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, discuss feminism and feminist ethics, and consider libertarian, utilitarian, and other general approaches to the resolution of ethical controversies.

These broader perspectives will be woven in with our attempts to understand the nature and possible resolution of particular contemporary ethical debates. Specific topics will likely include:

- Abortion
- The rights of animals
- Ethics and business
- Drugs, addiction, legalization
- The environment and the ethical responsibilities of the consumer
- Global economic justice
- Ethics and happiness

In our discussions, we will consider not just the morality of particular social and legal policies, but the ethics of the associated personal practices. Not just, for example, “Should abortions be legal?” but also, “Should I or someone I care about have an abortion?”

Course requirements include, in addition to quizzes and exams, argument analysis exercises, Discussion Board contributions, and in-class Philosophy Team exercises. There are no prerequisites for this course. It satisfies the Discovery Humanities (HUMA) Category, Gen Ed Category 8, and the PCBE ethics requirement.