

*Western Philosophy – Les Misérables (1998 film) writing topics*

The following essay assignment is intended to accompany the 1998 version of the film *Les Misérables*. This paper is designed to revolve around the film, assuming the students have not read the original text; should a student have seen the film and completed the text, they are welcome to include the book in their analysis if they so choose. In terms of formatting, you may choose to write this either as a formal essay, or as an informally written conversation as we sometimes do in class.

Consider the philosophical lectures, theories, homework readings, and discussions which we have engaged in. You will write a paper which applies elements of philosophy to make sense of the events or characters within the film. But there's a catch (naturally...)

First, you will need to focus your paper's direction around two themes. These themes might be encompassed within the broad categories of epistemology, metaphysics, ideology/religious, political and ethical/moral. For clarification, they are...

- a) Epistemology
  - ☞ Philosophy which is concerned with the nature of knowledge.
  - ☞ Typical questions in this field include: How is knowledge justified? What are different sources of knowledge? What different kinds of knowledge are there? How can we know anything at all?
- b) Metaphysics
  - ☞ Philosophy which is concerned with the ultimate structure of reality.
  - ☞ Typical questions in this field include: Does life have meaning? How does one event cause another? What can we say actually exists? What is essential and what is accidental in something's nature?
- c) Ideological/religious
  - ☞ Philosophy which is concerned with the existence and role of a greatest conceivable being.
  - ☞ Typical questions in this field include: Does God exist? If there were no God, would we make one? Is redemption feasible?
- d) Political
  - ☞ Philosophy which is concerned with governmental and societal structure.
  - ☞ Typical questions in this field include: What is the appropriate role for any government structure? What is the best form of government? Is corruption inherent in politics? What is the proper role of the law?
- e) Ethical/moral
  - ☞ Philosophy which is concerned with human will, action and responsibility; it evaluates what is right and wrong
  - ☞ Typical questions in this field include: What is justice? Are there objective rules for moral conduct? On what grounds can we say an action is right or wrong? To what extent are we responsible for our actions? Should our moral decisions be indifferent toward those close to us? Is it possible to make immoral decisions yet be a moral person?

Second, for each theme you chose as a focus point, you will need to apply at least five of the philosophers you have been exposed to.

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Some final thoughts . . .

View this as an opportunity in which to challenge yourself and your academic writing skills. I am intentionally leaving this assignment's direction rather open-ended so that you have plenty of creative liberties as you formulate what to write about.

Should you find this paper particularly challenging to start writing, then you might consider what the philosophers may say about the events of the film, and please remember it is certainly ok to offer conflicting perspectives from philosophers on the same topic.

If you continue to be stuck and not quite sure how to best proceed in this writing, the following areas are some suggestions to consider. Different approaches you might consider taking include, but are not limited to, the following lines of thought . . .

- ☞ How might you utilize philosophy to address any of the themes in the film (these themes might include: justice; moral right and wrong; ethics; politics and revolution; ideology/religion, and so on)
- ☞ What might a philosopher say about the good and bad elements of society?
- ☞ What might a philosopher say about describing the behavior of the characters (ie, human nature)?
- ☞ What might philosophers say about the role of religion in the film, be it in the context of unification, division, redemption or something else?
- ☞ People to consider specifically might include Machiavelli, Descartes, Augustine, Hobbes, Locke, Plato, Socrates, Rawls, Nietzsche; others are also certainly applicable to the film as well.
- ☞ Consider specific events within the film, such as the moment of confrontation at the end, or the trial scene in the early one-third of the film, the political upheaval occurring in Paris, and so on.