

Apologies

“My Apologies” Signature Assignment #1

*The Greek meaning of “Apologia” is actually pretty much the opposite of what we typically think of by that word. ...Indeed, at best, one could say that, in philosophy, the “Apology” is the epitome of the “Sorry, *not* Sorry” statement: a clearly explained and justified, unapologetic *defense* of my life against those who might accuse me of not living well, of not caring about the right things, of doing what I shouldn’t and not doing what I should, etc.*

Generally Speaking, “a philosophical ‘apology’ is a text that both articulates what the author believes on some particular matter, and offers arguments for why she is rational in believing as she does, all within the context of a larger personal narrative. It’s sort of like a philosophical memoir with arguments.”¹

Some of the most famous philosophers and leaders have written Apologies in response to accusers who would have them condemned: Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote a fiercely reasoned defense for his actions and life-commitments while sitting in a jail cell. Recently, local Utah resident Tim DeChristopher gave an extraordinary apologia for his environmental civil disobedience in a formal statement before he was sentenced to two years in prison.

They all follow in the footsteps of Socrates. Socrates: who stood up before his accusers, and before being sentenced to death, defended his philosophical way of life in one of the most important “sorry, not sorry’s” in written record.

For this Signature Assignment, you will be writing your own “apology,” in which you explain to an “accuser” why you choose to be a certain way or do a certain thing.

Pick one particular action or choice that you have made that a) you value and think is right, but that b) another or others think is wrong and not valuable. (for instance, maybe you want to pursue a major that your family doesn’t understand or agree with. Or maybe you hang out with the “wrong” people. Or maybe you have another life commitment that some might consider off-track.). (The key here is to select a real choice you’ve made about something important to you, that people you care about have disagreed with (“people you care about” can be close people (your family, friends), but it can also be larger groups you care about (your culture, your nation, your human-community)).

See back page for Assignment Requirements

¹ Meghan Sullivan, professor at Notre Dame, explains the Student Apology assignment in these words.

Your Apology should have the following elements:

- a) An **explanation of your choice** and its context. Include here an explanation of who your “accusers” are. Why is their view on this issue important to you? Why, in other words, are you moved to justify your choice here to them?
- b) A **presentation of the best reasons your ‘accusers’ give** for why they think you are wrong. [This is the “**You May Say/Ask**” aspect of your “apology”]. As you present their “you may say”s, be sure to be generous in your explanation of what they think you’re doing wrong. Present their best reasons. (If you can’t defend your choice against their best well-intentioned arguments, then you don’t *really* think you are right).
- c) The **reasons you give** for why, despite your accusers’ concerns, you nevertheless believe your choice is **grounded in solid values, an accurate assessment of reality and a commitment to consistent thinking**. Ultimately, here you will be explaining how your choice reflects a “**way of life**” that you aim to live (in other words, a set of practices and choices that reflect a worldview resting on **an ethics, an epistemology and a metaphysics**). [This is the “**But I say in response**” aspect of your “apology”]

Format: This is a 3-5 page essay, and is to be submitted on Canvas. It should be formally-formatted (12 pt font, normal margins, proper writing mechanics, clean look). If you like, you can write it in the form of a letter to your accuser, or in the style of closing remarks at a trial, or what-not. Feel welcome to choose a style (and an organization of points) that fits the task, and that gets you excited about writing. But remember that it is a designed to be an argument: taking a position and defending it with reasons/values/beliefs against those who would critique it.

Late Policy: every day late is 1/3 of a grade penalty (for instance, from an A to an A- to a B+ to a B, etc.) I may grant an extension for you but **only** with at least two-days advance notice. If you come to me on or after the due date asking for an extension, yours will be subject to the late penalties.

Note: There have been several Pre-signature Assignment Module Activities that were designed to help you prepare for writing this SA, by “scaffolding” the tasks into manageable chunks. (Note that the Module Activities served as foundations for group workshopping, and primarily got graded as complete/partially complete/incomplete. They were designed as milestone-steps in a process, rather than a graded end-product). The Signature Assignment, though, will be graded for clarity, structure, argumentation (that is, good reasoning and reflection...see (c) above), clean formatting and good writing mechanics. Consider visiting the Writing Center for assistance with your final draft).

- 1) **Module 1 Activity 2: “The Photographed Life”:** This one asked you to articulate some of your own answers to questions like “What is a Good life?” “What Matters in Life?” And “What do those values look like in our daily practices?”
- 2) **Journal Entry 2: “My biggest disagreements with people important to me.”** This was a freewrite exercise to help you identify and narrow down your selection for #3 below.
- 3) **Module 2 Activity 1: “The Accusations against Me”:** Here you settled on the choice/action you were going to focus on, and the reasons some folks give for why they think you are doing the wrong thing, or living the wrong way.
- 4) **Module 3 Activity 1: “My Defense”:** Here you began to articulate your justifications for your choice, and connect them to a way of life you find appealing/important (including that way of life’s values, worldview and thoughts about a worthwhile way of life), following our in-class workshop modeling of “You may say”/“But I say in response” style.