

Find-a-Flaw / AITA Assignment

Due date: Tuesday, March 22 at 11:59 PM

### Prompt

As we discussed during the first few weeks of class, there are only two ways to rationally undermine an argument: point to some flaw in the reasoning or provide reasons to reject one or more of the premises. For this assignment, you will apply the first of these skills to your everyday life by summarizing an argument for a position on a contemporary moral problem that you've encountered outside of class and explaining why the reasoning is flawed.

You will find your *target argument*—that is, the argument that you will evaluate—on the subreddit Am I The Asshole? (AITA).<sup>1</sup> It can be extracted from a main post, one or more comments on a main post (e.g., when a redditor develops their line of reasoning in a conversation with another redditor), or a combination of the two (e.g., when a redditor elaborates on their main post in the comments). (If you'd prefer to find a target argument somewhere else, such as an opinion piece, schedule a meeting with me to talk about it.)

It is largely up to you to decide what you consider to be a contemporary moral problem. In general, the question “Am I the asshole?” appears to be a moral question that is traceable back to at least Aristotle, who would have put it like this: “In the circumstances, did I do what a vicious (as opposed to a virtuous) person would have done in those circumstances?”<sup>2</sup>

More generally, a contemporary moral problem can concern a type of action, activity, emotional response, or worldview that raises difficult questions about whether something should or shouldn't be done, whether something is required (“you have to!”), permissible (“it's okay”), or wrong (“not cool!”), or whether something is good or bad.

The goal of the assignment is to explain why the *reasoning* behind your target argument is flawed, *not* to argue that the main *premises* or *conclusion* of that argument are *false*. In other words, your goal is to attempt to persuade your reader that *even on the assumption that the premises are true*, they do not give us a *good reason* to accept the main position of your target argument. There are several different ways to do this, but here are some questions to keep in mind:

1. How many premises does the redditor offer in support of their position? What are those premises?
2. Do they seem to intend their premises to logically guarantee their position, or do they seem to intend their premises to merely raise the likelihood that their position is true?
3. Is their argument logically valid? Is it inductively strong? Is it neither?
4. Do they commit any fallacies of reasoning?
5. Do they use terminology clearly, unambiguously, and consistently? Or do they fail to explain what they mean, use overly ambiguous terminology, or equivocate with their terminology (i.e., misleadingly use the same words to express different ideas in different premises)?
6. Do they provide sufficient support for their main premises?
7. Do they face any obvious counterexamples?
8. Is the redditor reasoning in the way recommended by what Jeff McMahan calls the “theoretical approach,” or are they reasoning in the way recommended by the “intuitive approach,” or what? Does their approach make it rational for them to be confident in their position? Why or why not?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reddit.com/r/AmItheAsshole/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://1000wordphilosophy.com/2022/02/06/virtue-ethics/>

9. If they appeal to a moral principle or theory, is the principle or theory intuitively plausible, simple, powerful, unified, or explanatory, or is it highly counterintuitive, needlessly complicated, ill-equipped to guide future behavior, disunified, or ad hoc? Does the moral principle or theory really apply to the case under consideration, or is it irrelevant to the case under consideration?
10. If they draw an analogy with other cases, are the two cases relevantly similar?
11. Do they attempt to raise problems for competing positions? If so, have they properly understood those competing positions, and do they employ good reasoning in attempting to raise those problems?
12. Do they rest their reasoning on any problematic philosophical assumptions without acknowledging those assumptions or defending them?

### **Grading Information/Submission Instructions**

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Your written piece should be **700–1,000 words** (roughly 2.5–4 double-spaced pages), typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins all around, with page numbers in the header aligned to the right. Include a link to your chosen Reddit thread on a separate page at the end of your assignment. Separately upload screenshots of the relevant posts or comments to Blackboard (since posts on Reddit may be deleted).

With my permission, you may complete this assignment through alternative media instead of prose, such as a short documentary, vlog entry, podcast episode, short film, or something along those lines. Regardless of the medium, however, you will need to rigorously engage with the prompt.

Grades will be assigned on the basis of the following point breakdown:

- 2 points: Meets the formatting and word-count requirements and contains no major grammatical, spelling, or style errors that would impede the reader's understanding.
- 2 point: Shows proficiency with the relevant empirical, logical, philosophical, or moral concepts.
- 4 point: Provides a clear and concise introduction to the contemporary moral problem along with the necessary context for the reader to understand the dialectic (e.g., clearly explains the when/why/where of the target argument).
- 4 points: Describes a contemporary moral problem in sufficient detail and explains why it is a moral problem (e.g., why it is unclear how to answer the associated questions).
- 4 points: Presents the target argument in a precise, methodical, and charitable way.
- 6 points: Clearly explains why the reasoning of the target argument is flawed and fails to adequately support the conclusion (even if the premises are true).

**= 22 points**

NOTE ON GROUP WORK: Your writing **must** be entirely your own. Co-authorship is **not** permitted. See pp. 9–10 of the syllabus for more information on academic integrity.

SUBMITTING YOUR ASSIGNMENT: To submit your written assignment, please attach it as a **PDF (not pages, doc, etc.)** through Blackboard. **Do not include your name on your assignment.**