

For this assignment, it is necessary that you read the (very) short story by Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." It is on reserve at the library.

Topic: Discuss how Le Guin's short story gives a representation of utilitarianism, and argue *why*, for those who walk away from Omelas, they do.

Introduction: Your first paragraph shall be a summary or thumbnail sketch of the essence of your essay. Your introduction need not contain information not pertinent to this goal. Thus, (1) although this assignment is an essay on ethics, it is not a paper discussing what people from the dawn of time have wondered – and therefore, no such sentence should make an appearance as the starting point of your introduction. Maybe you need such a sentence to get your creative juices flowing as you write your first draft, but make sure to delete it please before turning your essay in! Alternatively, (2) your thesis statement is crucial to your paper, and your stand on the thesis *should* appear in your introduction. Errors such as committing (1), or failure to perform (2), are factors that will negatively affect your grade, the latter more severely than the former.

I. Dividing your paragraphs topically as you see fit, summarize Le Guin's short story.

II. Spend at least 2 paragraphs discussing utilitarianism. What does it place value (positive and negative) upon? How does one decide what the right thing to do is? Make sure to include consideration of what Mill calls higher and lower pleasures. Discuss the philosophy thoroughly and carefully. If it takes you only 3 sentences, I promise, that is not carefully enough. In your discussion, use an example of your own making (*not* from Le Guin – attention aplenty will go to that momentarily) to make the philosophical generalities more specific and clear. That being said about the example, a word of caution: your example should accessorize, not dominate, this philosophical section of your essay. The ratio of philosophy to example should be on the order of 2/3 to 1/3, or 3/4 to 1/4; not the other way around.

III. Apply what you have revealed about utilitarianism in (II) to Le Guin's short story. How does the community of Omelas manifest a utilitarian point of view? Take your time and present your evaluation carefully; do not presume that your reader will fill in any blanks for you. Another word of caution: do not bring in, at this point, relevant points about utilitarianism that were not already discussed in (II). That isn't to say that the new point you wish to include isn't relevant or important; the point here is one of editing and organization. As you write, if you find yourself bringing in a new component of utilitarianism to (III) that wasn't introduced in (II), then that means you ought to go back and revise (II) to include the material you are wishing to insert now.

IV. This is a section that will most require imagination and creativity, in addition to argument. Le Guin does not give any reason for why there are ones who walk away from Omelas. This final section of the assignment asks you to imagine why they do, and justify your picture of the situation. Let me be completely clear: I do *not* think there is a right or wrong answer to the question of why the walkers-away, leave. But I *do* think that there are better and worse justifications. So, for instance, “because I said so” just as such, might work for a mother to her offspring, but it is a poor justification for a philosophy paper. I’m asking you to explore here, and give your hunch some legs. For instance, are the walkers utilitarians who calculate the ratio of happiness to unhappiness differently than the citizens of Omelas? How so? Explain that out. Are the ones who walk away *not* utilitarians at all – is there something else factoring into their view of what is right and wrong? Using our course material at your disposal, what other factors might that be? Can you find help from Kant, or from Williams, or from Hursthouse? Explain what other materials do come to your aid, and discuss how these other considerations justify your interpretation of the short story’s conclusion.

Technicalities:

This essay must be at least 3 full pages, but not more than 5 full pages, in length. Your margins should be 1 inch wide on all sides. Your type should be in a standard style such as Helvetica or times new roman, in size 12. Double space. Do not double space between paragraphs, please. The only place there should be an occurrence of your name is on a separate cover sheet.

You are encouraged to make direct reference to citations from our texts, but you should not use any long, block, quotes. For citations, use in-text parenthetical references (for instance, “blah blah blah,” (Readings, p. 24).) Do not use material – directly or indirectly – from the internet, period. This isn’t to say you shouldn’t consult outside readings to help with your comprehension, but I do not expect any outside sources to appear in your text. If outside sources do make an unfortunate appearance in your text without attribution, rest assured that if I find it, you will have earned yourself at a minimum, a grade of zero for the essay.

For further information such as writing tips, grading guidelines, the late policy and my policy on typos and grammar, see the syllabus.