

MLA Sample Paper

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Seventh Edition (2009)

- 1** Margins
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- 1** Position of Title
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- 2** Citation of Author's Name in Text
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- 3** Alteration of Source Material (Added Word)
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- 4** Parenthetical Citation of a Work with No Pagination
- 5** Parenthetical citation of a summary of a text not confined to one section of the source
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Double space all in Times New Roman 12-point font.

Title case capitalization for title

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Every page has a header on with author's last name and page number in Times New Roman 12-point font.

Female Subjectivity and the Social Order: A Defense of Kant's Categorical Imperative

Indent

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It is a... and-wave feminist writers to advocate for a separate and distinct female... gies seek to establish a new way of looking at the subject and, p... at the Other – a way that ostensibly does not objectify the Other, but... some sort of understanding of the Other, to see the Other on his or her own terms rather than as a problem to be dealt with in the "proper" manner.

Close spaces between paragraphs by checking the Don't Add Space box under the Paragraph tab.

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In seeking out this new subjectivity, it has often been deemed necessary to call out the universal subject position of Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative, explicitly labeling it as totalitarian in its failure to adequately acknowledge the particularity of the Other and of the material and psychical conditions of the Other's existence. While this vein of criticism has its merits, however, feminist writers... of the Categorical Imperative. A look at... nist proposals for secondary subject positions shows that the Categorical Imperative provides a foundation for ethics and countermands relativism in a way that particularity alone cannot.

No parenthetical citation needed if an author's name or the name of a work is mentioned in text without a quotation

Though the connection is not immediately evident, the socio-political efficacy or inefficacy of the Kantian Categorical Imperative in relation to the Other is in fact a feminist issue. The link lies, at least in part, in the characterization by second wave feminist philosophers such as Luce Irigaray of "masculine" ethics as being associated with the universalizing effect of the Categorical Imperative. The Categorical Imperative, they insist, is not objective as Kant hoped, but bound up in the culturally constructed ideologies of the white,

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Western, heterosexual, Christian male. According to Irigaray, the Other has historically been defined in relation to the universal – that is Kantian – subject: “one, singular, solitary and historically masculine, that of the adult Western male, rational, competent” (83). The Other, by Irigaray’s definition, is defined in the negative and can thus be read as the feminine, the non-Western, children, the irrational or non-rational, and the incapacitated. Understandably, Irigaray wants to establish a second subject, separate but equal to the Kantian subject, to counteract the relegation of difference to the negative in relation to Kant’s universal subject. She rejects the expansion of the Kantian subject to include the Other on the grounds that “the exploitation and the alienation of women are located in the differences between the sexes and the genders, and have to be resolved in that difference, without trying to abolish it, which would amount to yet another reduction to the singular subject” (Irigaray 85). Difference must be recognized and respected even in a state of equality, and the expansion of the Kantian subject would be to acknowledge the qualities that are shared between the Western adult male and the Other but, in doing so, to erase difference. But Irigaray’s development of the *two* begs the question: why should the *two* be demarcated along gender lines and not along some other line of difference? In thus delineating subjects, she appears to want to provide a paradigm that recognizes some set of differences while ensuring that everyone is covered by one conception of subjectivity or the other, but Irigaray’s claim that “these two subjects have the duty of preserving the human species” (86) seems blatantly heteronormative and has an essentializing effect on both gendered subjects, even as it leaves the congenitally intersexed, the differently gendered, and the transsexual outside of bigendered subjectivity. Thus, even at its best, Irigaray’s conception of the *two* is inadequate to cover everyone.

Moreover, though she insists that a paradigm of two subjects rather than one universal subject can lead to greater intersubjectivity, presumably through the superior powers of

empathy inherent in the female, thereby furthering her case for a gendered demarcation of dual subjects, Irigaray's stipulation that the two subjects "should not be situated in either a hierarchical or genealogical relationship" (86) can be read to excuse hierarchical classifications along the lines of race, thus potentiating the exclusion of non-whites by both masculine and feminine classes of the subject's relation to the Other, whether the Other is in the opposing subject position or in the position of any Other not defined by gender, there is little to suggest that Irigaray's female generic of the Kantian subject amounts to much more than the Kantian subject in a dress. By essentializing the feminine, Irigaray creates a limited universal that is potentially as exclusionary as the single Kantian subject.

