

# Ethics II: Genetics and Christian Faith

Luther Seminary ~ ST 3429 (half course) ~ Spring 2009  
Tues. 1:10-4 P.M. ~ Room: NW 231

PROFESSOR: Alan G. Padgett  
PHONE: (651) 641-3221  
OFFICE: Bøckman Hall 27  
FACULTY WEB PAGE: [www.luthersem.edu/apadgett](http://www.luthersem.edu/apadgett)

EMAIL: [apadgett@luthersem.edu](mailto:apadgett@luthersem.edu)  
MAIL BOX: Gullixson Hall, 1<sup>st</sup> floor  
OFFICE HOURS: by appointment only  
COURSE WEB PAGE: see MyLuther Net

**CATALOG DESCRIPTION:** A study of the genetic revolution in biology, and the challenges it brings to the Church. Ethical and pastoral issues that arise out of genetics will be covered, including genetic screening, genetic engineering, cloning, organ harvesting, and eugenetics.

**PURPOSE:** This course will introduce the issues and challenges that new biological technologies present the Christian faith. We will explore these issues from the perspective of Christian ethics and Biblical faith. A previous knowledge of moral philosophy is assumed. How to think about these bio-ethical issues will be our main theme. The local church and Christian ministry will provide the context for leadership in the area of Christian moral discourse concerning these issues in genetics. 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 meets a requirement for M.Div. and M.A. students.

**RELEVANCE TO MISSION:** Luther Seminary “educates leaders for Christian communities called and sent by the Holy Spirit, to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ, and to serve in God’s world.” In this class we learn to think and dialogue theologically and morally about some key issues in bio-ethics. This introduction and attendant reflection/conversation enables learners to better lead in and serve the Church in an age of bio-technological “miracles” and difficult moral decisions.

## LEARNING GOALS

*In this class the student will learn to:*

1. Understand and appreciate the challenge of the new genetic technologies for our lives today.
2. Understand and appreciate the place of moral deliberation in the Christian life, ministry, and mission.
3. Express one’s own moral theology clearly and present reasonable arguments for one’s own opinions and beliefs.
4. Respect the intellectual rights of others, and treat them with respect.
5. Learn to discuss important moral issues in a group context, from the perspective of one’s own faith.

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

1. Recognize and name the major issues in bio-ethics surrounding the new genetic technologies.
2. Show familiarity with central terms and themes in Christian ethics relating to bio-ethics.
3. Demonstrate a basic ability to interpret Scripture ethically.
4. Solve a moral dilemma using responsible Christian ethical reflection.
5. Participate in small group moral deliberation and evaluate that process in writing.

## CONTENT

The course will consist of assigned readings, in-class discussion, a written solution to a moral dilemma, a short quiz, and participation in a process of group moral deliberation that will include a written evaluation of that process and a group presentation. Students are encouraged to participate by discussion with each other and with the instructor by dialog, questioning, and answering questions. True spirituality and intellectual openness are essential components of the theological quest.

**TEXT BOOKS AND READINGS:**

*Required*

ELCA, *Genetics! Where Do we Stand as Christians?* (ELCA, 2001). Chapter 8 is ONLY online!  
This can be read in full online (free!) at the Faith, Science and Technology Alliance Library of the ELCA: <http://www.elca.org/faithandscience/library.html>.  
James C. Peterson, *Genetic Turning Points* (Eerdmans).  
Robert Song, *Human Genetics* (Pilgrim Press).

*Recommended*

Grenz & Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics* (IVP).  
ELCA In-process position paper on Genetics: online at <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements-in-Process/Genetics/Link-to-the-Study.aspx>  
Morton Jenkins, *Teach Yourself 101 Key Ideas: Genetics* (McGraw-Hill, 2001).

**COURSE WORK AND EVALUATION**

Besides general enthusiasm for this course, you will also be required to take a quiz and a final, write-up a solution to a moral dilemma, participate in a group process of moral reflection, and a written evaluation of the group process. There are 375 possible points in the course, as outlined below.

|                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Quiz .....                     | 50  |
| Final Exam (short answer)..... | 125 |
|                                |     |
| Dilemma paper .....            | 75  |
| Group process paper .....      | 75  |
| Attendance/participation.....  | 50  |
| =====                          |     |
| Course Total .....             | 375 |

*Letter Grading*

In general and apart from exceptions, you can expect 90% to be the cut-off for an “A-,” 80% for a “B-,” etc.

*Pass/Fail Grading*

For any element of this class, a “Pass” will be at least a “C+” in traditional terms. You must Pass every element of the list below to pass this course. Assignments which “Fail” will be returned for no credit. You will have to do them over again in an acceptable manner in order to earn a passing grade for the assignment. Marginal assignments may also be rewritten in order to improve to a Pass level. You may receive one “M” grade for an assignment and still pass this class. The grade of “M” will be assigned to those who receive a marginal grade in two or more of the assigned elements of this class, or fail one assignment (only).

