111-19 Theological Foundations

James Helmer

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THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
Theology 111-19
Spring 2014
TH 2:30-3:45

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*The easiest and most efficient way to reach me outside of my designated office hours is by e-mail (helmerj@xavier.edu). I will endeavor to respond to e-mail as quickly as is reasonably possible.

Course Description

THEO 111: “Theological Foundations” is an essential element of the Ethics, Religion, and Society (E/RS) component of the undergraduate core curriculum at Xavier, which serves to promote critical ethical and religious reflection on issues central to our collective social and political life from the perspectives of the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. (http://www.xavier.edu/ers/index.cfm) THEO 111 serves more generally to introduce students to the discipline of theology understood as a critical dialogue between Christian traditions and contemporary human experience and it typically engages issues such as the nature of religion and revelation, the sources and methods of theological reflection, and the ethical dimensions of living in community. In addition to meeting these goals, our course this semester will serve to deepen your sense of ethical reflection and to promote the skills related to the effective moral analysis of ethical issues and to practical moral reasoning, both individually and collectively.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

As indicated above, the overarching objectives of this course are to promote critical ethical and religious reflection on issues central to our collective and social political life, to introduce you to the discipline of theology, and to promote those skills related to effective moral analysis and to effective practical reasoning. The successful realization of these overarching objectives should lead to the achievement of the following learning outcomes:

1) 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;
2) 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;
3) By engaging in critical conversation with religious traditions (predominantly yet not exclusively, with the Christian theological tradition) through the lens of contemporary human experience, and in considering how these traditions might provide ethical resources for engaging contemporary global challenges and for promoting peace and justice, you will gain a deeper sense of the interconnections both between the various forms of human cognition and also between the various academic disciplines;
4) By organizing your ideas in writing and in oral communication, and by presenting clear and cogent arguments, you will become more effective communicators.
Course Texts


*Other readings/resources on Blackboard (blackboard.xavier.edu) are denoted by (RSV) on the course syllabus.*

Course Requirements/Methodology and Grading

Course Medium: As noted in the School's course catalog and in the course description above, this is an introductory level course in Theology. The course will run in a twice weekly lecture and discussion-style format, and will integrate the reading, (individual and group) analysis, and discussion of texts, films, and other media.

Course Assignments and Responsibilities:

1/ Class Attendance, Class Preparation, and Class Participation

Class Attendance: Regular and punctual attendance is essential, both in terms of fulfilling the course requirements, and in terms of your success as a student, and you are expected to have prepared for lectures and class discussions through a careful consideration of the assigned readings. The assigned daily readings and class discussions will provide you with an opportunity to critically respond to the assigned texts and to enter into conversation with one another on various significant ethical issues. Each and every person in the class will be expected to have engaged conscientiously with the daily readings so that she or he will be able to contribute actively to the daily class discussions. You will find that if you prepare carefully for each class the class will be more interesting and more to your enjoyment.

A sign-in sheet will be available at the beginning of each scheduled class date. In order to be recorded as present for any particular class day, you MUST sign the class register for that date on entry to the classroom at the beginning of the class period. In order to be recorded as present for any particular class day, you must also arrive punctually and be prepared to begin at the scheduled class start time. Tardiness without a reasonable excuse will constitute an unjustified class absence. No one will be admitted to class after five minutes past the scheduled start time.

If you are unable to attend a scheduled class meeting for any reason, please notify me by e-mail (helmerj@xavier.edu) in advance, whenever possible. If the absence is necessitated by personal illness, death in the immediate family, or duties performed for the University, you should seek an excused absence through the appropriate office and designated procedure as specified in the Student Handbook (http://www.xavier.edu/deanofstudents/documents/studenthandbook.pdf). Upon consultation with the instructor, you may be permitted to make up any course work missed as the result of the excused absence. Unexcused absences for more than two classes will automatically result in a lowering of your grade by one (numerical) point per subsequent missed class, and more than three unexcused absences may result in automatic failure of the course. I will notify you in writing (i.e. by e-mail) once you have two unexcused absences.
**Class Preparation:** What does it mean to be “prepared” for this class? Carefully complete all of the assigned readings prior to coming to class, and take notes on the readings. The purpose of these notes is to allow you to participate fully in class discussion and to provide you with a study resource for exams. Whatever you read for a given day should be brought to class on that day. Successful class preparation depends on developing and exercising good study habits. What works best varies from person to person, according to her/his particular learning habits, but here are a few suggestions:

1. Schedule a fixed period of time for class preparation.
2. Do your readings in an environment where you will be least distracted (e.g., in the library). Lack of distractions will help you to focus better, and to work more efficiently overall.
3. Preparation includes both reading and note-taking. Try to summarize that day’s readings in your own words, as though you were explaining the thesis of the reading selection to a friend who is not in the course. Your summary should include questions that you can raise during class discussion.
4. Discuss each day’s reading assignment with a friend in the class. After completing steps one through three, get together with a friend (at Starbucks or elsewhere) and compare your individual notes.