Finally, a second subject position necessitates a second set of universal features that define the subject as such. Irigaray declares that "it [is] essential to ensure that this barely defined feminine subject, lacking contours, norms nor mediations, have some points of reference, some guarantees, in order to nourish her and protect her own becoming" (87). In seeking to define the terms and limits of the feminine subject, Irigaray actually begins to erase difference within the very set of former Others whom she has gathered into her circle of female subjectivity. Originally broad and diverse, Irigaray's second subject must *become* Woman according to characteristics that it is "necessary to *give* woman" and which Irigaray considers "*appropriate* to them" (emphasis added) (87). But if the feminine subject does not come ready-made, if she does not exist outside an artificially constructed circle of feminine subjectivity, . . .

. . . In her critique of Immanuel Kant, Sylviane Agacinski posits a different reason for rejecting the Kantian universal, insisting that the universality of Kant's Categorical Imperative makes the formula untenably egoistic and imposes on the subject an abstract sense of duty

toward the other at the expense of difference as it regards all others as self-same. Agacinski argues that Kantian ethics “excludes the relation to the other and the other’s voice” (41), reducing all ethical questions to the subject and his or her general, predetermined duty in a given situation rather than attending to the needs of the other, rendering the other a mere object for the use of the subject. Unlike Irigaray, Agacinski does recognize the possibility of women’s occupying the Kantian universal subject position. Agacinski’s complaint is not about who populates that subject position, but about the manner in which the subject goes about interacting with the Other. A parenthetical criticism would be entirely valid if Kant had not extended his Categorical Imperative beyond its first formulation, but Agacinski addresses only the Principle of Universal Law. The text reads: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (Kant). She declines to discuss the Principle of Humanity (End in Itself): “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end” (Kant). These two principles, along with the Principle of Rationality, amount to an attempt on Kant’s part to categorize the good into sweeping, fundamental maxims that would provide both the individual subject and the collective society with an ethical device that could be deployed in any conceivable circumstance. The proper use of this device, however, is contingent upon the subject’s ability to employ reason and, especially in the first formulation, on the subject’s position in society, which affects his perspective on what is desirable in the social order.

On its own, the first formulation certainly seems to result in the absolute egoism Agacinski says it does, in which “there is no need for me to listen to the other in order to discover how I should behave towards them, for my reason will tell me” (41). By the standard of the first formulation, it would appear that the subject’s only criterion for ethical decisions

should be a rational cost-benefit analysis of the effect his actions would have on the material conditions of his own existence if they were to be put into practice by others. The desires of others and impact of one's actions on others do not come into question. Moreover, the first formulation relies entirely on the Kantian conception of reason for its ethical foundation and thus tends toward the hypothetical and the general rather than the particular and the personal.

However, the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative is not supposed to stand alone. In his second formulation, Kant himself provides a buffer against the egoism that Agacinski decries. The second formulation does, contra Agacinski's assertion, deny the subject the right to treat the other as a means to an end, maintaining that the other is to be viewed as an end in itself, thereby moving the subject toward the kind of particularity Agacinski argues for, if only for the sake of universality in praxis as well as theory.

Kant's exhortation to treat others as ends unto themselves effectively forces the subject to recognize and respect the other's needs and desires as equal to his own by causing the subject to question what it is the other desires and why.

Admittedly, a flaw in subjectivity of the other, thus (or women's recognition of the subjectivity of men, for that matter). **Parentetical citation of a summary of text not confined to one section of a source** **Certainly, Kant himself did not understand women as being included in the subject position (Agacinski).** However, the problems proposed by this shortcoming are no worse, and in many ways no different, than the problems that arise out of feminist conceptions of multiple subjectivities. Just as no effective way has been proposed to enforce the wholesale acceptance of the subjectivity of all persons, the recognition of a separate subjectivity in persons of other classes of subjects is equally unenforceable. The recognition of Irigaray's distinct feminine subject can no more be made compulsory than can the female *as* subject in Kant's conception of universal subjectivity.

