The purpose of this course is to help the student understand what ethics is and how this branch of philosophy bears on specific ethical dilemmas in contemporary society and on the personal issues that intertwine with societal ones. To understand what is distinctive about ethics, we will discuss how it might be distinguished from religion and from the law. We will explore the debate between those who maintain that ethical judgments are relative to the beliefs of a particular culture or individual, and those who maintain that such judgments can be objective, transcending individual or collective belief. We will ask how a system of ethics might be justified, and discuss feminist, libertarian, Aristotelian and other general frameworks for thinking about ethics.

These broader perspectives will be woven in with our attempts to understand the nature and possible resolution of particular contemporary ethical controversies among individuals, within organizations, or in the interrelations among individuals, organizations and society at large. Specific controversies to be discussed this semester will include:

- Abortion and Reproductive Rights
- The Rights of Animals
- Ethics and the Environment
- Rights and Social Responsibilities of Individuals and Corporations
- Gender Equality, Sexism and Racism
- Digital Life: Ethics and the Virtual World

We will conclude with some reflections on morality, friendship, and happiness.

There are no prerequisites for this course. It satisfies an ethics requirement for PCBE students and counts toward the Discovery Humanities (HUMA) Category. This section is open only to PCBE students.