. An adjudicatory essay is not merely an expository essay, reporting the views of others. Nor is it an editorial, reporting your personal opinions on an issue. An adjudicatory essay combines exposition and editorial with *engagement*, an attempt to fairly assess the merits of competing views and to imagine the values and reasons that motivate sane and intelligent people to disagree.

In addition to having an introduction, exposition, and evaluation, an adjudicatory essay contains a **resolution** of the dispute, in which the author defends a particular stance on the issue. The resolution only rarely amounts to a judgment that one of the stances is entirely and wholly correct. More often, the resolution involves a stance that carefully and creatively interweaves many complementary insights from the dispute and many of the author's insights. A *good* resolution does three things: (1) it states the author's stance in a single, clear, concise statement; (2) it presents the key values and reasons that support the stance; and (3) it explains why the stance is more plausible than its competitors. This last part is the trickiest, requiring the author to not only tout the virtues of the resolution stance but also explain why that stance does not succumb to the weaknesses of its competitors. A *bad* resolution either omits one of the three essential components of a good resolution *or*, while including all of those components, offers reasons against competing stances that are either blatantly unfair or unresponsive to the concerns that motivate those stances.

Recommendation 5: Be open-minded. Don't think of ethical disputes as multiple choice questions. If you are not satisfied by any proposed stances, develop a new one that tries to better integrate the values motivating other stances.

Your assignment is to write an adjudicatory essay with the following components: a revised introduction; a revised exposition; a revised section in which you criticize arguments from your exposition; a statement of your stance about the ethical issue; an argument for why your stance is more reasonable than one competing stance that appears in your exposition (see Chapter 10.4).

Introduction to Ethics: Grading Rubric for Essays

Grammar (10 pts)	Comments
10.0: A+ 9.0: A	The paper has little to no grammatical mistakes (no spelling errors, fragments, excessively long sentences, obscurity, etc).
8.0: B	The paper contains a few minor grammatical errors (an occasional misspelled word or misplaced comma, etc).
7.0: C	The paper has a few significant, or minor but recurring, grammatical errors.
6.0: D	The paper has many significant, recurring grammatical errors.
5.0: F	The paper is a grammatical disaster.

Style (20 pts)	Comments
20.0: A+ 19.0: A 18.0: A-	The paper is clearly written (avoids unfamiliar or complicated words when familiar or simpler ones will do, avoids ambiguous terms, gives illustrative examples, etc). It avoids rhetorical questions, uses paragraphs in an intelligent way, and provides signposts to the reader. There are proper citations. Each sentence is necessary to support or explain some other sentence.
17.0: B 16.0: B	The paper shares many features of an "A" paper, but there are some awkwardly phrased sentences or other minor stylistic deficiencies. The paper might benefit from more explanation in key places.
15.0: C 14.0: C	The paper has a large number of awkwardly phrased sentences, bad transitions, or unhelpful citations. The author's meaning is difficult to discern because of awkward writing.
13.0: D 12.0: D	The paper is the same as a "C" paper, except that it has a "C" paper's deficiencies to a greater degree.
11.0: F 10.0: F	The paper is a stylistic disaster.

Introduction (10 pts)	Comments
10.0: A+ 9.0: A	The paper introduces the issue in a single, clear, concise statement and illustrates some circumstances for which a stance on the issue is important. The illustrations are vivid, realistic, and relevant to everyday concerns. There are no platitudes or rhetorical questions.
8.0: B	The statement of the issue is clear and concise, but the illustrations of the issue are slightly less than ideal. There are no platitudes or rhetorical questions.
7.0: C	The statement of the issue is obscure, and the illustrations are less than ideal. There are some platitudes or rhetorical questions.
6.0: D	The statement of the issue is obscure, and the illustrations are significantly less than ideal. The main substance consists of platitudes or rhetorical questions.
5.0: F	The statement of the issue is obscure or absent. There is no illustration of circumstances for which a stance on the issue is important.

Exposition (60 pts)	Comments
60.0: A+ 57.0: A 54.0: A-	There is a clear, concise statement of two competing stances toward the issue. For each stance, there are two fact-to-value arguments that support that stance. The generalized connection for each argument is stated clearly and correctly, and there are examples given that support each connection. Those examples are plausible. Each argument for a stance is one that is fair and sympathetic to advocates of the stance, presenting that stance in the best possible light.
53.0: B+ 51.0: B 48.0: B-	There is a clear, concise statement of two competing stances toward the issue. For each stance, there are two fact-to-value arguments that support that stance. The generalized connection for each argument is stated clearly and correctly, and there are examples given that support each connection. However, either the examples are implausible, or the arguments do not present advocates of the stance in the best possible light.
47.0: C+ 45.0: C 42.0: C-	There is a clear, concise statement of two competing stances toward the issue. For each stance, there are two fact-to-value arguments that support that stance. However, the connections for the arguments are obscure, unsupported, or incorrect, or the stances themselves are presented in a biased manner. There is a failure to understand how advocates of competing stances could be reasonable.
41.0: D 39.0: D 36.0	There is a clear, concise statement of two competing stances toward the issue. However, there are not two fact-to-value arguments given in support of each stance.
35.0: F 30.0: F	The discussion of the competing stances is obscure, and the discussion of supporting arguments for the stances is either absent or prejudicial.