With any foundational rubric for ethical behavior, there will always be those who are not in compliance. The failure of some to fulfill their ethical obligations must not be seen to suggest that we should have no foundational set of ethics.

Kant argued that practical (experiential) reason is inferior to pure (*a priori*) reason predicated on a deontological code or *imperative* because practical reason's empirical nature makes it necessarily contingent, circumstantial, subjective. His Categorical Imperative was designed to provide an objective foundation of ethics to counter the moral relativism of Utilitarian Ethics. As such, reason is intended to be deployed as a tool by individuals to preempt conflict within the greater social sphere. The force of intellect is intended to be applied to the relations between individual subjects only in the interest of maintaining the peace on a larger scale. The Categorical Imperative is publicly oriented and deliberately anticipatory, prescribing the individual subject's relation to the individual Other as the individual subject's duty. According to Henri Bergson, the *Closed Religion* of the Categorical Imperative is static, rigid, and bound up with an impetus toward the codification of social cohesion and the survival of the community:

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Society has its own mode of existence peculiar to it, and therefore its own mode of thinking. So far as we are concerned, we shall readily admit the existence of collective representations, deposited in institutions, language and customs.

← Indent 1" → Together they constitute a social intelligence which is the complement of individual intelligences. (104)

The universalizing effect of the Categorical Imperative finds its purpose not in the ratification of individual rights, in the correction or punishment of particular injustices, or even in the inscription of subjectivity upon individual persons, but in the perpetuation of collective knowledge, perceptions, values, and norms. Thus, while arguments such as Agacinski's that

critique the Categorical Imperative on its inability to underwrite particularity may be correct, they are asking the Categorical Imperative to do something that it was never designed to do.

Justice, by any definition, cannot be achieved without particularity. It is one thing to anticipate injustice, define the conditions of it, warn against it, and set out incentives for avoiding it; that is what the Categorical Imperative is meant to do. It is another thing to mete out justice in particular cases; the Categorical Imperative cannot see in retrospect or on the level of the individual to adjudicate actual cases on the ground. Indeed, one of Bergson's major criticisms of the Categorical Imperative is that it forms an incomplete version of justice: a guarantor of communal harmony (assuming everyone is in compliance) unmediated by the collective valuation of the individual:

... this conjunction of individuals ... has given rise to a collective intelligence, certain representations of which will be puzzling to the individual mind. If sociology is open to criticism, it would ... be that ... certain of its exponents tend to regard the individual as an abstraction, and the social body as the only reality. (104-5)

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Under such conditions, not only is the individual lost in the crowd, but subjectivity is also limited to those who are in possession of the collective intelligence. According to Bergson, when an individual decides to stray from his obligations to society, perhaps because there is more in it for him than he stands to gain from maintaining a stable connection to the community, the rule of law is in place in an attempt to codify habit and social need, anticipate resistance to individual social obligation, and countermand that resistance as it occurs. Collective justice consists of whatever is perceived by those interpolated into that system to be in the best interest of the community. In this sense, justice is not justice at all, but merely law (Derrida). It stands to reason, then, that since crowds are less agile than individuals, the

evolution of the notion of justice in a given society – indeed, the evolution of communal designations of subjectivity – is slow and laborious . . .

. . . the very vagueness that serves to make Kant’s Categorical Imperative universal also gives it the ability to be specifically ethical if and only if it is *not* codified into law, a situation which precludes the Categorical Imperative’s being a wellspring of justice and relegates it to being a tool for the application of mere law. Nonetheless, particularity should not be read to mean lawlessness. Social order is, of course, crucial to the wellbeing of all members of a given society, regardless of their status. Kant’s Categorical Imperative, deployed with the compassion that particularity affords, remains an invaluable tool for the achievement of social order.

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