PRE 111 Introduction to Ethics fulfills the requirement for a Foundational Area of Knowledge in *In Search of Meaning and Values*. A course that fulfills this requirement will assure that students consider the importance and significance of what it means to be human. In this class, students will work to:

1) consider ways that humans have come to understand the meaning of existence
2) evaluate the philosophical or spiritual implications of human actions and policies
3) develop an understanding of their ethical values

PRE 111 will seek to accomplish all of these learning outcomes
Course Readings:


Course Description:

An examination of philosophical theories on the foundations, principles, and applications of ethics. Upon completion, students will be able to describe the theories of Egoism, Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism, the Social Contract, and Kantian Ethics. Also, students will be able to apply the insights of these theories to contemporary moral issues.

The word “ethics” comes from a Greek word that means “character.” Ethicists try to discover what is right and wrong in the realm of human behavior. Over the next eight weeks, we’ll study the ideas of major ethical philosophers from antiquity to the present; we’ll also look at moral issues facing us today. Our guides through the ethical landscape will be influential persons such as Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant, just to name a few. We’ll be looking at questions such as “What is right and wrong?” and “Can there be morality without God?” and “Why should I be moral?” and “What is the good life?”

Learning Outcomes:

1. students will understand the major ethical theories from antiquity to the present (e.g. virtue theory, divine command theory, egoism, etc.)
2. students will be able to apply various ethical theories to a number of contemporary moral issues

3. students will see the complexity of moral issues and will think more carefully about them

4. students will develop a tolerance for doubt, diversity and uncertainty

**Learning Strategies:**

In order to fulfill the learning outcomes of PRE 111, various learning strategies will be used. Strategies include but are not limited to the following: lectures by the instructor, small group discussions, video clips on YouTube, guest speakers (ministers, philosophers, social workers, government and law enforcement officials, etc).

**Learning Assessment:**

*Attendance, Participation & Attentiveness (APA):* Attendance is mandatory. The material we’ll cover in class will be from the week’s reading assignments; we’ll also cover material in class that may not be found in the readings. So attendance is important. Participation is expected. Learning to express your ideas orally is a huge part of a college education; it also makes discussion more interesting. Attentiveness is also expected. You may use a laptop computer for class notes only. If you use a laptop for the Internet, email or video games, you will lose the privilege of using a laptop for the rest of the semester. Finally, if you are disruptive in class (talking while the instructor is talking, texting, sleeping, flirting, etc.), you will be asked to leave for the remainder of the class. **APA will account for 40% your grade.**

**Ethics Essay:** Students will write a 3-5 page essay on a topic of their own choosing. Imagine your essay will appear in *Think a Second Time*. What topic would you choose to
write about so that students can read about it and reflect on it? You can choose a topic in the areas of religion, ethics, politics, psychology, anthropology, and so on. You can use the essays in Prager’s book as a model for your essay. Your essay should include three parts: 1) an introduction with a thesis statement (a thesis statement is “the big claim” that you’re making, such as “If God doesn’t exist, then life is meaningless”; 2) a body with several paragraphs that support your thesis statement, plus a criticism or two of opposing views; and 3) a conclusion that summarizes your argument. Write clearly and concisely. Be creative. Tell the truth. The Ethics Essay will account for 20% of your grade.

News Flashes: Students will write two News Flashes, one for Humanism: A Very Short Introduction and one for Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life. Imagine that you are a radio talk show host. Now imagine that you have to speak to your national radio audience about the contents of these books (e.g., the authors’ views of God (or lack thereof), where morality comes from, the meaning of life, and so on. What essential information would you include in your News Flash? How would you word it to keep your audience members’ attention, so that they’ll look forward to tuning in to your show the following week? You are responsible for two News Flashes. Each News Flash should be 2-3 pages (typed and double spaced), though they can be longer, if you’d like. Your two News Flashes will account for 20% of your grade.

Final Exam: The final exam will be a multiple-choice exam and will focus on the various ethical theories that we’ve studied. The Final Exam will be a take home exam and will make up 20% of your grade.

Note: The Ethics Essay, the News Flashes, and the Final Exam should be stapled together and submitted as a whole one week after our last class meeting. Late work will be accepted with the consent of the instructor.
What to Expect in Class:

Expect to be challenged. This class will challenge your most deeply held convictions. Get used to it. You won’t grow as a human being unless you wrestle with points of view—religious, political, and ethical—in opposition to your own.

