2014

303-01 Christian Ethics: Methods and Problems

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THEOLOGY 303.01: CHRISTIAN ETHICS—METHODS AND PROBLEMS/Fall, 2014
Tuesday/Thursday: 11:30 AM – 12:45 PM (Cintas Center 202)

Instructor: Andy Buechel, Ph.D.  
Office: Hinkle 121  
Email: buechela@xavier.edu  
Office Hours: T/Th 10 – 11:15 AM and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will introduce you to the methodology of Christian ethics, i.e., the process by which we draw on sources of knowledge (scripture, tradition, reason, and contemporary experience) to formulate response to contemporary ethical issues in social ethics, paying particular attention to sexual ethics, the ethics of violence, and growth as persons of character. In addition to the issues studied in class, student will select an issue for further research.

OBJECTIVES:

1) A foundational understanding of significant texts, methods, and approaches in the discipline of contemporary Christian ethics;
2) A deeper appreciation of how these resources might be brought to bear on issues of contemporary ethical concern in a social context that is culturally, ethically, and religiously plural, and of how these resources might contribute importantly to the public moral and political discussion of these issues;
3) In engaging in critical theological reflection on ethical and religious questions of social significance, you will deepen your capacities for moral and religious insight and understanding while enlarging your moral capacities for a sense of justice and a sense of compassion;
4) In probing fundamental questions and experiences arising from the human condition, such as those concerning the nature of morality, the essence of justice, and the meaning of religious faith, you will increase your capacities for critical analysis and evaluation;
5) By organizing your ideas in writing and in oral communication, and by presenting clear and cogent arguments, you will become more effective communicators.

REQUIRED TEXTS:


Some of the readings for this class will be found on CANVAS. As part of your participation grade, these readings are to be PRINTED out and BROUGHT to class on the relevant date(s).

**AN EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLE:**

The construction of this course (the syllabus, assignments, classroom time, etc.) is grounded upon one basic pedagogical principle: “Learning results from what the student *does* and *thinks* and only from what the student does and thinks. The teacher can advance learning only by influencing what the student *does* to learn” (Herbert Simon). My goal in this course is to create the circumstances that are most likely to lead to significant learning for students. First and foremost here is the requirement of frequent, active engagement with the course material – both inside and outside the classroom.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

*Participation* (10%)

Since learning is a cooperative endeavor, participation in class is a significant component of the course and grading. All students are expected to come to class having read the assigned readings and ready to make a positive contribution to the class discussions. As part of participation, attendance is required. A student who is unable to attend a scheduled class meeting for any reason should notify the instructor in advance, whenever possible. An excused absence is given on account of personal illness, a death in the family, or duties performed for the University (some form of verification is needed: a signed note or email from your health-care provider, department of Athletics, *etc.*). After consulting with the instructor, the student will be permitted to make up any coursework missed as a result of excused absences. Students are allowed three unexcused absences without penalty. Additional unexcused absences will result in the reduction of the participation portion of the grade and more than five may result in failure for the course. Absences do not excuse a student from knowledge about the material discussed, any announcements, or any syllabus changes. Any unexcused absence on days of tests/exams will result in a score of zero on the test. An excused absence on a test date will result in a make-up taken as soon as possible.

There will be an attendance sheet at the front at each class session. The Instructor will take it upon the beginning of class. If you arrive late you MUST inform the instructor after class to ensure you have been counted as present. Three tardies will be counted as one unexcused absence.
Laptops, cell phones, etc. are NOT to be used during class time, unless you are specifically instructed to do so by the professor.

Student athletes are responsible for ensuring that the instructor is aware ahead of time of any scheduling conflicts or absences due to university-sponsored athletic events. Please provide a letter from your coach or advisor with the team schedule and dates highlighted that will necessitate an absence.

Most class sessions will be semi-lecture format, with the instructor asking questions of the students and encouraging discussion. It is ESSENTIAL that, in any such discussion, all persons are treated with respect and attentiveness. Active debate is both healthy and encouraged (including with the instructor), but must always take place within a context where we assume the best of one another and seek always after the truth.