**Readings:** This is a reading-intensive course, so you should schedule your time to allow you to complete all of the assigned readings carefully. Diligent completion of assigned reading is an essential foundation for understanding class lectures, participating in class discussion, and for completing writing assignments. If you do not understand some part of the reading, please do not hesitate to e-mail me or to come to see me with questions. These readings are outlined below in the Reading Schedule.

When you read, keep the following questions in mind:

1. What are the most important points in the text? Why are they important?
2. Do you agree with the claims that the author is making? Why or why not?
3. Is there anything in the reading that you do not understand?

**Class Participation:** This is a discussion-intensive course. Given the nature of the class, participation in class discussion is essential. The goal of these discussions is to help you better understand the readings and lectures, and also to provide you with practice in engaging these challenging issues with others. The key purpose of class discussion is just that: to discuss. Intensive class discussion provides you with ongoing opportunities to develop your abilities to think critically and to articulate and defend your particular point of view. This in turn requires an environment where participants are willing to listen to and to rationally consider arguments that they may disagree with so that everyone feels comfortable to communicate their own views. Even though there are divergent and even opposing opinions on different issues covered by the course, it is essential that you develop the skills to engage and to discuss such issues in a receptive and fruitful way.

→ **Regular class attendance, class preparation, and class participation will comprise 24% of your overall grade.**

2/Exams: There will be two take-home written examinations in the course. The take-home midterm examination, which will be due (submitted by e-mail) by 5PM on Thursday, February 27, 2014, will cover the material that is treated in the first half of the course and it will comprise 20% of your overall grade; the take-home final examination will cover the material that is treated over the entire course and it will comprise 30% of your overall grade. The examinations, which will be comprised of short essay formats, will cover all of the assigned reading as well as the class lectures. The examinations will require you to synthesize and apply what you have learned through class lectures and discussions. The final examination for the course will be due by the date stipulated in the
University’s official final examination schedule (to be announced at a later date), and the examination is also to be submitted by e-mail. According to University policy, an unexcused absence (i.e., failure to electronically submit the examination by the submission deadline) for either the midterm or final examination will result in a student receiving a grade of no credit. The instructor and the student’s Dean will determine whether the cause of the absence is sufficient to permit a later re-administration of the examination. Please review your examination schedule in advance, in order to ensure that you do not have a scheduling conflict between two or more examinations.

➔ The Midterm and Final Examinations will aggregatively comprise 50% of your overall grade.

3/Weekly Response Papers: Each student will prepare a one page response paper (single-spaced, twelve point font, 1 inch margins, with the class information (“THEO 111-03”) and your name included in a header at the top of the page) for each Tuesday class meeting to be submitted in paper/hard copy form to me at the beginning of that particular class day. The response paper is to be formulated in response to a discussion question distributed in advance (typically the Thursday class prior) and the paper should engage critically with the main argument of the text under consideration for that day, and raise questions in response to the main claims being advanced in the text. In your response you may either agree or disagree with the main claims that the author is making (and indicate the reasons for your dis/agreement), raise issues about points that the author either fails to consider, or ought to consider more seriously than s/he does, and relate the author’s perspective to other texts that we have been considering in the course.

Each paper will be graded pass or fail, and the minimum quality needed for a passing paper is a B. Each paper will count for 2% of your overall final grade. Barring exceptional circumstances, the failure to submit a required response paper by the required time (i.e., the beginning of the class period on the class day that the paper is due) will result in a loss of credit for that particular response paper. **No response paper will be due on March 4, 2014.**

➔ The Weekly Response Papers will comprise 26% (13 papers @ 2% per paper) of your overall grade.

