

Course Information: FYE Ethics and Aesthetics – Colorado College

Type: Individual assignment
Oral interview
Paper

Professor Alberto Hernandez

Level: 100

This course offers an introduction to Ethics and Aesthetics within the field of philosophy.

Block Plan Context:

| | S | M | T | W | R | F | S |
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Important Features of the Assignment:

- Encourages student to apply philosophical concepts to their own history
- Has an aspect of **civic engagement**
- **Staged.**
- Involves interviewing as a stage in building an interpretation.

Description of Assignment:

This assignment is given out in the second week of a first-year course, and involves a number of stages. Ultimately students are to write a 5-page autobiography and a 3-page biography based on personal reflection, philosophical reading, interviews, and library research.

Each student forms a conversation partnership with a senior citizen. They each ask questions about each other’s history. Each student is encouraged to think creatively about philosophical readings in relation to their own life and in relation to the life of their conversation partner. They are also encouraged to learn more, through library research, about topics which arise—they may find themselves, for example, investigating the Bay of Pigs, if their conversation partner was part of that battle.

An excerpt from the assignment follows:

Both the autobiography and the biography you will write should be centered around this question: **Can the creation and development of a human life be compared to the creation and development of a work of art?** Can a person’s actions and choices be seen as steps in a creative process towards balance and beauty? If the artwork results from the interaction of the artist’s will and the resistance of the materials to which that will is applied, it may be compared to the application of a person’s will to his or her specific circumstances. This is the central question that will be explored in this course by means of a survey of Western literature devoted to the issue. Beginning with Plato, who considers art suspect of spreading illusion and falsehood, the course culminates with Thoreau and Dewey, for whom the whole of human experience can be precisely equated with art.

The question, of course, is very controversial, and no easy answer can satisfactorily address its complexity. Nevertheless, its exploration opens up a series of interesting questions that lend themselves to a fruitful process of reflection, among them:

“Who am I?”

“How did I get here?”

“What would I like to become?”

These questions are meant to emphasize the interpretation of the human being as a process rather than as a given essence. Humans, in this view, are impulses, forces, trends, which flow from a past that can be traced back for generations into a future that extends forward as desires and longings already present in this present. You will ask these questions of your own life, and also of the life of your conversation partner.

The **result** of this reflection will be a **5-page autobiography and a 3-page biography** recording important features such as genealogy, geographical and cultural origins, present situation and hopes.

Both you and your conversation partner may want to reflect on significant life choices you have made. You may also want to amplify your understanding of topics of interest through interviews with family or friends, or through library research. Reference librarians can be enormously helpful in tracking down unusual sources, including genealogical materials.

As in the readings and discussions in our course, the concept of *eudaimonia* (reflections on what constitutes true happiness in life) is the thematic key to both essays. Do you agree or disagree with the formula that equates the construction of a life with the construction of a work of art. What similarities do you see between the terms? What differences between the terms make the comparison untenable?

Timeline:

| Wk | <i>Monday</i> | <i>Tuesday</i> | <i>Wednesday</i> | <i>Thursday</i> | <i>Friday</i> | <i>Weekend</i> |
|-----------|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|-----------------------|
| 2 | Assignment is handed out. Reading. | Students find a conversation partner. | First conversation and notes. | Philosophical reading and library research. | Philosophical reading and library research. | |
| 3 | Rough draft of autobiography handed in. | Second conversation and notes. | Comments returned on rough draft of autobiography. | 3-page biography due. | 5-page autobiography due. | |