# Lens Assignment: “The Tyrant”

## Overview

During this first unit, we will begin a semester-long discussion about how to read closely and apply that knowledge to other texts. For the primary text of the lens essay we will view an episode from the television series *House* titled “The Tyrant.” *House* is set in the fictitious Plainsboro, NJ hospital and focuses on patients with mystery illnesses. In “The Tyrant,” Dr. Chase and Dr. Cameron have conflicting feelings about treating the patient, a renowned dictator named Dibala from an unnamed African country. For the lens texts, you will choose excerpts from *either* John Stuart Mill’s essay on Utilitarianism, which argues that the goal of every society should be to maximize the collective happiness, *or* Immanuel Kant’s essay on the categorical imperative, which argues that certain actions are always right or wrong.

For this essay make an argument about how “The Tyrant” adds to, challenges or complicates either Mill’s ideals of maximizing the collecting welfare or Kant’s ideals of absolute right and wrong by drawing on the perspectives of Chase, Dibala, Foreman and Cameron. Your aim is to synthesize your understanding of Mill’s theory with your interpretation of “The Tyrant” **in order to construct an argument that you could not have made through close reading alone**. You should seek to inform your readers, to open up this television episode in new ways for them by exploring in what ways the episode complicates the ideas of Mill or Kant and in what ways the ideas of Mill or Kant complicate the episode. Some things to consider:

### Mill:

* In what ways does “The Tyrant” complicate Mill’s notion of the utilitarian standard?
* What kinds of unanticipated consequences stem from Chase’s actions?
* How does the episode comment on the notion of quantity as the most important way to make decisions?
* What is the role of uncertainty?
* How does Mill’s theory account for killing?

### Kant:

* In what ways does “The Tyrant” complicate Kant’s notion of the categorical imperative?
* How does the application of universal laws play out in the episode? Are all murders equal?
* What is the role of punishment in the episode, and how does that relate to universal laws?

### Essay Length:

* 6-7 pages

**The first draft of the essay must be submitted electronically to your peers and me no later than 11:55 PM on Thursday, 2/25.** Essays must use 1-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. Do not enlarge your punctuation—I can tell. Essays must have a title, be double-spaced and have page numbers. Pre-drafts will be submitted in hard copy in class and must be typed and stapled.

This assignment presents you with a number of new challenges:

1. You will be transferring your close reading skills from one text to another.
2. The writings of Mill and Kant are at once accessible and complex. You will encounter many difficult texts during your career at Brandeis, and it is essential that you learn how to make sense of them effectively. Part of your task for this paper is to let your readers know what Mill and Kant are trying to say and do, and why.
3. You will be offering an interpretation of “The Tyrant” **informed by either a Utilitarian or Kantian philosophy**that will help you investigate what the text has to say, how it constructs its meanings, and what the implications of those meanings are. As a result, you will be able to reflect back on philosophical ideas with a refined and even critical perspective.

## Goals of the Essay

1. **Open with an engaging introduction that makes your motive clear.**

Recall Gordon Harvey’s description of motive as “the intellectual context that you establish for your topic and thesis at the start of your essay, in order to suggest why someone besides your instructor might want to read an essay on this topic or need to hear your particular thesis argued—why your thesis isn’t just obvious to all, why other people might hold other theses that you think are wrong.” Ask of your thesis, “So what? Why would someone care? What’s unexpected here? How is this interesting?” until you can respond with a satisfying answer. The answer will lead you to your motive. Underline your motive in all drafts and revision of this paper so it can be quickly identified.

1. **Create a dialogue between two texts.**

Don’t settle for a baseline reading of the points of connection between “The Tyrant” and the lens. Rather, devise a thesis that identifies how (and how well) Utilitarianism or the Categorical Imperative as a lens explain the form and function in“The Tyrant.” You will also want to identify a “twist,” a place where your case and the lens don’t match up. This is your opportunity to revise, refine, or even critique the lens—you need not agree with him wholeheartedly, just remember to explain why you disagree and to examine the merits and faults of his argument logically. Essentially, you are being asked to *interpret the story and reflect on your lens.* As always, close readings of specific passages are required to support and/or complicate your argument.

1. **Grapple with the theory’s central ideas, rather than taking isolated passages out of context to support your ideas.**

Whenever you are called on to bring a critical text into an assignment, your essay will not only be judged on the merit of your original ideas but also on how accurately you represent and make use of the critical text. Even when you disagree with the author, you must explain why you disagree, and that requires you to fully understand the author’s position. When you refer to Mill, be sure you engage his main ideas and not a side detail of those ideas.

1. **Document quotations using MLA in-text citation method.**

This citation method requires that you cite your sources parenthetically in the text of your essay (as opposed to using footnotes or endnotes). See examples from the close reading assignment sequence.