Expect to hear points of view with which you disagree or even find offensive. America is a free republic. If your colleagues say something you disagree with, use reason and logic to prove them wrong, not AK-47s or machetes. And don’t pout or throw temper tantrums, either. This is college, not daycare for crybabies.

Expect to read and write. This isn’t a “coasting” course. You must do the readings and come to class ready to discuss them. This will be a boring class if I’m the only one up here talking.

Expect to pay attention in class. Don’t talk while the instructor is talking. Don’t talk while a colleague is talking. Raise your hand if you have a question and wait until you’re called on to speak.

Expect to be in class until at least 8:00PM. If you arrive to class late, don’t ask the person next to you what you’ve missed. Wait until the break or after class to ask this and related questions.

Expect the instructor to teach the class. Don’t think you can teach the class. Many students enroll in the courses offered at Doane University. Expect to hear from all of those students.

Expect to keep all books, notebooks and pencils on your desk until class is over. Don’t put them away early. Don’t do anything that suggests class is over when it isn’t; doing so will trigger the “off” switch and students will stop paying attention.

Expect to listen to the instructor and the guest speakers. Without listening, we can’t access the diverse lives, experiences and beliefs of those who share this planet with us.
Expect to turn your cell phone off at the beginning of class—and keep it off.

Grading Scale

100-95 = A  
94-90 = A-  
89-87 = B+  
86-84 = B  
83-80 = B-  
79-77 = C+  
76-74 = C  
73-70 = C-  
69-67 = D+  
66-64 = D  
63-60 = D-  
59 & below F

A Note on Plagiarism

All written work must be in your own words. Borrowing a person’s words or thoughts without a proper citation is a crime. If I find you guilty of plagiarism, not only will you earn a free trip to the Dean’s Office, you may also fail the course. Play it safe—don’t steal.

A Note on Courtesy

We live in the twenty-first century. Everybody should act civilized. When the instructor is talking, nobody talks. When you’re talking, nobody else talks (including the instructor). And finally, if you disagree with someone, attack the person’s argument, not the person.
Tentative Class Schedule

Week 1: What is Philosophy? What is Ethics?

Week 2: The Ancient World: Biblical Ethics

War All the Time: 1-40
Think a Second Time: ix-16

Week 3: The Ancient World: Aristotle and Virtue Ethics

War All the Time: 41-80
Think a Second Time: 17-35

Week 4: The Ancient World: Epicurus and Hedonism

War All the Time: 81-120
Think a Second Time: 36-54, 99-103

Week 5: The Modern World: Hobbes and Psychological Egoism

War All the Time: 121-160
Think a Second Time: 132-158
Week 6: The Modern World: Darwin, Freud and Evolutionary Ethics

War All the Time: 161-200

Think a Second Time: 159-194

Humanism: A Very Short Introduction: TBA

Making Sense of It All: TBA

Week 7: The Modern World: Sartre and Existentialist Ethics

War All the Time: 201-240

Think a Second Time: 197-255

Humanism: A Very Short Introduction: TBA

Making Sense of It All: TBA

Week 8: The Modern World: Theism vs. Atheism

War All the Time: 241-288

Think a Second Time: 235-258

Humanism: A Very Short Introduction: TBA

Making Sense of It All: TBA
Introduction to Ethics: At a Glance

Here’s how class will play out each week:

War All the Time: Pick a favorite poem and share it with the class. As you show and tell your favorite poem, address one of the following questions: 1) What light does the poem shed on human nature? 2) What did you take away most from the poem about the existential issues we face in life and how to deal with those issues?

Think a Second Time: Pick a favorite essay and share it with the class. As you show and tell your favorite essay, address one of the following questions: 1) What did you agree or disagree with in the essay and why? 2) What could you add to the essay to strengthen or to weaken it?

Humanism: A Very Short Introduction and Making Sense of it All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life. Read the assigned chapters and be ready to discuss the opposing views held by each philosopher, such as their views of God (or lack thereof), morality, the meaning of life, and so on. As we discuss each philosopher, pay attention to their “big ideas,” which you can use as talking points in your News Flashes.

Here’s what a News Flash should include:

Introduction (a brief introduction to the subject of the book)

Body (the philosopher’s view of God (or lack thereof), morality, and the meaning of life)

Conclusion (final remarks of your choice)
Here’s what an Ethics Essay should have:

Introduction (with a thesis statement)

Body (support for your thesis)

Conclusion (summarize your argument)

Note: The News Flashes, the Ethics Essay, and the Final Exam should be stapled together and submitted as a whole one week after our last class meeting. Please submit all assignments to Mr. Tasey’s third floor mailbox (left side/bottom).