Course Grading:

Class Preparation, Class Attendance, Class Participation 24%
Midterm Examination 20%
Final Examination 30%
Weekly Response Papers 26%

My expectation is that you will observe the basic requirements of grammar and syntax in all of your written work. Aside from the basics of correct grammar and syntax, your overall performance will be assessed in relation to: 1) your overall comprehension of the material (apprehension and understanding of the facts, terms and concepts in the readings and class discussions); 2) your analysis of the material (the ability to understand the structure of and relationship between the parts of a given text); 3) your synthesis of the material (the ability to relate items of a given text or idea to other texts and ideas, creating new ideas in the process); 4) your overall contribution to class discussion; and 5) your clarity of communication (your ability to communicate what you have comprehended, analyzed, and synthesized to others). These basic criteria can be summed up in terms of two scholarly virtues in relation to which your written work will be assessed: those of **accuracy** and **precision**. (For more on grading see, [http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm))

**Accuracy** refers to how accurately you present or represent the views of your interlocutors, either the views of those authors whose work we are reading, or those of your classmates. While there is always some reasonable hermeneutical latitude in presenting someone else’s views, there are at the same time reasonable limits to the practice of interpretation that are provided for by a commitment to truth in moral enquiry. Thus, there is a close
link between the accurate (re-) presentation of someone’s views and the principle of charitable dialogue which enjoins one to present the perspectives and arguments of one’s interlocutors in the fairest possible light and without distortion (i.e., by giving them the benefit of doubt and attributing to them the strongest/most defensible version of the view that they are advocating). As with any highly complex discussion, the overall success of our class as a form of extended conversation will depend highly on the practice of charitable dialogue, and accordingly, a high value will be placed in the accurate presentation and representation of various views. The desideratum of Precision presupposes accuracy but differs from it in that precision pertains to the clarity and conciseness with which one’s views are expressed. The presence of sufficient precision in self-expression provides for the possibility of one’s claims being grasped in their fullness and thus, of being appropriately responded to. In accordance with Academic Regulations, the following grading scale will be used:

Undergraduate Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quality Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VF</td>
<td>Failure to officially withdraw</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Official withdraw</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>Audit, no credit, no effect on GPA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Satisfactory, credit earned, no effect on GPA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory, no credit earned, GPA is effected</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>No credit earned, non-graded</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Incomplete Work - Undergraduates

Course assignments are due at the time specified by the instructor. Extension is time beyond the termination of the course is rarely granted and only for a serious reason. If an extension of time is granted, the grade of "I" (Undergraduate Incomplete) will be assigned and calculated as an "F" in the grade point average. Unless the work is completed and submitted by the fifteenth calendar day of the academic semester following the course, the student will fail the course and the "I" will be permanently changed to an "F" (summer term is excluded). Exceptions to this policy must be approved in writing by the appropriate dean prior to that date. The faculty member initiates the grade change process once the student has made up the incomplete work.

If the student is deferred for graduation due to a grade of "I" (Incomplete), he or she may be eligible for the original date of graduation. Work must be completed, graded and recorded within thirty days of that term's graduation date.

Students with Special Needs

Students with documented disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations as needed in accordance with general academic regulations. If you need accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible. Accommodations will not be granted retroactively.

Academic Integrity Policy

Please cite your sources on all assignments prepared outside of class (both papers and case studies). Quoting or paraphrasing work without properly citing it constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism on an assignment will result in a failing grade for that assignment and possibly a failing grade for the semester. Cheating on an examination will likewise result in a failing grade for that assignment and possibly a failing grade for the semester.

Grade Disclosure Policy

It is a violation of federal law for me to communicate with you about your grades by e-mail or over the telephone; this constitutes a breach of privacy because these media are not fully secured. Grades will be provided in the report of academic achievement that is sent at the end of each term. Should you have questions about your grades, I would be pleased to speak with you personally after class or to make an appointment to meet with you at another time.
SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Part One: Ethics

Week 1
Tuesday, January 14, 2014 – Introduction to the Course: Overview Discussion – Ethics, Religion, and Society

Thursday, January 16, 2014 – Being Ethical: Ethics and Human Happiness

Required Readings:
Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis* (excerpts) (RSV)

Week 2
Tuesday, January 21, 2014 – Being Ethical: The Origins of Ethics

Required Readings:
Steven Pinker, “The Moral Instinct” (RSV)
Paul Bloom, *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil* (excerpts) (RSV)

Thursday, January 23, 2014 – Being Ethical: A Matter of Reason or Emotion/Feeling?

