

Introduction to Christian Social Ethics

Theology 1301-151
Spring 2008
MWF 9:00-9:50
Bellarmine 216
Saint Joseph's University

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Office Hours: M, W, F,
1:00-2:00 & by appointment

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to Christian ethics and how the forms and teachings of impact the broader society. In particular, students will be encouraged to develop analytical and critical thinking skills, as well as reflect on your own processes of moral reflection. Throughout the course, we will think and test our ideas about Christian social ethics through examining the array of questions surrounding various issues in American society, including media and industrialized food.

The course centers on three key aspects of the moral life. (1) We will study foundational principles in the moral life by examining several classical, philosophical, and theological approaches to ethics and moral reflection, including the key issues of social ethics. (2) We will explore the role that story and narrative play in shaping the ethics and morals of both communities and individuals. (3) We will examine some of the questions that arise when we begin to realize that we are not moral machines, but rather human beings who try to live well while growing, changing, and developing in community.

Texts

Connors, Russell B. and Patrick T. McCormick. *Character, Choices & Community*. New York: Paulist Press, 1998.

Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. New York: Harper Collins; Harper Perennial, 2002.

Beaudoin, Tom. *Consuming Faith*. Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2003.

Raimes, Ann. *Pocket Keys for Writers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Required course reader available at SJU Press.

Course Goals

You will:

- 1) understand and be able to use ethical terms, concepts, and methods that are prominent in Christian approaches to the moral life.
- 2) use these terms, concepts, and methods to examine contemporary social issues.
- 3) use the terms, concepts, and methods of Christian social ethics to build arguments for particular positions on moral issues.
- 4) present ideas and respectfully engage in dialogue with others when discussing the course materials and various cases we will encounter in class.
- 5) develop an understanding of the role of narrative and cultural communication in society and the moral life.
- 6) continue to develop critical reading skills for both primary & secondary texts.
- 7) continue to identify and clarify the values significant to your own ethical reflection and moral decision-making processes.

This course has been approved as fulfilling partial requirements for the Faith-Justice Studies Minor. Faith-Justice Studies courses (1) engage students directly with the “sufferings of the poor” and explore the call, not only to serve them, but also to stand in solidarity with them, (2) invite students to analyze institutions and social structures and to question prevailing systems of thought or action that systematically contribute to modern-day social problems (poverty, racism, human rights violations, violence), (3) challenge students to consider existing social values and priorities in light of Gospel values and faith-based traditions of social justice, (4) present students with alternative models (social movements or schools of thought) that challenge current modes of thinking and provide creative steps toward social transformation, and (5) provide students with tools and approaches for acting as faithful citizens in a more just society.

Given the subject matter of the course, we will address these objectives regularly.

Course Requirements

First Quarter Exam	10 %
Midterm Exam	10 %
Final Exam	15 %
Preparation	15 %
Participation	15 %
Discussion Paper	15 %
Issue Assessment Paper	20 %
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Total	100 %

Three Examinations – 35% of final grade total (course goals 1, 2, 3, & 5)

The exams will be comprised of short answer and essay questions. They are designed to let you show your comprehension, analysis, and synthesis of assigned readings, lecture material, and conclusions of class discussions and activities. The final will be cumulative.

Preparation and Class Participation – 30% of final grade total

The success of our work together in this class will depend upon the engagement of all students in the educational endeavor. This engagement is reflected most clearly in daily preparation and participation.

Each person in the class will be expected to *prepare* daily readings and assignments so that she or he will be able to contribute to the discussions and class activities, as well as to prepare to interact and participate in class. Each person in class will also be expected to *participate* in class discussions and activities. Typical opportunities for demonstrating preparation and participation: presentation of various assignments to a small group, explanation of readings to classmates, answering questions posed by the instructor, participation in discussions of issues posed in class, in-class writing assignments, etc.

Preparation (course goals 1, 5, 6, & 7) will be evaluated on the basis of short quizzes that will be given throughout the semester. It is likely that there will be six quizzes, but the exact number and schedule of the quizzes will be at the professor's discretion, based on the particular needs of each class. Presentation of Issue Assessment Papers will also be included in the Preparation grade. *Participation* (course goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7) will be evaluated by the professor through observation of daily classes. Participation progress reports will given out shortly after midterm so that you can chart your progress in this area.