## Pre-Draft 1.1: Close reading a scene from “The Tyrant”

Close reading is a careful analysis and can be done to any kind of text whether it is written, oral or visual. For essays you write at Brandeis—regardless of the class or discipline—you will perform close reading of your evidence in order to support your argument, or thesis.

Your lens essay will use close reading both of the “The Tyrant” and articles. The first step in a close reading is to be sure that you have a clear understanding of the text that you are evaluating. To that end, your first assignment will be to analyze a single scene from “The Tyrant” that is relevant to Dibala’s case. Analyze the scene with respect to the following:

* Dialogue: what is the implicit and explicit meaning of the words used by the characters? What is the tone of voice?
* How is music used to set the atmosphere?
* How does the lighting influence your interpretation?
* How are camera angles used to emphasize or de-emphasize people or objects?

Your analysis should be one double-spaced page in length and should quote directly from the paragraph in your analysis (cite page numbers).

### PRE-DRAFT 1.1 DUE BY 11:55 PM ON SUNDAY, 2/7

## Pre-Draft 1.2: Understanding the Lens for Mill and Kant

One method that helps to grasp challenging texts like John Stuart Mill’s theory of Utilitarianism and Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative is called “reverse outlining.” To do this, you create an outline that maps out the ideas of Mill and Kant by using the format below. A reverse outline forces you to boil that text down to its constituent ideas, decide for yourself which ideas are the most important, and arrange those ideas in an organized hierarchy. At some level, it is reductive, but as a technique for working out complex ideas, it can be very useful.

Once you have actively read and marked up the essay, produce one reverse outline for Mill and another for Kant. Use the following format for your outline, define the concepts and answer the questions in your own words. In addition, cite the page number(s) on which you find your evidence.

### Mill:

1. Utilitarianism (define this)
   1. Happiness
   2. Unhappiness
2. According to Mill, what makes something desirable?
3. Why does Mill think that some people will dislike Utilitarianism, and how does Mill respond to or refute their claims?
4. According to Mill, what makes one kind of pleasure more desirable than others? What does he say about quantity vs. quality of pleasures?
5. Utilitarian standard
6. Besides promoting happiness and avoiding pain, what are the bigger goals of Utilitarianism?

### Kant:

1. Hypothetical imperative (define this)
   1. When is an action hypothetical?
2. Categorical imperative (define this)
   1. When is an action imperative?
3. Imperative of skill (define this)
4. Are the means to pursue happiness a hypothetical or categorical imperative? Why?
5. Why does Kant say the categorical imperative is “that of morality” (3)?
6. How do we decide if something should be a categorical imperative?

### PRE-DRAFT 1.2 DUE BY 11:55 PM ON TUESDAY, 2/9

### Also have a copy accessible for class on Wednesday, 2/10

## Pre-Draft 1.3: Mini Lens Analysis

Lens analysis asks you to put two or more texts in conversation in order to produce a reading that you couldn’t have made through close reading alone. After analyzing and considering Mill’s theory of Utilitarianism and Kant’s Categorical Imperative in relation to “The Tyrant” in detail, choose one character and one scene from the episode for Mill and another character and Scene for Kant. Next:

* Using for the first scene, make a mini-argument (two paragraphs) using Mill’s notion of maximizing the collecting welfare to analyze the character’s decisions in your chosen scene. Be sure to cite at least one piece of dialogue from the scene in your analysis. This exercise offers a microcosm of the lens essay, and you should be able to use your reading for this pre-draft in the final essay.
* Using the second scene, make am mini-argument (two paragraphs) using Kant’s notion of the Categorical Imperative to analyze the character’s decisions in your chosen scene. Be sure to cite at least one piece of dialogue from the scene in your analysis. This exercise offers a microcosm of the lens essay, and you should be able to use your reading for this pre-draft in the final essay.

### PRE-DRAFT 1.3 DUE BY 11:55 PM ON TUESDAY, 2/16

### Also have copy of the pre-draft accessible for class on Wednesday, 2/17

## Pre-draft 1.4: Outline for Rough Draft

A comprehensive outline will ensure that your paper has a logical structure and evidence that is relevant to your argument. Each paragraph should have a separate claim that supports the thesis, as well as evidence and analysis. In order to organize your paragraphs, you will have to select and analyze quotations. The argument should develop as the paper unfolds. In other words, paragraphs should not be interchangeable. The outline should follow the format below:

### I. Introduction

1. Motive
2. Thesis

### II. Paragraph #1 (Lens paragraph)

1. Topic Sentence: This should summarize the main idea of the paragraph: What is Utilitarianism?
2. Evidence: include the quotation and the page numbers for each idea about Utilitarianism that is relevant to your paper (you will need 2-3 quotations).
3. Analysis: briefly explain in your own words what you’ve quoted
4. Relevance: a brief statement of how the evidence relates to your thesis