Required Readings:
Paul Bloom, *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil* (excerpts) (RSV)

Week 3
Tuesday, January 28, 2014 – Being Ethical: The Challenges of Cultural and Moral Relativism I

Required Readings:
Anthony Appiah, “Wars against Women”, in *The Honor Code* (RSV)

Thursday, January 30, 2014 – Being Ethical: The Challenges of Cultural and Moral Relativism II

Required Readings:
Steven Lukes, *Moral Relativism* (excerpts) (RSV)
Week 4

Tuesday, February 4, 2014 – **Morality in a Diverse Globalized Context I**

**Required Readings:**

Kwame Antony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Intro and Chapters 1, 4, 6 and 9

Thursday, February 6, 2014 – **Morality in a Diverse Globalized Context II**

**Required Readings:**

Kwame Antony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Chapters 2, 3, 5 and 10

**Part Two: From Ethics to Religion**

Week 5

Tuesday, February 11, 2014 – **Moral Animals**

**Required Readings:**


Thursday, February 13, 2014 – **Believing Animals**

**Required Readings:**


Week 6

Tuesday, February 18, 2014 – **Story-telling Animals**

**Required Readings:**

Christian Smith, *Moral Believing Animals*, Chapter 4

Thursday, February 20, 2014 – **The Nature of Religion**

**Required Readings:**

Week 7
Tuesday, February 25, 2014 - Is Religion a Virus?

Required Readings:

Richard Dawkins, “The God Delusion” and “The Virus of Faith” (video) (RSV)

Tuesday, February 27, 2014 – The Myth of Religious Violence?

Required Readings:

William Cavanaugh, The Myth of Religious Violence (excerpts) (RSV)

Week 8
Tuesday, March 4, 2014 – No Class – Spring Break

Thursday, March 6, 2014 – No Class – Spring Break

Part Three: The Practice of Theology

Week 9
Tuesday, March 11, 2014 – The Nature of Christian Faith

Required Readings:

Bevans, Theology in Global Perspective, Introduction and Chapter 1

Thursday, March 13, 2014 – The Practice of Theology

Required Readings:

Bevans, Theology in Global Perspective, Chapter 2

Week 10
Tuesday, March 18, 2014 – Bible and Christian Tradition I

Required Readings:

Bevans, Theology in Global Context, Chapters 4 and 5

Thursday, March 20, 2014 – Bible and Christian Tradition II

Required Readings:

Bevans, Theology in Global Context, Chapters 10 and 12
Week 11

Tuesday, March 25, 2014 – Human Experience and Theology I

Required Readings:

Sandra Schneiders, “The Bible and Feminism” (RSV)
Hill, Knitter, and Madges, Faith, Religion, and Theology, Chapter 11 (recommended) (RSV)

Thursday, March 27, 2014 – Human Experience and Theology II

Required Readings:

James Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree (RSV)
Hill, Knitter, and Madges, Faith, Religion, and Theology, Chapter 11 (recommended) (RSV)

Part Four: Ethics, Religion and Society

Week 12

Tuesday, April 1, 2014 – Challenges to Christian Faith: The Experience of Human Suffering I

Required Readings:

The Book of Job
Gustavo Gutierrez, On Job, Intro and Chapters 1-6

Thursday, April 3, 2014 – Challenges to Christian Faith: The Experience of Human Suffering II

Required Readings:

Elie Wiesel, Night (excerpts)

Week 13

Tuesday, April 8, 2014 – Christian Faith as a Response to Human Suffering

Required Readings:

Jon Sobrino, Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity and Hope, Chapters 1-2

Thursday, April 10, 2014 – Christian Faith as a Response to Human Suffering II

Required Readings:

Jon Sobrino, Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity and Hope, Chapter 3
Week 14

Tuesday, April 15, 2014 – Christian Faith as a Response to Human Suffering III

Required Readings:

Jon Sobrino, Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity and Hope, Chapter 4

Thursday, April 17, 2014 – No Class – Easter Break

Week 15

Tuesday, April 22, 2014 – Christian Faith as a Response to Human Suffering IV

Required Readings:

Jon Sobrino, Where is God? Earthquake Terrorism, Barbarity and Hope, Chapter 5

Thursday, April 24, 2014 – Christian Faith as a Response to Human Suffering V

Required Readings:

Jon Sobrino, Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity and Hope, Chapters 6-7, Epilogue

Week 16

Tuesday, April 29 – Saints and Heroes I

Required Readings:

James Martin, My Life with the Saints (excerpts)

Thursday, May 1 – Saints and Heroes II/Course Review

Required Readings:

James Martin, My Life with the Saints (excerpts)
Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World (excerpts)