Written Assignments – 35% of final grade (course goals 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5)

Short Essays – These 1-2 page, short written assignments are aimed at getting out your ideas on specifically defined, rather narrow questions. These will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis, in accordance with whether or not you completed the assignment and approached the essay in a serious manner. Students will need to redo any failed short essay.

- 1) Song Essay: Summary of the moral claims made in a song. Due 2/4. (goals 1, 2 & 5)
- 2) Scripture Essay: Proposal for the three central scripture passages of Christian social ethics. Due 2/18. (goals 1, 2 & 6)
- 3) Paper Proposal: Proposal for the Issue Assessment. Due 3/28. (goals 1, 2, 3, & 6)

Papers – In these 5-7 page written assignments, you will have a chance to demonstrate your understanding of the course material, ability to analyze moral positions, and develop your own cases on particular issues. These will be graded in the standard "A to F" manner.

- 1) Discussion Essay: Report on and evaluation of a discussion of a class topic with non-class-members outside of class. In the Interview Essay, you are required to plan, carry out, analyze, and report on conversations you will have with two individuals on a topic from the readings we have worked with so far this semester. Due 3/14.
- 2) Issue Assessment: Examination and evaluation of a contemporary social issue of your choosing light of principles of Christian social ethics. In the Issue Assessment, you will have to describe a world situation based on three print media sources, explain several key ideas of Christian social thought that speak to the issue at hand using the course texts as your key resources, analyze the situation raised in the news story using the ideas you have identified, and propose a viable remedy for the situation. General topics areas will be selected from a list of topics provided by the instructor. Due 4/16.

More detailed information on the papers will be provided as the semester progresses.

Measures of Success

Overall, performance is considered in light of three key activities:

- 1) *comprehension* of the material: apprehension and understanding of the facts, terms and concepts in the readings and lectures
- 2) *analysis* of the material: ability to understand the structure of and relationship between the parts of a given text
- 3) *synthesis* of the material: ability to relate items of a given text or idea to other texts and ideas, creating new ideas in the process

Yet, having good ideas is not sufficient for success either in class or life. You must be able to communicate your ideas to others and work with others toward goals. As a result, you will also be evaluated in terms of your:

- 4) *contribution* to the classroom: ability to contribute one's comprehension, analysis, and synthesis to the overall community of learning in a charitable and respectful manner
- 5) *clarity* of communication: ability to communicate one's comprehension, analysis, and synthesis to the overall community of learning
- 6) *mechanics*: ability to communicate one's comprehension, analysis, and synthesis in standard academic English. It is expected that all written assignments will be free from errors of spelling, punctuation, and syntax when they are handed-in or posted to the web.

Grading

If you do all of the work required in a class in an adequate and average manner, you deserve a grade of "C." Grades of "B" are given for "very good" work. Grades of "A" are given for "excellent" work. Grades of "D" are given for "poor" work. Using the categories above, the grades sound something like:

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| A | excellent comprehension, insightful analysis, and creative synthesis of material
frequently makes <i>invaluable</i> contributions with:
clarity in spoken communication and no issues with mechanics in written work |
| B | very good comprehension, solid analysis, and good synthesis of material,
frequently makes <i>valuable</i> contributions to class with:
clarity in spoken communication and no issues with mechanics in written work |
| C | adequate comprehension, can do some analysis, beginning to synthesize material,
frequently makes contributions to class with:
some clarity in spoken communication and some issues in written work |
| D | difficulty comprehending material, little analysis, little ability to synthesize material,
makes infrequent contribution to class or attempts to make contributions with:
little clarity in spoken communication and some problems in written work |
| F | difficulty comprehending material, no analysis, no ability to synthesize material,
makes no worthwhile contribution to class, either in written or spoken form |

Details on Writing Assignments

Submitting Written Work – All written assignments must be submitted to the instructor in two forms: 1) a paper copy of the essay must be delivered at the *start of class* on the day it is due, and 2) an electronic copy uploaded to the course site at Turnitin.com. If either copy is late, the paper is considered late and will be penalized accordingly. Your paper is not considered “handed in” until I receive both copies. The paper copy is for me to read, mark, and return to you. **Issue Assessments will not be returned to the student unless requested before it is turned in.**

Late Assignments – Written assignments turned in late will be penalized a fraction of a grade per day late for the first three days (1 day = 24 hours). Late written assignments will not be accepted after the third day late.

