

Messiah College
School of Education and Social Sciences
Department of Human Development and Family Science
HDFS 340 Ethics and Family
Summer, 2011

Instructor: Jennifer L. Ransil, MA
Class: Summer Online Class
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Texts:

- Wilkens, S. (1995). *Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics: An Introduction to Theories of Right and Wrong*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Traer, R. & Stelmach, H. (2008). *Doing Ethics in a Diverse World*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- National Council on Family Relations (1998). *Tools for Ethnical Thinking and Practice in Family Life Education*. Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
- Picoult, J. (2004). *My Sister's Keeper*. New York, NY: Washington Square Press.

Course Description:

This course will provide students with an introduction to the applied field of family ethics. Therefore ethical problems that arise when families interact, join, create, or dissolve will be the focus of learning and discussion. Rational solutions will be considered from the framework of multiple ethical theories. Specific steps in the process of moral decision making and ethical action, as well as their relevance to larger social contexts will also be addressed.

Course Objectives: Within the context of familial relationships:

1. Obtain a working knowledge of various ethical theories.
2. Understand how moral rules generate “rights” and “duties” and influence ethical decision making.
3. Examine rational solutions to specific moral problems embedded in familial relationships.
4. Learn specific steps of moral decision making and criteria for ethical actions.
5. Explore implications of problems and solutions to larger social contexts .
6. Integrate theological concepts while forming personal positions on contemporary family issues.
7. Gain personal insight on core family values and beliefs and how they impact personal, ethical decision making.

Course Format:

We will examine the way in which the family is shaped by ethics by interacting with one another via Messiah’s online learning management system, **Sakai**. It is **very important that you have reliable access to a computer and internet connection that will support Sakai at least 1 time per week during the summer semester**. You will write reflections, essays, and book reviews that allow you into interact with the ethical dilemmas that families face. Forum posts will be used to dialog about the course material and interact as a class. There will be an objective midterm and final exam.

Course Requirements:

1. Worldview Paper - Each student will summarize their worldview (or a worldview of their choice) on a number of key issues and analyze how their worldview was shaped by their family and context. Papers will be 5-7 pages in length, 12 pt. font, double spaced, & Times New Roman.

~The first 1-3 pages will summarize the important components of philosophy, theology, biology, law, sociology, and history. A brief example will be placed on Sakai for your reference. (50pts.)

~Pages 3-5 will discuss how ETHICS in the family relates to worldviews. (50 pts.)

~ Last page(s) should include a personal account of an example of an ethical decision within the family and the ways in which you see your worldview interacting with the decision process or outcome. (50pts.)

POINT TOTAL: 150 pts.

2. Ethical Theories Application Presentations: (IN FORUM SECTION) _Students will gather a video clip (youtube is fine), article, song, or other media source and upload it to the Forum 3 section. The student will then give a brief analysis of the worldview or ethical theory that is demonstrated by the media source. Each student will pose at least one question for the rest of the class to respond to via the post thread. See Appendix A. POINT TOTAL: 100 pts.

3. Midterm Exam - A midterm exam will evaluate conceptual background, covering the conceptual background of ethics and the family before proceeding into the elements in ethical decision making. Midterm exams are worth a total of 100pts and will be a combination of multiple choice and true/false. The midterm will be taken ONLINE via Sakai.

4. CFLE Model Assignment – Each student will select a topic from a chapter from Traer and respond to one ethical question. By using the resource, “*Tools for Ethical Thinking and Practice in Family Life Education*”, the student will become familiar with ethical decision making in a concrete manner and navigate the decision making process in reference to CFLE standards. Point total: 50 pts.

5. My Sister’s Keeper Choice Paper– Students may pick one of the following two options:

a) Students choosing this option must write themselves into the storyline of My Sister’s Keeper. Papers should mimic the form and voice of Picoult’s chapters: written in the present tense by a character in or related to the family and their situation. An introductory and conclusion paragraph, outside of this format may be necessary for explanation. Characters must be original and their role clearly linked to plot, storyline, and their own personal wrestling with the ethical issues at hand. An integration of faith is expected. See Appendix D for additional instructions and grading rubric.

b) Students choosing this option must completely answer question # 6 or question # 11 from the *Questions and Topics for Discussion* at the very end of the novel. Papers need to reflect an explicit integration of faith, personal wrestling with the ethical issues at hand, and the influence of them on and from society as a whole.

See Appendix B for additional instructions and grading rubric.

6. Final Exam - A final exam will cover the application of ethical theories to the context of family life from Section II. “Elements in Ethical Decision Making.” The exam will be a combination of multiple-choice and true/false. The final exam will be given online via Sakai.

COURSE GRADING:

Worldview Paper	150 pts.
Ethical Theories Application Presentation	100 pts.
CFLE Model Assignment	50 pts.
Forum Discussions (5 posts, 20 pts. Each)	100 pts.
My Sister’s Keeper paper	50 pts.
Midterm	100 pts.
Final	100 pts.
TOTAL points	650 pts.

Web sites and resources:

- www.aamft.org (Official AAMFT site that also contains CFLE)
- www.al-islam.org (Muslim marriage and family perspectives)
- www.centerforethicalstudies.com (legal consultant to mental health professionals)

Some helpful resources:

- CHOICES: Making Right Decisions in a Complex World by Lewis Smedes
- ETHICS: Approaching Moral Decisions by Arthur E. Holmes
- BIBLE & ETHICS in the Christian Life by Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen
- Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life by Dennis Hollinger
- Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World by Dennis Hollinger
- Morals, Marriage and Parenthood by Laurence D. Houlgate
- Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics R.K. Harrison, General Editor
- “Public Policy through a Family Lens” by the National Council on Family Relations

SCHEDULE (see Sakai Site)

APPENDIX A

Ethical Theory Application Presentation Grading Rubric

Application Presentations should highlight the assigned ethical theory via the choice of some form of media capturing its constructs (ie: a song and its lyrics, a movie clip, current event, sitcom episode, etc).

Choice of Media Source (how well does this particular example illustrate the ethical theory or choice?) (15pts.)

Summary of Ethical Dilemma or Theory (20 pts.)

Question for class consideration and interaction. (15 pts.)

APPENDIX B

*My Sister's Keeper Choice Paper and Presentation
Grading Rubric*

Students may pick options "a" or option "b"

a) Students choosing this option must write themselves into the storyline of My Sister's Keeper.

Papers should mimic the form and voice of Picoult's chapters: written in the present tense by a character in or related to the family and their situation. An introductory and/or conclusion paragraph, outside of this format may be necessary for explanation.

/10

Characters must be original and their role clearly linked to plot/storyline

/10

Character's personal wrestling with faith and the ethical issues at hand must be discussed

/20

3-5 pages in length, 12pts Arial or Times New Roman, double spaced with 1" margins, appropriate grammar and spelling

/10

Total

50pts

APPENDIX E

Name _____

*My Sister's Keeper Choice Paper and Presentation
Grading Rubric*

b) Students choosing this option must completely answer question # 6 or question # 11 from the *Questions and Topics for Discussion* at the very end of the novel. Additional internet research or use of a dictionary for ethical terms may be necessary.

Completely answers question and thoroughly explains reasoning	/20
Explicitly integrates faith into answer and discusses personal wrestling with the ethical issues at hand	/10
Covers apparent implications for society as a whole	/10
3-5 pages in length, 12pts Arial or Times New Roman, double spaced with 1" margins, appropriate grammar and spelling	/10
Total	50 pts