

Devil's Advocate

Requirements: 1,000 words; Electronic submission via email; Standard formatting

Due: TBD by Class Vote

Purpose of the assignment: Compelling arguments require compelling interlocutors! In academic writing, if you fail to consider an opposing view, or if you present your detractors in a way that makes their position seem weak or underdeveloped, your argument will appear weak in turn. One difficulty, however, is that a tailor-made objection to your own line of argumentation is not always in print already. Nevertheless, if there isn't already an objection in print, you must anticipate and develop one of your own. Far from undermining your own argumentative goals, motivating the position of anticipated detractors actually serves to make your own argument more forceful and persuasive.

Task: In this assignment, you will (i) identify a philosophical position with which you sympathize, *summarize* and *analyze* its strengths, and then (ii) craft at least one original objection against this position. The more challenging the objection, the stronger your paper will be.

THE BASIC GUIDELINES

1. TAKE A STANCE:

Choose a claim relevant to an ethical debate (can be an ethical claim - e.g. moral hedonism - or a claim relevant to an ethical claim - e.g. psychological hedonism). Begin your paper by *briefly* motivating the claim you choose, weaving summary of any relevant readings together with your own argumentative support.

2. PLAY DEVIL'S ADVOCATE:

Create an **original objection** to the view you have just advanced. The majority of time, space, and effort should be spent on the objection portion of your paper. **Remember:** A good objection is honest, objective, and not easily dismissed – it doesn't misrepresent the view in question, and offers considered reasons rather than mere opinions, emotional reactions, or baldly asserted talking points. Good objections should also make some effort to address and bat away any seemingly obvious solutions that might occur to a reader. You want your objection to appear as challenging to your reader as possible. Otherwise, you will look to your reader to be pitching yourself a "softball." **NOTE:** You don't have to defeat the devil's advocate objection in this assignment, so try to stump yourself!

3. REFLECT:

Conclude by assessing the potential prospects for addressing the objection you raise: Do you think this objection could be resolved? If so, outline some possible strategies for responding to the objection that you would pursue in a larger paper. If you cannot respond to this objection, reflect: Does this mean the issue is irresolvable? Have you possibly changed your mind? Or are there problems with both sides of the debate?