Evaluation (20 pts)	Comments
20.0: A+ 19.0: A 18.0: A-	There are four total criticisms, one for each of the two arguments given to support two stances. The criticisms are <i>very</i> thoughtful and engaging. There is helpful citation to research pertaining to the truth of factual claims. When a generalized connection is criticized, the examples given are realistic and relevant.
17.0: B 16.0: B	The paper is the same as an "A" paper, except that the citation is less than ideal, the criticisms are somewhat thoughtful and engaging, or the examples are less than realistic or somewhat irrelevant.
15.0: C 14.0: C	The paper is the same as a "B" paper, except that the criticisms are obscure or contentious, or there only three criticisms given.
13.0: D 12.0: D	The paper is the same as a "C" paper, except that there are no relevant citations, the criticisms are given as flat assertions rather than supported with appropriate reasons (citation of research or illustration by example), or there are only one or two criticisms.
11.0: F 10.0: F	There is an utter failure to complete any part of the assignment.

Adjudication (10 pts)	Comments
10.0: A+ 9.0: A	The thesis is original, creative, and feasible. Reasons for believing the thesis are made clear, as is the way in which those reasons support the thesis. The author is sensitive to the ways in which those who disagree might criticize these reasons and makes an outstanding effort to take those criticisms seriously and respond to them.
8.0: B	The thesis is original and feasible. Reasons for believing the thesis are made clear, as is the way in which those reasons support the thesis. The author is sensitive to the ways in which those who disagree might criticize these reasons and makes a good-faith effort to take those criticisms seriously and respond to them.
7.0: C	The thesis is feasible. Reasons for believing the thesis are made clear, as is the way in which those reasons support the thesis. However, the author is not sensitive to the ways in which those who disagree might criticize those reasons, or is sensitive but does not take those criticisms seriously.
6.0: D	There is a thesis, but the reasons for believing the thesis are obscure.
5.0: F	There is no thesis, or there is one but it is supported by a list of assertions with no clear connection to the thesis. There is a failure to engage with opposing stances in a thoughtful way.

Expository Essay Assessment

Grammar: _____ / 10
 Style: _____ / 20
 Introduction: _____ / 10
 Exposition: _____ / 60
Total: _____ / 100

Evaluative Essay Assessment

Grammar: _____ / 10
 Style: _____ / 20
 Introduction: _____ / 10
 Exposition: _____ / 60
 Evaluation: _____ / 20 x 5
Total: _____ / 200

Adjudicatory Essay Assessment

Grammar: _____ / 10
 Style: _____ / 20
 Introduction: _____ / 10
 Exposition: _____ / 60
 Evaluation: _____ / 20 x 5
 Adjudication: _____ / 10 x 10
Total: _____ / 300

Introduction to Ethics: Supplemental Comments on Essay Assessment

Your grade does not depend upon the *length* of your paper. Take as many or as few pages as you need in order to complete all elements of the assignment. There is no page requirement. This means that there is no need for fluff.

As a student, write for your parents (or someone else with no prior exposure to philosophy.) If your parents could not understand what you've written, try again. If a person from high school, looking only at your notes from class, could have written your paper, then try again. I will give comments on rough drafts (preferably submitted by email). But drafts are not required. I also will meet with you to discuss your ideas. This is not required, either. But it is likely to increase the quality of your paper.

If you are in doubt about how to format the paper, use your favorite method from high school or college. If you use outside sources, be sure to cite them in a consistent manner, and in a way that would allow a reasonable person to locate the source. If you are unsure, show someone else your citation and see whether they could find the source. Standard elements of a responsible reference include: source name; source title; source location; year of publication or access.

It is okay to use the first person singular.

There is no need for a separate conclusion, in which you summarize the content of your paper. That's boring and, given the probable length of your paper, redundant.

Polite Requests

Please staple or otherwise bind together the pages of your essay (but please do not use the rip-and-fold binding method). This helps me to keep all of the papers organized and facilitates transporting the papers between office and home.

Please submit a hard-copy of your essay, double-spaced, and use a readable font. Times New Roman 12 point is a nice one. So is Calibri 11 point. All of this helps me to avoid straining my eyes. (The hard-copy also helps me to keep track of submissions: sometimes technology doesn't cooperate and I can't get to a printer that works in a timely manner.)

Please do not use a separate cover page or submit your essay in a folder. Put your name at the very top of the first page. Put a title below that, with center justification. Then insert one or two blank lines and begin your essay. This helps to prevent unnecessary use of our natural resources and reduce waste. For the same reason, please do not use a separate page for references. Enter one or two blank spaces after your last sentence and then insert your references (if any).

Emphatic Suggestions

If you have questions about the term paper, ask *before* the paper is due. Do not wait until the last minute to begin work on your papers. Since you have advance notice about when each essay is due and what each essay should be, I am not prone to be sympathetic to hearing that you were unable to do a good job because of your obligations in other courses, at home, or at work.