Man I was mean but I’m changing my scene
And I’m doing the best that I can
I admit it’s getting better
A little better all the time

“Getting Better” by The Beatles

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, deontology, 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.

News Flashes: Each week, students will write a 1-2 page News Flash for each chapter we read in Who Are We?: Theories of Human Nature. Imagine that you are a radio talk show host. Now imagine that for the next seven weeks you have to speak to your national radio audience about the philosophers we study in class, explaining to your audience
each philosopher’s view of human nature and the ethical life. What would you say in your News Flash to keep your audience members’ attention? What would you say to make your audience members want to tune in next week to learn more about human nature and the ethical life? You are responsible for ____ News Flashes (one for each chapter we cover in Who Are We?: Theories of Human Nature). Each News Flash should be 1-2 pages (typed and double spaced), though your News Flashes can be longer, if you’d like. Your batch of News Flashes will account for 40% of 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 for future students to read and to reflect on? 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—e.g., “The death penalty should be reinstated” or “If God doesn’t exist, life is meaningless”) 2) a body with several paragraphs that support your thesis statement and criticism of others’ viewpoints 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. Note: The News Flashes should be stapled to the Ethics Essay 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+
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? What is Human Nature?

Week 2: The Biblical View

War All the Time: 1-40

Think a Second Time: ix-16

Who Are We?: TBA
Week 3: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle

War All the Time: 41-80
Think a Second Time: 17-35
Who Are We?: TBA

Week 4: Saint Augustine

War All the Time: 81-120
Think a Second Time: 36-54, 99-103
Who Are We?: TBA

Week 5: Hinduism and Buddhism

War All the Time: 121-160
Think a Second Time: 132-158
Who Are We?: TBA

Week 6: Immanuel Kant

War All the Time: 161-200
Think a Second Time: 159-194
Who Are We?: TBA
Week 7: Sigmund Freud

War All the Time: 201-240

Think a Second Time: 197-255

Who Are We?: TBA

Week 8: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre

War All the Time: 241-288

Think a Second Time: 235-258

Who Are We?: TBA
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) Does the poem shed any light on human nature? If so, how? 2) What did you take away most from the poem about the existential issues we face in life and how we deal with them?

**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 weaken it?

**Who Are We?:** Read the chapter and be ready to discuss each philosopher’s view of human nature and the ethical life. As we discuss each philosopher, pay attention to their “big ideas,” which you can use for your talking points in your News Flashes.

Here’s what a **News Flash** should include:

- **Introduction** (a brief biography of the philosopher)
- **Body** (the philosopher’s view of human nature and the ethical life)
- **Conclusion** (final remarks of your choice to your audience)

Here’s what an **Ethics Essay** should have:

- **Introduction** (with a thesis statement)
- **Body** (support for your thesis and criticism of others’ viewpoints)
- **Conclusion** (summarize your argument)
Note: The **News Flashes** should be stapled to the **Ethics Essay** 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).