

**CEP 461: ETHICS AND IDENTITY
DRAFT SYLLABUS FOR DISCUSSION
1/4/20**

Winter 2021
Asynchronous + Wednesday discussions, 10:30-
12:20, on Zoom
<https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1433759>

Instructor:
Keith Harris
gkh2@uw.edu



“Everything excellent is as difficult as it is rare.”
—Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*

Introduction

There are two main aims in this course. The first is to help you develop critical literacy in some of the major debates about ethics and morality. This means being aware of, understanding, and critically evaluating the various arguments that people make about ethics and morality. The second aim is to help you gain experience developing, articulating, applying, and defending your ethical arguments as a member of a larger community, which may or may not share your perspective on what is ethical.

Course Goals

- Develop critical literacy in key arguments about ethics and morality.
- Gain experience negotiating those arguments together with other people.
- Developing a better understanding of how those arguments work in everyday practice.
- Improve academic communication, reading, writing, and analytical skills.
- Form a viable and sustainable learning community among ourselves.

Student Responsibilities

In CEP, students have significant responsibilities, and the success of the course ultimately depends upon how well those responsibilities are met. Your first responsibility is to one another and to one another’s education. In this class you and your classmates will generate knowledge through discussion, deliberation, and debate. In order for the class to be successful, *you* must be an active participant in both teaching and learning. In class, each of you will participate by contributing, discussing, listening, facilitating, and analyzing the material, while outside of class, each of you will participate by reading the material and carefully completing each assignment.

I also expect students to complete the following, more specific tasks:

- Contribute to each day’s discussion and work, and understand, reflect on, and form your own views on the issues.
- Complete each and every assignment on time while ensuring that products are of a high standard. No late work will be accepted.
- Write a narrative evaluation of your and your team’s contribution to the final project

In order to meet the above requirements, of course, you must participate. Please read the material closely, do the written assignments before discussion, and participate fully in every synchronous discussion. Attendance will be noted at all scheduled meeting times, and participation will be evaluated for every class.

Instructor Responsibilities

I play several roles in the class and can be relied upon to provide the following:

A safe and rigorous learning context: My first job is to set the learning context for the course. In this case that means establishing much of the structure of the course. Setting the context also means that I will work to make sure that the learning environment is a safe, respectful, and productive environment for all of us. As a community, the class should maintain these standards by regulating itself, but if a student continues to feel that these standards are not being met then he or she should speak to me so that we can find ways to resolve the problem.

Timely feedback, advice, and instruction on course assignments and other course requirements: Students should expect me to provide timely and considered feedback on course assignments and projects. I will also be available to answer questions, provide advice and information, and otherwise aid students in their learning.

Assigning final credit for the course: I will be responsible for assigning final course grade consistent with the grading basis (numerical grade or CR/NC) you have selected.

Assessment

Your final assessment in this course will be based on your performance on the following:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Date Due</i>
Synchronous Discussion Participation	30	Every Wednesday
Reading assignments	35	Wednesdays at 8:30 am.
Synthesis? TBD	10	Fridays per sign-up sheet
Project/Presentation	25 ¹	See Project/Presentation section below
Total	100	

For those of you taking the course CR/NC:

University guidelines state that the instructor must determine the minimum performance level that can earn a grade of credit. In this course, the minimum level is 75 percent. In other words, if you earn between 75-100 percent, you will receive a grade of “credit.” If you earn less than 75 percent you will receive a grade of “no credit.”

For those of you taking the course for a standard numerical grade:

I will similarly follow all university guidelines, but in your case that will result in a numerical grade rather than CR/NC.

¹ See Project/Presentation section below for how these points are distributed across components of the project.

Course Readings

All are available on Canvas.

Academic honesty

The University takes the offenses of cheating and plagiarism very seriously, and so do I. Cheating is taking advantage of the work of others. Plagiarism is representing the work of others as your own, without giving appropriate credit. If you are unsure what is okay or *not* okay, make sure to ask!

Class Schedule (reading assignments always due on Wednesday by 8:30 am on Canvas.

Week 1 – Introduction	
Monday, January 4	Introduction to Course, Finalizing Course Design
Wednesday, January 6	Reading: Almeder, R. (2000) <i>Human Happiness and Morality: A Brief Introduction to Ethics</i> , 23-89 Assignment: Reading Assignment #1
Week 2 – Virtue Ethics I	
Wednesday, January 13	Reading: Vaughn, L. (2008) <i>Doing Ethics</i> , Chapter 7 Plato, selections from <i>Gorgias</i> ; all of <i>Euthyphro</i> (+ intros, recommended) Assignment: Reading Assignment #2
Week 3 – Virtue Ethics II	
Wednesday, January 20	Readings: Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Books I&II (the Crisp introduction to Aristotle is included and recommended) Assignments: Reading Assignment #3
Week 4 – Natural Law	
Wednesday, January 27	Readings: St. Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> , First Part of the Second Part, Questions 90-108 (the McDermott introduction is included and recommended) Martin Luther King, Jr. “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” from <i>Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story</i> & “Letter from Birmingham Jail” Assignment: Reading Assignment #4