### III. Paragraph #2 (Evidence)

1. Topic Sentence: This should summarize the main idea of the paragraph
2. Contextualization: When you cite your evidence, what is happening in the episode?
3. Evidence: include the quotation (use just one quotation)
4. Analysis: brief statement of how you will close read the evidence
5. Relevance: a brief statement of how the evidence relates to your thesis

### IV. Paragraph #3 (Evidence)

1. Topic Sentence: This should summarize the main idea of the paragraph
2. Contextualization: When you cite your evidence, what is happening in the episode?
3. Evidence: include the quotation (use just one quotation) or describe the moment you’ll be analyzing if no dialogue
4. Analysis: brief statement of how you will close read the evidence.
5. Relevance: a brief statement of how the evidence relates to your thesis.

Etc… for ALL of the body paragraphs.

### Final Roman numeral: Conclusion

1. What are the larger implications of your argument? How does the text comment on a broader theme than just your specific claims?

### PRE-DRAFT 1.4 (OUTLINES) ARE DUE BY 11:55 PM ON SUNDAY, 2/21

## Essay 1 Rough Draft Cover Letter

Please write a draft cover letter, addressed to your readers, in which you answer the following questions and present any other concerns that you have. This letter should be typed and should be about three-quarters to a full page long, single-spaced. Attach it to the front of your essay.

1. What do you see as your thesis or main idea? How does this thesis engage both “The Tyrant” and lens texts?
2. Select your motivating idea from the worksheet distributed in class and report it in your letter. What is your motive? Underline it in your rough draft.
3. How well do you feel you have represented and engaged with Mill?
4. How well do you feel you have performed a close reading of “The Tyrant”?
5. What are the biggest problems you’re having at this point in the writing process? What have you accomplished most successfully?
6. What’s the number one concern about your essay—thesis, structure, use of evidence, persuasiveness, style, and so on—that you’d like your reader(s) to focus their comments on for you?
7. When you revise, what’s the one biggest thing you intend to focus on? How?

### DRAFT OF ESSAY #1 PLUS COVER LETTER DUE ON LATTE BY 11:55 PM ON THURSDAY, 2/25.

### EMAIL YOUR PEERS A GOOGLE DOC.

## Essay 1 Peer Review

Your goal during peer review is to offer the writer constructive comments that will help him or her revise, literally to “see again,” from a fresh perspective. This is an opportunity to help your partner become a better writer by pushing for true revision, rather than cosmetic tweaking. As you carefully read each essay you have been given:

* Draw a line under awkwardly expressed sentences and phrases whose meanings are unclear.
* Write marginal notes to the writer on anything that puzzles you, explaining why.
* Label the topic of each paragraph; if you cannot determine the topic, put a question mark.

After you have marked it up, read the essay one more time and then write a letter in which you include the following:

* A greeting (i.e., their name) and a signature (your name)
* Something you liked about their essay, maybe even more than one thing.
* What you think their argument is (don’t simply copy-paste their thesis, write it in your own words).
* Respond to their cover letter and any questions they had for their reviewers.
* Identify any aspects of the paper that confused you or where you got lost.
* A prioritized to-do list of 2-3 things that will most improve the paper upon revision. Be sure to describe the issue and say why it needs revision and maybe even make a suggestion for revision.

\*Focus on the most important elements like thesis/motive/evidence/analysis and to a lesser degree structure, unless style/grammar actively and consistently interferes with the more important elements.

### POST YOUR PEER LETTERS TO LATTE BY 5:00 PM ON TUESDAY, 3/2 AND COMMENT ON YOUR PEERS’ ESSAYS USING THE GOOGLE DOCS.

## Essay 1 Revision and Cover Letter

Each time you hand in a revision, you’ll hand in a cover letter (1 page single-spaced) along with it and your peer reviews. For Essay 1, please answer the following questions and discuss any other concerns you have.

* 1. What is your thesis? How has it changed from draft to revision?
  2. What other changes have you made? Why?
  3. What are you most pleased about in this revision?
  4. What would you work on, if you had the chance to keep revising?
  5. What was the most challenging in your drafting and revision process? How did you approach those challenges?
  6. Choose two “Elements of the Academic Essay” (Gordon Harvey)—one that you think works well, and one that feels less successful—and describe, in each case, why (see lens unit handout for Monday, 2/22 for description of the different elements).

Be sure to re-read the information on grading criteria to make sure your paper fulfills the requirements.

### REVISION OF ESSAY #1 PLUS COVER LETTER DUE ELECTRONICALLY BY 11:55 PM ON SUNDAY, 3/7.