



Course Syllabus

Intro to Ethics: Evaluating Ethical Frameworks and Popular Ethical Concepts

Course Summary:

This class will introduce ethics to students including basic ethical concepts. It will explore classical concepts of ethics so students can think about the importance of ethics or moral philosophy and learn about different ethical and moral frameworks that people hold.

Furthermore, the class will apply reason and logic to important ethical concepts that are popular in the U.S culture with an eye to understanding if those concepts are both ethically and logically sound.

The course will include presenting ethical dilemmas for students to work through in order to apply what they have learned.

It is highly recommended that a student take this course prior to taking the *Examining Social Issues in the Light of Reason* courses.

Course Experience:

There is a very important thing happening in the U.S. culture now – there is much conflict over ideas, traditions and issues that have ethical implications. No U.S. citizen should be able to watch the news and not be concerned about the animosity, discord and conflict that is currently occurring in the U.S. culture. **This class will equip students to understand WHY the conflict is happening from an ethics or moral philosophy perspective.**

There is large shift happening within the U.S. and that shift is rooted to people’s moral understandings on what is true (existentially) and right (ethically). Specifically, there is a shift away from moral objectivism and to moral relativism. Very few people have a clear understanding of those two moral frameworks, and yet **understanding the differences between those two moral frameworks is the key to understanding the problems associated with the culture war and the ensuing conflict.** This course will allow you to understand those differences.

Some the most popular yet misunderstood and misapplied doctrines with direct moral implications will be examined and judged as to their soundness – tolerance, respect and judgement – and we will arrive at the best definition and application of those important concepts.



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If you want to have a sound and clear understanding of WHY so many people are disagreeing with one another over ethical or moral issues, this class will enlighten you.

Prerequisites & Age & Ability Recommendations:

No prerequisites are recommended for this class. This course is appropriate for advanced middle school children to adults.

Content Review by Week:

Intro: (Week 1)

- Why is ethics or moral philosophy important? All people have beliefs about what is right or wrong. Important ethical decisions are made or a spoken about on a daily basis. Decisions about the value of human life, or what is acceptable use of force, or what is the right thing to do in a given situation, are made by people billions of times each day.
- What is the difference between ethics and morality? (Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. Morality is what individuals believe are right or wrong actions.)
- Other than moral philosophy, what are the other major thinking or philosophical disciplines that exist? (A brief exploration of Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology.)
- How do scientists intersect or interact with ethics? (Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology.)
- What are the three major divisions in ethics and what do they mean? (Normative ethics; metaethics; applied ethics.)
- Are there better ethical frameworks than others? How can we know that?

The Elements of Ethics: (Week's 2)

- What are the concepts or principles which make the study of ethics unique and guide our inquiry into ethical concepts?
 - The Preeminence of Reason
 - The Universal Perspective.
 - The Principal of Impartiality
 - The Dominance of Moral Norms
- What is the relationship between religion and morality?
 - Religious people need and use moral reasoning.
 - When conflicts arise, ethics steps in.
 - Moral philosophy enables productive discourse.

Evaluating the Four Major Ethical Frameworks: (Week's 2-4)

- An exploration of the four major ethical frameworks:



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- Moral objectivism
- Cultural relativism
- Subjective relativism
- Emotivism

Reason and logic will be used in exploring these four views with the goal of exposing views that don't hold up well to the test of reason and logic.

We will also learn how these ethical frameworks are contributing to the problems the U.S. culture is currently experiencing.

Ethical Relativism & Popular Ethical Concepts: (Week 5)

- There are important concepts in the culture that are strongly influencing many people's thinking regarding ethical matters. Those concepts are:
 - Tolerance
 - Respect
 - Judgement
- We will take a close look at those concepts in light of what we learned about the four major ethical frameworks and arrive at conclusions regarding what they should mean using reason to guide us.

Moral Theories: A Brief Introduction (Week 6)

- Moral philosophers have been thinking about morality for millennia. Certain moral theories have been proposed, identified and held by people throughout the centuries. We will take a brief look at the most popular of those theories and how to evaluate them.
- Consequentialist Theories versus Non-Consequentialist Theories
 - Utilitarianism
 - Ethical Egoism
 - Kant's Categorical Imperative
 - Natural Law
 - Divine Command Theory

What Items or materials are provided with the course?

- This syllabus.
- Student version of each classes content will be made available prior to the class, so students don't have to take notes.
- Homework is not required but will be provided upon student's request. If a student requests homework, the answers will also be available in a document.



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- It is recommended but not required that students purchase the excellent book, "***Beginning Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy***" by Lewis Vaughn. The course is largely based on that book.