

GIVING FEEDBACK ON STUDENT WRITING SUPPLEMENT 2: SAMPLE OF STUDENT PAPER WITH INSERTED COMMENTS

This is an example that combines commenting strategies #1 and #5. The student writer has inserted marginal comments to ask for feedback from a peer reviewer. The reviewer has responded to the writer's questions directly and has also written a "head comment" and additional marginal comments that offer focused suggestions for revision. (The reviewer's marginal comments appear in bold text.)

S.

I honestly enjoyed reading your paper. I think it had excellent structure and brought up a couple of very interesting points. I disagreed with the point of view you took on the subject but yet I found your argument to make logical sense. I understood the line you took on Eichmann and the fact that it was challenging makes the effort even more commendable.

The main focus of your revision (as you correctly identified through your comments) is your second body paragraph. The argument you attempt to make in that paragraph is a little tricky and is complicated a little bit by a quote that I didn't see as directly related. Re-read that paragraph; I think you will understand what I am talking about. Also keep in mind that it's important to link this point back to your main argument – that might help you iron out some of the issues in the coherence of the argument.

Finally, to do with word count (as suggested in one of my final comments), removing some matter from your intro is a good place to start. Summarize a little less or do so more succinctly. Also, try and paraphrase one or two quotes, that might help you save some words and express the ideas a way that adds to the strength of your central thesis.

Hope this helps, good luck with final editing.

S

Guilt and Dirty Hands

What happens when a person's agency is taken away, and to what extent can they be held accountable for their actions? Michael Walzer addresses this question in his essay "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands." According to Walzer, politicians sometimes have a right, even a duty, to do things that are ethically wrong when they are faced with a moral dilemma. As a political actor, Nazi transportation expert Adolf Eichmann could have attempted to use Walzer's argument to defend himself during his trial for his part in the death of thousands of Jewish people, but to use this argument Eichmann would have to prove that he meets the criteria of two crucial components of

Comment [A1]: (student) Do I need to explain what a moral dilemma is (having to choose between two difficult options), or is this clear enough for the reader?

Comment [A2]: (response) I think that the way it is right now is totally fine and is understandable. Having said that, if there is something you would like the reader to know about a moral dilemma that the phrase itself doesn't suggest then add that in. I think it is clear for the reader right now but it is a little "general" i.e. think about how specific you want the reader's viewpoint of a "moral dilemma" to be.

Walzer's theory of dirty hands. First, Walzer argues, in order to have dirty hands the actor must be acting for the good of others; second, he must acknowledge his guilt. The fact that Eichmann could claim he *feels* guilty and argue that he was doing what he thought was best to promote the "good" motives of the Nazi's, shows the possible loopholes Walzer's argument could present to enable the unjust political actor to escape punishment.

Walzer argues that there are many instances in which, "a particular act of government [...] may be exactly the right thing to do in utilitarian terms and yet leave the man who does it guilty of a moral wrong" (Walzer 161). In Walzer's model a political actor is justified in breaking moral laws because he has an ethic of duty to answer tough political questions without referencing his personal moral beliefs. If Eichmann used Walzer's argument, he could claim that he was acting on behalf of all Germans to achieve their political goal. As Ardent claims, "The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, [and] they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal" (Ardent 276). If Eichmann does not consciously know that he is doing something wrong, and truly believes that his acts are to achieve what is best for all, then he could claim his hands are simply dirty and he is not guilty of doing any more than fulfilling his duty as a political actor.

Furthermore, Walzer's model requires that a political actor who breaks the moral code understands his guilt and is perceived as guilty. Although Eichmann does not appeal to the guilt requirement of Walzer's argument, Ardent claims when, "for whatever reasons, even reasons of moral insanity, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong is impaired, we feel no crime has been committed" (Ardent 277). This guilt requirement of dirty hands creates a problem when dealing with people like Eichmann who are not truly achieving a greater good for all, but who could either feign guilt under Walzer's model to escape punishment or claim they are only doing what they believe is truly correct. Eichmann could have argued he did not need to feel guilt because dirty hands classify his actions as simply duties of his job.

Although Eichmann can't actually claim that he has dirty hands because he is not facing a genuine moral dilemma, the possibility that he could appeal to an ethic of duty to commit moral wrongs shows the weakness of Walzer's model. If one can do anything in politics because they face a tough moral decision, when is the politician supposed to be held accountable? Ardent argues, "...guilt and innocence before the law are of an objective nature, and even if eighty million Germans had done as [Eichmann] did, this would not have been an excuse for [him]" (Ardent 278). Walzer's idea of dirty hands comes dangerously close to permitting this argument and allowing politicians to commit any immoral act so long as their aim is "good", which leaves the door open for immoral men to escape punishment for unspeakable wrongs.

Comment [A3] : (reviewer) You attack the argument right at the outset, making a strong point. Good job!

Comment [A4] : (student) Could he argue that he was acting for ALL Germans? I don't necessarily mean to point out that he couldn't but simply to question the idea of using a massively sweeping phrase like this one.

Comment [A5] : (reviewer) I do agree that it is a good idea to talk about the guilt factor because I think it is a very sound argument and is an interesting one at the same time. However, this paragraph's quote is not entirely linked with the argument of guilt, more-so with the belief that one's actions are correct. The two are connected but I believe that there does exist a difference between the two. I think both points are valuable and it is hard to say that one is clearly stronger than the other. As a reader, the argument about guilt drives home a stronger point for me.

Comment [A6] : (student) I'm struggling a bit with this second body paragraph. At first I thought I could talk about Eichmann's appeal to Kant and how he was not acting as a free agent, but I think it is better to talk about the second requirement of "guilt" that I mention in my intro. Is my second body paragraph clear enough?

Comment [A7] : (reviewer) This phrase is a little vague - perceived by who? Are you talking about public perception or more of self-perception?

Comment [A8] : (reviewer) On a prompt like this one, its hard for anyone to be wrong, its just about the evidence you use. I think that you have two sound points that do make coherent sense. The guilt argument combined with utilitarianism seems like two things Eichmann could have used in his defense and I doubt very much that anyone would tell you that you're opinions are incorrect. You might have to take some out of your intro - sum up points in a less wordy way. Also, try and see if you really need ALL the quotes you have,

Comment [A9] : (Student) There is so much to say about this prompt that I'm having a really hard time choosing what points are the best to keep in my argument and what should be omitted to reduce my word count. Also, I'm worried that my argument is incorrect because the professor made a comment in class that Eichmann