Introduction to Ethics

PRE-111 (3 Credit Hours)

Doane College

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Catalog Description:

An examination of theories and forms of reasoning about moral problems. Procedures for reasoning about ethical issues are examined as well as several major philosophical theories, such as Utilitarianism, which attempt to provide guidance in these issues. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to provide their own solutions to these problems, guided by the theories discussed. This course fulfills the philosophy/religion general education requirement for the Doane Plan and for Liberal Arts Major.

Course Description:

Ethics comes from a Greek word meaning “character.” Ethicists try to discover what human actions are right and wrong as well as how best to live in the world. Studying ethical theories can be arduous and perplexing. Many of the historical theories are complex; and have morphed or been modified by later adherents, creating different schools of thought within a theory. In this course we will cut to the chase in an attempt to make an often boring subject more interesting. We will focus more on how we explain our beliefs and why we make the decisions we do.

We will look at events in our contemporary world and explore questions such as: What is right or wrong? Why do I believe the way I do? Why do others believe differently? What should I do and what is my personal responsibility?

The class will use a variety of methods to learn more about moral reasoning and decision making. We will discuss major ethical theories and their application to contemporary ethical issues. The course will involve a significant amount of group discussion of ethical issues including reading assignments and case studies to allow each student to better define their personal belief system and the ethical basis for their decisions. The course will include written papers analyzing current ethical issues using historical ethical theories and contrasting them to the individual student’s belief system.

Required Text:

Course Objectives:

Students who successfully complete the course will:

1. learn several of the ethical theories of ethical philosophers.
2. be able to examine contemporary ethical issues taking the belief systems of others into account.
3. be able to explain the reasoning behind personal sentiments and beliefs.
4. understand the ethical basis of their personal belief system and how it affects their decision making.

Course Requirements:

Class Participation and Attendance: 35%

Participation requires speaking, listening and demonstrating the effort to make connections between different types of materials and experiences. Attendance in class is prerequisite for participation. You will not pass the course with three absences.

Written Assignments: 40%

Students will prepare a one to two page paper each week reviewing a recent contemporary ethical issue in relation to an ethical theory and contrast this with their personal belief system.

Final Paper: 25%

The final paper will require the student to review a recent contemporary ethical issue using two competing ethical theories. The paper will include a critical evaluation of the two ethical theories with a personal analysis of how relevant the theories are in justifying individual actions.

Grading Scale:

Assignments are due on the date specified. Late assignments will be graded down 5 points for each day they are late. Allowances on lateness may be made for emergencies. Pluses and minuses may be given with grades. The grading scale for written assignments is: 90 – 100% = A, 80 – 89% = B, 70 – 79% = C, 60 – 69% = D, Below 60% = F.

Course Policies:

Disagreements are to be expected when discussing ethical beliefs. Debate is welcome. Students will show respect for the rights of others to express beliefs and opinions. Disrespect or the use of profanity will be considered when giving grades in participation.

The Doane Academic Integrity Policy will be followed in this class.