

Ethics I: Introduction to Christian Ethics

Luther Seminary ~ ST2420 (half course) ~ Spring 2011
Thur 1:30pm – 4:20pm ~ Room: GH103

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MY WEB PAGE: www.luthersem.edu/apadgett

COURSE WEB PAGE: visit My Luther Net

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

An overview of the various ways that Christians make moral arguments and decisions. The focus is on methods and models important for moral discourse and the relationship of theological ethics and its biblical, historical, and confessional sources to insights from philosophy and other disciplines.

PURPOSE

This course will introduce the tasks and themes of Christian ethics. This will include a brief overview of moral philosophy, but our main focus will be on interpreting Scripture for Christian ethics today. How to think Christianly about ethical issues will be a main theme. We will emphasize the Biblical resources for moral theology, and both individual and corporate ethical reflection. The local church as a locus for public moral discourse will be explored. Our perspective in moral theology will be ecumenical and evangelical, biblical, and critical. We will develop skills in critical thinking, reading, clear development of arguments, and discussion. This course is required for M.Div. and M.A. students.

LEARNING GOALS

In this class the student will learn to:

1. Understand and appreciate the place of moral deliberation in the Christian life, ministry, and mission.
2. Express one's own moral theology clearly and present reasonable arguments for one's own opinions and beliefs.
3. Be aware of different philosophical approaches to ethics, and to biblical moral interpretation.
4. Respect the intellectual rights of others, and treat them with respect.
5. Understand the nature and Biblical basis of some basic Christian moral concepts.
6. Learn to participate in group moral deliberation with an eye to Scripture and local church leadership.

These goals will be measured by, inter alia, the following abilities:

1. Recognize and name the major alternatives in moral philosophy today.
2. Show familiarity with central terms and themes in philosophical and theological ethics.
3. Demonstrate a basic ability to interpret Scripture ethically.
5. Participate in small group moral deliberation.

CONTENT

The course will consist of assigned readings, in-class discussion, lectures with discussion and participation in a group process of learning, listening and discernment. Students are encouraged to

participate by discussion with each other and with the instructor by dialoging, questioning, and answering questions. True spirituality and intellectual openness are essential components of the theological quest.

TEXT BOOKS AND READINGS:

Required

These books are also on reserve in the library (the Grentz dictionary is in the reference room).

Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, *Reviving Evangelical Ethics* (Brazos).

W. Spohn, *What are they Saying about Scripture & Ethics?* (Paulist).

S. Grentz, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics* (IVP).

Essays on e-reserve. The first three are by Stanley Hauerwas from *The Hauerwas Reader* (also on reserve in the library):

1. "Visions, Story and Character".
2. "Reforming Christian Social Ethics: Ten Theses."
3. "Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom."
4. James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation," *Pro. Cath. Theol. Soc.* 40 (1985), 83-94.

Recommended

S. Wilkens, *Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics* (IVP) if you have not studied the various philosophical ethical options. Also, if you have had little or no philosophical background, check out this one-volume wonder:

R. Audi, ed., *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., paperback.

COURSE WORK AND EVALUATION

Besides general enthusiasm for this course, you will also be required to take a quiz and a final exam, write a term paper on Scripture & ethics, and participate in a group process of moral reflection. There are 200 possible points in the course, as outlined below.

Quiz	50
Term paper	100
Participation/attendance	50
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Course Total.....	200

Letter Grading

In general, while I grade on a "curve" you can expect 90% to be the cut-off for an "A-," 80% for a "B-," etc. If you wish to have traditional A-F grading, you must turn in a signed form by the second week. Forms can be found online at the registrar's web pages or at my faculty web page.

Pass/Fail Grading

For any element of this class, a Pass (P) will be at least a C+ in traditional terms. I expect you to pass every element of this class listed above in order to pass the class. You may receive one marginal (M) grade for an assignment and still pass this class, however. Assignments which do not meet this standard will have to be done over again. The course grade of M will be assigned to those who earn marginal grades for two or more of the assigned elements of this class, or one failed assignment.

