

HUMN 330 Values and Ethics

Personal Reflection on Values and Ethics

Assignment Guidelines

Erik Erikson, one of the most influential psychoanalysts of the 20th century, proposed an eight-stage theory of growth as a model for how we live, think, learn and change throughout our lifetimes. What we value, our character and psyche are determined as a result of the developmental tasks we face in each stage. For more information on his stages see: <http://swppr.org/Textbook/Ch%209%20Erikson.pdf>

Erikson's last stage is sometimes referred to as late adulthood, maturity, or old age (Erikson's term is Ego Integrity vs. Despair), and begins around the age of 60 or when we typically retire. According to his theory, during this final stage of life we take a deep inventory of our lives and our sense of usefulness. The basic question most people grapple with at this stage is: did our life have meaning? However, we do not need to wait until the latter part of our life to answer this question. We can do it now!

Some people become preoccupied with the past, their failures, regrets, and the bad decisions they made, knowing they do not have the time or the vigor to reverse how they lived and treated others. Sometimes this results in people becoming depressed, vindictive, resentful and spiteful in old age. They often wish that they had lived a life that was different, more positive and had deeper meaning. Conversely, others look back and accept the choices they made, realizing they did their best given the choices they had and the circumstances they faced. If you were dying now, into which category would you place yourself?

While most of us are not dying, we do know that we are not guaranteed a tomorrow. In fact, we cannot even be sure we will live through the day. Yet, in the face of the one certainty in life we all share—that everything outside of the imminent moments in which we live and breathe—Western society continues to deny the presence and possibilities of death. This is true even when we are directly confronted with it—witness, for example, the lengths to which we will go to live longer even when those measures vastly deteriorate the quality of our lives. Rather, as the essential, defining element of life itself, death should be embraced as a means of learning how to live a full and truly meaningful life. So, perhaps now is a good time to reflect and take an inventory of how we have lived.

Our personal values, morals and ethical code serve as a basis for distinguishing between right and wrong, and thereby have a direct effect upon our thoughts, behavior and emotions. Of course our family, upbringing, peers, and education play a critical role in the development of our core values and ethics as well, but as you learned in this course, there are many other variables that shape our character and values.

The objective of this assignment is for you to relate the material from the textbook readings and course discussions to the experiences in your life so that you can assess its meaning. As we reflect on acknowledging our mortality, can we start to bring a greater meaning to our lives while still living? We can if we are honest with ourselves and take the time to do so.

So, how do we go about determining what our values and ethics are? Perhaps the best approach is to start with developing a statement that encompasses an overall picture of your values and ethics. This opening part of your paper needs to be general in nature and should

reflect your beliefs, and not necessarily a statement of fact. Are your values based on family, health, achievements, wealth, job success, happiness, faith, love, or anything else that you hold in great esteem, that perhaps you would be willing to even die for? Think of your value statement as what defines you as a person. You took a similar inventory in Module 2, so your answer might be similar. However, after reading the material in this course, you may have changed your perspectives on some of these items. If so, explain. Certainly, you now have a theoretical framework in which to place these values, so make sure you add that information.

Once you determine what you value, then you can transition to formulating a personal ethics statement. How have your values informed your decisions and shaped the way you live? This part of the paper would include your personal view of ethics. In addition, consider how this code was instilled in you from the time you were born until now. What personality traits do you consider to be closely related to ethical and unethical behavior? Why? How do you see your development according to Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (<http://web.missouri.edu/~segerti/capstone/kohlberg.pdf>)?

The next step in the process is to think about your values and ethics from the different ethical perspectives covered in the course. This will require you to think critically, synthesize and apply theory to your life. You might try to address as many ethical theories as possible, but you can also focus on just applying one or two if that is what you prefer to do. For example, you could use a deontological perspective to represent how a duty/rule-based approach was used by your parents, family, faith or religion (how were the principles of respect of others, honesty, hard-work, success, altruism, morality, excellence or the opposites, etc. taught as morally wrong or right regardless of the outcomes achieved?). Or maybe you would like to apply a utilitarian approach in which an assessment of the overall outcomes of consequences (greatest benefit and overall happiness vs. greatest harm and unhappiness) was used mainly to determine right and wrong? You could also take consider the influence of egoism, personhood and rights or virtue-based ethics on other aspects or issues in your life. **In this section, make sure you use the text as evidence.**

In your concluding paragraph describe the person you are today and maybe address the person you want to become. Are they the same person or different? As a result of this reflection, do you have areas in your life that you want to change or work on? What would you most like to change about yourself? Can you do it? If you were dying right now, what is the most important thing you might say to your best friend about life and how to live it? You may want to consider the chapters on virtue theory. Which of these virtues is most important to you? Why? How might you work on developing it?

Again, the overriding theme of this paper is to critically think about the meaning of your life relative to your self-interests, personal values and code of ethics. This is an about you and for you, but it will be heavily informed by the readings and discussions from this course.

Your paper must have an APA-formatted title page. The paper should be at least 1500 words in length (not including the cover page and references). It should be grammatically sound and free of spelling errors. **You must integrate the ethical theories discussed in the readings and class as they relate goal of this assignment. Be sure to include in-text citations and a reference page for this material.** Outside sources are not required, but any use of such material should be cited.

This paper will be submitted in Module 9, but begin this process early so you can address any concerns with your instructor.