Doane College
Autumn 2012

Introduction to Ethics

PRE-111 (3 Credits)

T 8:00PM-12:30PM

Instructor: Lee Tasey
Office Hours: Arranged
lee.tasey@doane.edu

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

Course Description: The word “philosophy” comes from two Greek words that mean “love of wisdom.” Philosophers try to better understand G-d, the world, and human beings. The word “ethics” comes from a Greek word that means “character.” Ethicists try to discover what behaviors are right and wrong as well as how best to live in the world.

Over the next eight weeks, we’ll study the major ethical theories of Western philosophy; we’ll also look at moral issues facing us today. Our guides through the ethical landscape will be the most influential thinkers in Western Civilization: Plato, Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, just to name a few. We’ll be looking at questions such as “Is anything right or wrong?” and “Can there be morality without religion?” and “Why should I be moral?” and “What is the good life?”
Course Readings:


Course Goals:

to explore the major ethical theories from antiquity to the present (e.g. divine command theory, virtue theory, hedonism, deontology, utilitarianism, egoism, etc.)
to study a variety of contemporary moral issues and apply ethical theories to them
to help students see the complexity of moral issues
to think more carefully about the moral issues of our day
to develop your own moral point of view
to develop a tolerance for doubt and uncertainty

Course Requirements:

Attendance, Participation & Attentiveness (APA): Attendance is mandatory. The material we’ll cover in class may not be found in the readings. 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. Students may use laptop computers for class notes only. Those who use a laptop for the Internet, email or video games will lose the privilege of using a laptop for the rest of the semester. Finally, students who are disruptive in class (talking while the instructor is talking, sleeping, flirting, etc) will be asked to leave for the remainder of the class.
Note: If you’ll miss more than two classes, do NOT enroll in this class. If you leave class early, you’ll be counted as absent for the entire class. More than two absences will result in the grade of “F.”

Philosophy & Ethics Journal: Every week students will write one page in a journal. The goal of keeping a journal is to reflect upon what you’ve learned in Sophie’s World. You could jot down something you found confusing or compelling; you could also criticize the readings or talk about how the readings are challenging your current viewpoint. The journal will help to articulate and develop your viewpoint on a number of ethical theories and moral issues.

At the beginning of class, I will collect your journal entries. The grade of +/- will be based on the degree to which you wrestled with the readings as well as the quality of writing. You are responsible for five journal entries. Each entry should be one typed double-spaced page.

Personal Philosophy & Ethics Essay: Here you’ll explain (in 2-3 pages) your personal ethical philosophy. Our models for the essay will be the essays in This I Believe.

Final Paper: The paper will be 6-8 pages and will involve two parts: 1) choosing a moral issue (e.g., abortion) and 2) an evaluation of the moral issue. Here you’ll argue for or against one of the views a person can take on the issue (e.g., abortion is wrong). Other moral issues may include, but are not limited to, the following: human cloning, gay marriage, capital punishment, genetic engineering, suicide and physician-assisted suicide, legalization of drugs, pornography, civil disobedience, and gun control. The final paper will be graded on the student’s handling of the readings, clarity of thought, organization of ideas, and creative thinking.
What to Expect:

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 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 and stay for the entire class.

Expect to be in class until at least 10:00AM.

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 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 turn your cell phone off at the beginning of class—and keep it off.

Course Evaluation:

APA: 40%
Philosophy & Ethics Journal: 20%
Personal Philosophy & Ethics Essay 20%
Final Paper: 20%
Course Grading Scale

A+ 100-98
A  97-95
A- 94-90
B+ 89-87
B  86-83
B- 82-80
C+ 79-77
C  76-74
C- 73-70
D+ 69-67
D  66-64
D- 63-60

A Note on Plagiarism

The Doane College Academic Integrity Policy will be adhered to in this class. All projects and tests will represent your own work. Any use of others’ ideas and words without proper citation of sources is plagiarism and will result in penalties to be determined by the instructor and/or the dean of undergraduate studies.

In other words, all written work must be in your own words. Borrowing an author’s words, sentences or thoughts without a 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’ll also fail the course. Play it safe—don’t steal.

A Note on Courtesy

We live in the twenty-first century, not the Stone Age. Everyone 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.
Week 1: What is Philosophy? What is Ethics?

Week 2: Aristotle & Virtue Ethics
Epicurus & Hedonism
Sophie’s World 3-137
This I Believe 1-50
Journal Entry

Week 3: Judaism, Christianity & Islam: Divine Command Theory
Sophie’s World 138-184
This I Believe 51-100
Journal Entry

Week 4: David Hume & Moral Subjectivism
Sophie’s World 185-298
This I Believe 101-150
Journal Entry

Week 5: Immanuel Kant & Deontological Ethics
John Stuart Mill & Utilitarianism
Sophie’s World 299-398
This I Believe 151-200
Journal Entry

Week 6: Charles Darwin & Evolutionary Ethics
Sophie’s World 399-440
This I Believe 272-273
Journal Entry

Week 7: Jean Paul Sartre & Existentialist Ethics
Sophie’s World 441-507
Personal Essay Due

Week 8: Non-Western Ethics: Buddhism
Final Paper Due