Week 5 – Consequentialism	
Wednesday, February 3	<p>Readings: Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>, Chapters 1-2 (the Pojman introduction to Mill is included and recommended)</p> <p>Additional reading on “applied” utilitarianism; I found one on environmental ethics that could be good</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #5 Choose project groups</p>
Week 6 -- Deontology	
Wednesday, February 10	<p>Readings: Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals</i>, Preface; Chapters 1-3; (the Pojman introduction to Kant is included and recommended)</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #6</p>
Week 7 -- Emotivism	
Wednesday, February 17	<p>Readings: Hume, <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i>, Book 3, Part 1, Sections 1 & 2 (Two introductions are included and recommended) and Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i>, Sections 1-5, App.1</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #7</p> <p>Work on Project Progress Report #1, Due Sunday, 2/21, midnight.</p>
Week 8 -- Nietzsche	
Wednesday, February 24	<p>Readings: <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>, Preface and Part 1 (the Welchman introduction to Nietzsche is included and recommended) <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i>, Preface and First Essay (the Ansell-Pearson introduction to <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i> is included and recommended)</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #8</p>
Week 9 – Feminism & International Perspectives	
Wednesday, March 3	<p>Readings: Noddings, <i>Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics</i>, Intro and Chapter 4 Ivan Illich, “1968 Cuernavaca Speech” Butler, <i>Precarious Life</i>, Chapter 2: <i>Violence, Mourning, Politics</i></p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #9 Work on Project Progress Report #2, Due Sunday, 3/7, midnight.</p>

Week 10 – Independent reading	
Wednesday, March 10	TBD
Exam Week	
Monday, March 15, 8:30 am-10:20 am	Presentations
Thursday, March 18	Final Project & Peer- and Self-Evaluation Due (upload to Canvas by midnight)

Reading Assignments

Overview

For each discussion, you will prepare yourself by reading the text and by preparing a written assignment. The idea of the assignment is to provide you an opportunity to develop a better critical understanding of a particular reading. You should not write a lot—you should think your answers through and write concise and insightful paragraphs. These will be due at 8:30 am on the day of class, so can use them to help guide discussion. You will then turn this annotated version in at the end of class to be graded.

Each reading assignment will have a Part One. Many reading assignments will also have a Part Two, so make sure to pay attention to what the instructions on the website ask for.

Part One: You will answer a specific set of questions I pose about the reading. Each reading is different, and so each has a specific set of questions tailored to it. The questions for each reading are available on the course website (address on page 1) under the “Reading Assignments” tab. So for each reading assignment, your first task is to provide an answer the questions I pose. In general, Part One should not be much more than 200 words or so (for reference, the following paragraph is about 200 words long...).

Part Two: In addition to answering the questions I pose, you should also think through how you see the ideas in the reading manifesting themselves in the world around you. How do the ideas in the text *work* in our everyday experience? How could I *use* Kant’s Kingdom of Ends (for example) to think about the decisions I face in my own life? For this part of the assignment, you should write about how you might *apply* the ideas in the reading to decisions you face, or your community faces, or America faces, or the world faces. [For example, to know whether it is ethical for me to turn a trolley car to hit one person instead of 10 people, Kant would have me decide according to the Categorical Imperative, which is a maxim that you can logically apply equally to everyone.] Alternatively, you could write about how such concrete decisions could inform (and even help us rethink) the ideas in the readings. [For example, you could demonstrate how thinking in terms of the Categorical Imperative would produce a disastrous outcome in a particular case you are familiar with, thus calling into question Kant’s whole approach.] In general, Part Two should not be much more than 200 words or so.

Part Three: This part is *always optional*, and *always encouraged*. Use it as a kind of journal in which you reflect on a particular quality of the reading, or of an author’s argument, or of your reaction to the reading, or how the class discussions are going, or... There are many different topics you could cover here: whatever seems is particularly important that your answers in the other parts were not able to address. Another option here is to keep running discussions on the course Canvas site.

Grading

I will give feedback to all parts, but in grading the assignment I will focus my attention on Parts One and Two. Again, Part Three is always optional, but is always encouraged. For Part One, the grading will be very much like it was in CEP 301. For Part Two, I will make sure your discussion of the arguments of the thinker are accurate, and I will also make sure you are rigorous and thoughtful in your discussion of the particular context you choose.

Participation

Participation makes up a significant portion of your course grade. It is important. And there is no way around participating. As the syllabus lays out, each of you has a *responsibility* to others in the class to share your ideas and insights. The way this happens is by you speaking during class. If you do not actively listen and share your questions and ideas with everyone, they can't benefit from what you have to offer. Each of you has important questions and ideas to share that we can all learn from. Therefore, since you all have something important to contribute, you all have a responsibility to contribute it.