## *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 class (get an F). You must prove to me that you wrote the paper or essay. If I suspect you of plagiarism, I will give you an oral exam on your paper which the author of the essay could easily pass (but not someone who just copied or summarized). So, the bottom line is this: please keep all notes and rough drafts of papers and essays until after you receive your final grade for this class. I may ask to see them!

## **TESTS**

There will be a short quiz, and a short-answer essay exam for the final. You will be given study guides for both.

## **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

### *Small Group Moral Deliberation*

You will be assigned a small Discussion Group for the semester, for discussion purposes. Your group will choose a contemporary moral issue arising from genetics facing the Church, and a Biblical text which speaks to that issue. Discuss the text and the moral dilemma in your group. Seek to reach "clarity" with respect to the ethical meaning of the passage, and with respect to the proper action of the Church with respect to your dilemma. We will generally meet during class times, but you may wish to meet at additional times to really talk through your dilemma and your text.

## **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. 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 is a form of the Chicago Style. Samples of both of the papers below, from other classes, can be found on my personal Web page (<http://www.luthersem.edu/apadgett>).

### *Five Steps Dilemma Paper*

You will reflect upon a moral dilemma and "solve" it using a five-step process presented in class. In outline, this process involves: (1) Analysis of the situation, sticking to one moment in time: what makes this problem a moral dilemma? (2) Alternatives and moral imagination: what are the options available to a single person or a single organization in this particular case? Eliminate the options that are practically impossible for your time and subject. (3) Evaluate each of the remaining options, both practically and morally. (4) Defend one option as the best one, considering the ethical principles involved. (5) Metaethics: describe and defend the ethical theory you used in choosing one option as best. Which

Christian ethical approach did you embrace for this project? What biblical passages came to mind as you worked through this moral issue?

ALTERNATIVE PAPER: “Genetics and Faith”

*Alternative Essay; Response to ELCA Social Statement “Genetics and Faith”.* Instead of a Moral Dilemma Paper, you may chose to write a theological, ethical and science-minded (i.e. interdisciplinary) response to the in-process ELCA social statement on genetics (for the 2011 Churchwide Assembly). You can read the draft of the study-booklet online at this link:

<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements-in-Process/Genetics/Link-to-the-Study.aspx>

Do write a clear and coherent essay, with a good introduction and conclusion, and include a bibliography of works cited. This can be about 8 pages long or so (double-spaced) or approx. 2, 300 words. Only a portion of your paper should be a review/summary. Be sure to include a goodly chunk (1/2? 1/3?) of your own critical response.

### *Group Process Short Essay*

You will write a one or two page short reflection essay upon the group process of moral discernment. You should discuss the group's moral dilemma and biblical text for about ½ of your paper. In the other half, focus on the group process. Start to think about these questions as you write the second half: Did your group reach any clarity on the ethical meaning of the text or on the right response to that moral problem? Did the group discussion help you reach any personal clarity on either the text or the moral dilemma? With respect to the process itself: what practices and forms of conversation helped the process along? Give examples. What practices and forms of conversation inhibited your making ethical headway? Give examples. What have you learned from this process about the possibility of the local church as a place for public ethical conversation? *Group Evaluation: at the end of the class, your fellow students will evaluate your attendance and participation in the group.* This will affect your grade.

## **ATTENDANCE**

### *Absences*

Attendance is important, and we have very few class sessions. You will not pass this class if you miss more than three days of class session. There is no distinction made between excused and unexcused absences. All absences (even “excused” ones) count against your total, unless they are redeemed.

### *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 four 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

| <b>Dates (Tu)</b> | <b>Topics</b>                                                                         | <b>Readings</b>                                                               |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| March 30          | <i>Overview of Course; Review of metaethics.</i>                                      | Song, ch. 1; Peterson, Intro                                                  |
| April 7           | <i>A Christian View of Science &amp; Technology; Overview of Genetics</i>             | Song, ch. 1 & pp. 134-37; ELCA, ch. 1& Glossary; Peterson, Intro, ch. 1 & 2.  |
| April 21          | <i>Theology &amp; Technology;<br/>Moral Issues in Genetics<br/>QUIZ</i>               | Song, ch. 2; ELCA, ch. 2 & 4<br>Peterson, ch. 3 & 4                           |
| April 28          | <i>Genes, Family &amp; Community;<br/>Genetic Testing</i>                             | Peterson, ch.5-8; ELCA, ch. 3 & 5                                             |
| May 5             | <i>Genetic Testing, Drugs and Therapy</i>                                             | Song, ch. 4; Peterson, ch. 9-12.                                              |
| May 12            | <i>Concluding Perspectives and Problems<br/>Moral Dilemma Paper due Fri. by 5 p.m</i> | Peterson, ch. 13 - conclusion;<br>Song, ch. 3 & 5;<br>ELCA ch. 6 & 8 [online] |
| May 16??          | Final Exam Period (group presentations)                                               | Group Presentation essay due May 19                                           |