Online gradebook: I use the online grade book to help us both keep track of how you are doing. These grades are *not* official, however. In particular, the grade of P does not exist, so I use 77% in the class grade book (this will look like a “C” to you) instead. See C, think P!

Plagiarism

The pressures of life sometimes tempt us to sin. Plagiarism is sin, defined in this case as taking credit for work that is not your own. This includes copying without quotation, excessive summarizing from sources (even if listed in a bibliography), or turning in your friend’s old paper with your name on it. If you are caught plagiarizing in this class, you will flunk the course. I reserve the right to speak to you in person about any work you hand in, and if needed give you an oral exam on it. So, please keep all notes and rough drafts of all essays and papers until after you receive your final grade for this class. I may ask to see them!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

You will be assigned a small Discussion Group for the last two weeks of the semester, for purpose of joint moral deliberation. You will present to your group a short analysis of the Biblical passage you are working on, with special attention to any moral and theological issues you find there. You will next present the ethical model/theory which you are using to help bring out the moral meaning of the text for today. Discussing this text and the moral dilemma with your group should help each of you write a better term paper. Seek to reach “clarity” together with respect to the ethical meaning of the passage, and with respect to its meaning for the Christian life in the context of the ethical model you are using.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

General Remarks

In general, your papers should be written in good English style and follow standard academic norms. Begin with an introduction and end with a summary conclusion. Follow standard footnote (or endnote) format for the humanities, or more specifically, “Chicago-Humanities.” Always include a list of Works Cited (i.e., a bibliography). If you are not familiar with these standards, I recommend you study the seminary “Short Cut” available at the Library circulation desk (call # LB2369.T8231 1996), on-line at the Library web site, or in the seminary bookstore. This Short Cut is based upon Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers*. Which in turned is based on the “Chicago style” i.e. *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Term Paper

You will reflect upon a specific passage of Scripture, its place in the larger ethical teachings of Scripture, and its meaning for Christian life today. In developing the last part of your paper, describe and then use a specific ethical model (theory) we have studied in this class. Class readings (Spohn, Hauerwas, Reuschling) provide some examples of what we have in mind here (when they discuss specific biblical texts). Focus on a moral-theological reading of the text. Note: there is a sample term paper for this class on my faculty web page for you to look at as well.

ATTENDANCE

Absences

Because this course is so brief, I do require you to attend every session. You will not pass this class if you miss more than one day of class session, but you can make up absence. Of course you will have a good reason to be gone, but that's not the point here. All absences (even necessary ones) count against your total, unless they are redeemed. If you must miss more than two class periods (= 1/3 of the class!) see me ASAP.

Redemption of Absences

You can redeem your attendance points by turning in a typed summary (2–3 pages) of the required reading for each day that is missed. You will be graded Pass/Fail on how well you summarized the readings. If you must redeem more than two days of absence, please see me ASAP.

Students with Disabilities

Students in this class with a disability which could prevent them from fully demonstrating their learning should meet with me and/or our T.A. for this class as soon as possible, to begin disability verification and discuss necessary accommodations for full participation and completion of course requirements.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date (Thu)	Topic	Readings
Mar 31	Introduction to class <i>What is Moral Theology?</i>	None for today
Apr 7	<i>Kant and Deontological Ethics</i>	Reuschling; 20-41 (skim 1-29); Spohn, introduction; Hauwerwas, "Jesus"
Apr 14	<i>Divine Command & Natural Law Models</i>	Spohn, ch. 1 & 2; Reuschling, ch. 2; Gustafson, "Sectarian" QUIZ
Apr 28	<i>Mill & Utilitarianism; Liberation Theology</i>	Reuschling, 41-51 & ch. 3; Hauerwas, "Reforming"; Spohn ch. 3
May 5	<i>Virtue, Character & Narrative Theology</i> [group discussion]	Reuschling, 51-87 & ch. 4; Spohn, ch. 4; Hauwerwas, "Visions,"
May 12	<i>Putting Things Together</i> [group discussion]	Spohn, ch. 5; Reuschling, ch. 5 & Conclusion

TERM PAPER due May 18th at 11pm.