You will be graded on participation class-by-class. Effective participation in a given class period is not measured by amount. If you consistently share your ideas and questions and concerns in an honest effort to explore the material in the spirit of intellectual curiosity, you will receive a good grade for participation.

So, the strategy for participation is this: do not hesitate to share your thoughts. Do not think that they have to be fully formed and 100% defensible before you offer them. Do not think that they have to be brilliant or dazzling. Do not think you should remain quiet because you have different ideas about a topic than most others in the class (that's when we need you most). And, most importantly, do not think that you have to *know* before you speak. *Honest questions and true struggles within yourself that you have not yet resolved are the best way to contribute.*

Remember also that *listening* is as important as talking. Asking *genuine* questions (for which you have not already decided on an answer) is a good way to listen. If you ask a question that you do not already have an answer for, you will genuinely want to hear what your classmates have to say. The worst thing for discussion is a series of unrelated monologues. What we are shooting for are true *dialogues* in which you engage the comments and questions of others rather than following them up with unrelated comments and questions. Be *curious* about what others have to say.

I understand that oral participation in class is a struggle for some. I am willing to explore any and all ways to help you participate. If you feel uncomfortable with speaking in class, for whatever reason, you should come see or e-mail me so we can think of ways to make it more comfortable. I stand ready to help you find ways to speak, but the responsibility for participating is yours.

Discussion Facilitation/Synthesis

This course typically includes small group facilitations for the second reading of any individual theorist (the second day of Aristotle, Kant, Hume, Nietzsche, and usually Butler as the second contemporary feminist theorist). However, I propose we have "synthesizers" instead, who draw together our theoretical and applied discussions from Wednesday into some kind of toolkit each Friday. We can discuss how this might work on the first day of class.

Project/Presentation

Overview

In week five, we will split into three or four groups, based on issues that you find compelling. Each group will develop and deliver an oral presentation, performance, or articulation that conveys a compelling argument about the relationship of course ideas to a concrete ethical issue. These should be polished, well thought out, and have a compelling ethical case to make. Don't just go through the motions, but make a convincing case: try to persuade the audience that a particular ethic is indeed the right way to handle the situation. The form is wide open – hence the use of the word “articulation” above – so organize it in a way that you feel is appropriate (interpretive dance may not be the best way to go...but then again, it *might* be).

Another highly-encouraged option for the project would be investigating other more contemporary ethical theories that we do not cover in class (but which the course will help prepare you to understand). I will mention some of these on the first day: posthuman ethics, black feminism, nonwestern ethics, indigenous environmentalism, queer ethics, and so on. You will do some exploration for the independent reading (Week 10), but this project option is for those who like to engage more fully with other ethical theories.

Final Presentation

Each presentation will last for 20 minutes, which gives you time to do a serious job, and they can be undertaken in a variety of ways: a performance of Socratic dialogue, a PowerPoint presentation addressing a topic from the news, an analysis of a scene from a movie, etc. Be creative and own your presentation. These will take place during our allotted final exam slot, on Monday, March 15, 8:30-10:20.

Schedule and Grading

I am a big advocate for intermediate deadlines and believe they help students focus early and create better projects, all while relieving some of the stress at the end of the quarter.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percent of course grade</i>	<i>Date Due</i>
Progress Report #1	3	Sunday, February 21, midnight (upload to Canvas)
Progress Report #2	3	Sunday, March 7, midnight (upload to Canvas)
Project/Presentation	15	Monday, March 15, 8:30-10:20 (upload by Sunday, 3/14 at 8:30pm)
Peer- and Self-Evaluation	4	Thursday, March 18, midnight (upload to Canvas)
Total	25	

As their title suggests, the progress reports are not meant to be polished documents. Instead, they are meant to demonstrate to me that your group has been working through the ideas at hand. Nevertheless, there are a few points that should be addressed in each report.

Details

Progress Report #1

- A clear explanation of the particular issue you will be addressing and some source material: newspaper articles, a scene from a film, a proposal for a building project,² etc.
- A provisional discussion of **two** ethical perspectives on this issue, drawn from readings over the first five weeks of class.
- A short description of at least **two** ways you might present the issue to the class.

Progress Report #2

- A revised and final explanation of the particular issue you will be addressing and your final source material.
- A provisional discussion of **two** ethical perspectives on this issue, drawn from readings over the second five weeks of class, including at least one of the independent readings by members of your group.
- A draft of your presentation: a script, a slideshow, a rough cut of a video, etc., depending on how you plan to present.

There is no set number of pages for either of these progress reports, so make them work for you. I would expect the first report to be in the neighborhood of five pages (~1 page per group member), while the second one will probably be *at least* double that.

² Although I encourage you to think beyond the confines of our college if you so desire, you are more than welcome to focus on the built environment. An excellent resource for finding out about proposed projects in Seattle is here: <http://www.seattleinprogress.com/>