

SAMPLE Reading analysis of Wolff's "The Conflict Between Authority and Autonomy."
By: Student 123456

In the first chapter of his book *In Defense of Anarchism*, Wolff argues that legitimate authority and autonomy are incompatible and that because autonomy is necessary, legitimate authority must not be possible.

Wolff begins by explaining the concept of authority. Wolff defines legitimate authority as authority that has the right to command. He differentiates this from the ability to command. We comply with some commands not because we recognize them as legitimate, but because they come with the threat of force. Legitimate authority has the right to demand subjects comply with its command. So, in cases of legitimate authority, Wolff thinks there must be cases where subjects have a duty to do what the authority tells them to do *merely* because the authority tells them to do it, regardless of whether or not they have judged that it is the right thing to do.

Next, Wolff describes the concept of autonomy. An autonomous individual is responsible for her actions. The autonomous person is free and not subject to anyone else's will; she may do what an authority tells her to do, but not merely because she is ordered to. She is also rational and weighs reasons and acts because of her own judgment. As individuals who possess free will and are rational, Wolff thinks that we have a moral responsibility to ourselves to be autonomous. I may take advice and consider possible punishment for my actions, but ultimately the moral implications of my actions fall on my own shoulders as a consequence of my free choice. The rational and free person owes it to themselves to do what seems best to them, not what they have been ordered to do.

Wolff concludes that legitimate authority is not compatible with this obligation to autonomy. Unreflectively complying with a command from authority would mean we do not reason and decide for ourselves what is best, which means we are not autonomous. So the duty coming from legitimate authority would conflict with the duty to be autonomous. We must be autonomous, so we cannot accept legitimate authority. Because of this, Wolff concludes that philosophical anarchism is the only reasonable political philosophy. Word count: 361

Virtues of the sample writing analysis:

- it has a very clear structure
- it is clearly written and engages in no “Bullshit”
(see Frankfurt, “On Bullshit,” link on Course Document website)
- it is within the word limit (between 250 – 400) and includes the word count
- it is anonymously written
- it makes no serious errors of fact
- it is clearly on the assigned text and focuses on explaining and understanding it
- it's in Times New Roman, size 12 font, double spaced, with 1” margins

This analysis gives a summary of the entire assigned reading, but this is not the only acceptable format for reading analyses.

So long as all of the above claims are true of your reading analysis, and it is all your own writing, it will receive a pass.