Tests (25% each—50% total)
There will be two, non-cumulative tests given during the course. The last will take place during the time scheduled for our Final Exam.

These tests will consist of two parts: identification of key terms and essay. There will be six terms given, and the student will choose three to identify in one-two paragraphs. There will be three essay questions given, and the student will answer two.

Study guides will be given in the week before the exam and, should there be interest, the instructor will host a non-required study session before the test, with times and places to be announced. The instructor will NOT be re-lecturing or re-teaching at these sessions, but will be there as a resource if there is genuine confusion on a topic. It will be up to the students to come having reviewed the pertinent material and, as a rule, students will assist one another in understanding the required material.

Reader Responses (9%)
Once a week, BEFORE that class’ meeting, students will respond in 1-2 paragraphs to a question provided by the professor on the day’s readings. These are to be well-formed paragraphs responding to the question asked. They will be graded on the following scale:

2/2: Posts ranging from good to excellent; illustrates an engagement with the text and some critical reflection.

1/2: Posts ranging from poor to satisfactory; shows that the text has been read, but with little engagement.

0/2: Posts not completed on time, not completed at all, or undeserving of credit.
Reader responses will be submitted via CANVAS and can be accessed by clicking on either “Quizzes” or the “Syllabus” tabs and scrolling to the appropriate date at the bottom. After the beginning of class on the date due, you will no longer be able to access the question or turn in the response. As these can be answered from anywhere with computer access, the only valid excuse to make up one of these will be to bring me a doctor’s note or being on a school-sponsored athletic trip.

_term Paper/Case Study (31%)_

Prepare an analysis and critique a particular ethical issue (either one that we have studied in the course, or another of your own preference) by developing a case study. In this paper (8-10 double-spaced pages in length; 12 point font; standard 1 inch margins top-bottom, left-right), you may defend or critique a particular position discussed, expand and extrapolate a position discussed, or creatively address the topic in another way. You could, for example, select an issue within the areas of sexual, biomedical, or ecological ethics, or alternatively, you could elect to treat another issue (e.g., one pertaining to the ethics of business and labor practices). But you need to narrow your analysis down by focusing on a concrete “real world” case and context that also provides adequate material with which to conduct your analysis. This paper is intended to provide an opportunity to explore something that is of particular interest to you, and I would be pleased to help you to select an appropriate topic.

The assignment and its grading are broken down as follows. These dates are firm and failure to hand in any portion of the following on time will result in a loss of the respective points allotted to that portion:

a) **October 28th** – submit in hard copy a paragraph outlining your proposed paper topic (10%)
b) **November 11th** – submit in hardcopy a 1-page outline of your proposed paper and a list of the readings that you will be engaging in the creation of your paper (20%)
c) **December 9th** – submit in hard copy the final draft of your completed case study (70%).

**XAVIER’S POLICY FOR ACADEMIC HONESTY:**

This course will be conducted in keeping with Xavier’s policy on academic honesty:

*Academic Honesty*

The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation. **All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own.** Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. **However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.** Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an "F" in the course, and
expulsion from the University. The dean of the college in which the student is enrolled is to be informed in writing of all such incidents, though the teacher has full authority to assign the grade for the assignment, test, or course. If disputes of interpretation arise, the student, faculty member, and chair should attempt to resolve the difficulty. If this is unsatisfactory, the dean will rule in the matter. As a final appeal, the academic vice president will call a committee of tenured faculty for the purpose of making a final determination.

DISABILITY STATEMENT:

If you have a documented physical or learning disability requiring academic adjustments for this course, please contact the Learning Assistance Program (www.xavier.edu/lac), and see me in the first week of class to discuss any necessary arrangements or ways I can be of assistance.

GRADING SCALE:

This course uses the standard Xavier University grading scale, which can be found here: http://www.xavier.edu/registrar/facultyandstaff/Grading-Scales.cfm.

According to Theology Department standards, the grade of “A” does not mean “average” or “good” work or “strong effort.” It is reserved for exceptional academic performance. Students who seriously engage this class—the readings, discussions, papers, tests—should do will. Students who do not attend closely to the readings, bring necessary materials with them, pay attention to the discussions and lectures will do poorly.

The instructor is here as a resource. Part of your education, especially at a school like Xavier with relatively small class sizes, is getting to know your professors. Please take advantage of my posted office hours or, if those times do no work, make an appointment. If you find yourself struggling or uncertain at any point in the semester, I am happy to help. But do not expect a sympathetic response if you actively blow-off most of the semester and come to me in December worrying about your grade.

COURSE SCHEDULE, REQUIRED READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS:

(C)—Found on CANVAS.

(RR)—Reader Response question to be answer on CANVAS for this day.

NOTE: These readings and schedules are subject to change at the instructor’s discretion.

August

UNIT I: What is Christian Ethics and How Do We Think about It?

TUESDAY, 26th: Introduction/Class Overview

THURSDAY, 28th: What is Ethics? What is Christian Ethics? Experience as Morality’s Starting Point and Character as Its Basis

September

TUESDAY, 2nd: Choices and Community (RR)

READ: CCC: Chapters 3-4.

THURSDAY, 4th: The Bible and Christian Ethics

READ: CCC: Chapters 5-6.

TUESDAY, 9th: Conscience and Its Formation

READ: CCC: Chapters 7-8.

THURSDAY, 11th: Moral Norms, Natural Law, and Moral Reasoning (RR)

READ: CCC: Chapters 9-10.

TUESDAY, 16th: Understanding Sin (RR)

READ: CCC: Chapter 11

Unit II: Christian Sexual Ethics

THURSDAY 18th: Moral Conversion

READ: CCC: Chapter 12.

TUESDAY, 23rd: Sexuality and Its Meanings

READ: JL: Chapter 4

THURSDAY, 25th: Just Love and Just Sex: Preliminary Considerations (RR)

READ: JL: Chapter 5

TUESDAY, 30th: Just Sex as a Framework for a Sexual Ethic

READ: JL: Chapter 6

October

THURSDAY, 2nd: The Context of Just Love (RR)

READ: JL: Chapter 7
TUESDAY, 7\textsuperscript{th}: OPEN SESSION

THURSDAY, 9\textsuperscript{th}: NO CLASS—ENJOY FALL BREAK!

TUESDAY, 14\textsuperscript{th}: OPEN SESSION

THURSDAY, 16\textsuperscript{th}: MIDTERM

UNIT III: Ethics and Violence

TUESDAY, 21\textsuperscript{st}: Powers and the Domination System (RR)


THURSDAY, 23\textsuperscript{rd}: Jesus’ Answer to the Domination System


TUESDAY, 28\textsuperscript{th}: Practical Nonviolence


PARAGRAPH CASE STUDY PAPER PROPOSAL DUE!

THURSDAY, 30\textsuperscript{th}: Beyond Pacifism and Just War


November

TUESDAY, 4\textsuperscript{th}: The Enemy and Prayer (RR)


Unit IV: Ethics and Spirituality

THURSDAY, 6\textsuperscript{th}: Humility and Gratitude


TUESDAY, 11\textsuperscript{th}: Worth and Self-Esteem

READ: GL: 34-47.

ONE PAGE OUTLINE AND READINGS LIST FOR CASE STUDY DUE!
THURSDAY, 13th: Justice and Solidarity


TUESDAY, 18th: Trust and Fidelity

READ: GL: 67-78.

THURSDAY, 20th: Jesus and Discipleship (RR)

READ: GL: 79-95.
Sobrino, “The Principle of Mercy,” pp. 16-20 (C)

TUESDAY, 25th: Hope, Beatitudes, and Love

READ: GL: 96-118

THURSDAY, 27th: NO CLASS—HAVE A WONDERFUL THANKSGIVING!

December

TUESDAY, 2nd: The Good Life (RR)


THURSDAY 4th: Principles of Catholic Social Teaching (I)

READ: TBD

TUESDAY 9th: Principles of Catholic Social Teaching (II)

CASE STUDY/TERM PAPER DUE!

THURSDAY 11th: Course Wrap-Up and Discussion

FINAL TEST DATE: Thursday December 16, 10:30-12:20