Citations – The papers that we are doing are focused on building your document-reading skills and letting you demonstrate your insights into Christian ethics. I am mostly interested in your ideas. But, when you inevitably draw upon ideas from other authors, whether they are from our course readings your own research, all material taken from you use must be properly cited. Footnotes are the standard method for citing in Theology, but parenthetical styles are also acceptable. See a *Pocket Keys for Writing* for details on citations.

Errors – I expect your written work to be *free from errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanics*. It is very hard for me to understand your great ideas if I cannot read your text. Thus, if you have a lot of errors, your paper will be penalized. Having more than five errors in any written assignment will result in the reduction of the grade by one fraction of a grade (e.g. A+ reduced to A, B- reduced to C+, etc.). More than ten errors in any written assignment will result in the reduction of the grade by two fractions of a grade. More than fifteen errors will result in an “F” on the assignment. If you have particular difficulties with writing in English, please 1) discuss the situation with the instructor and 2) avail yourself of the resources of the Writing Center.

Formatting – Written assignments should be formatted according to some recognized standard format (e.g. Turabian, MLA, APA, etc.) If your particular college has a particular style manual that you use for writing assignments, please indicate this to me *before* you turn in any written work so that I know what you are trying to do. If it does not have a prescribed style manual, formatting for written assignments should follow the guidelines for format, grammar, and punctuation in the *Pocket Keys for Writing* manual, available at the SJU bookstore.

At a minimum, papers must be word processed, and turned in with 1 inch margins, double spaced, with page numbers, and using a standard serif font (like Times or Palatino) in 11 OR 12 point size. Papers in cursive bold, or display fonts will be returned to the student with an F. Please put a cover page on your paper that has your name, the date, title, relevant class info, etc. *Do not* put your name on the other pages of your paper. Papers that are shorter than the required length will be penalized.

“Plagiarism is an academic crime punishable by academic death.”
Lt. Roland Sharp, *Man of the House*

Etcetera

- *Regarding Academic Honesty* – Work can be difficult and time consuming, but cheating and plagiarizing others' work is unacceptable. At a minimum, violations of the Academic Honesty Policy will result in the recording of a grade of "F" for the course. Violations of the Academic Honesty Policy will be reported to the Office of the Dean and could result in your expulsion from the University. You should familiarize yourself with the Academic Honesty Policy on pages 57-59 of the University Catalog.

- *Regarding Attendance* – Learning is a community endeavor. Each class period is important to your success in the course and the success of our community of learning. Simply put, you are expected to attend every class. If you miss three classes (1 week of class), your grade for the course will be lowered by a fraction of a grade. If you miss six classes (2 weeks), you will receive an "F" for the course. Not an "FA" — an "F".

The cause of the absence, if *very* serious, will be considered. But "having an excuse" does not guarantee that it will be considered serious enough to warrant being excused from the penalty for missing the class. The best way to ensure that you receive a participation grade is to be present and participate. Otherwise, be sure to see me *before* the absence.

- *Syllabus* – The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus as the course progresses. You will be informed of any changes that are made to the schedule or syllabus, and updated versions of either will be handed out as need be. In general, it is unlikely that changes will be made to the syllabus itself (e.g., class requirements, rules, and regulations). Each class, however, has its own pace and personality. Since it is better to change the schedule to meet the needs of the class rather than force the class to keep up with the syllabus, it is highly likely that changes will be made to the course schedule.

- *Students with Disabilities* – For those who have a documented learning, physical or psychological disability who are requesting reasonable academic adjustments, you are encouraged to contact Services for Students with Disabilities, Room 113, Science Center, 610-660-1774 or 610-660-1620 early in the semester. If you suspect that you have an *undiagnosed* disability (learning, physical, psychological), please contact Services for Students with Disabilities to discuss this concern.

It is important to discuss instructional needs and accommodations with me in the semester. All requests for extended-timed testing must be discussed with me at a *minimum of one week prior to the date of each exam*.

Introduction to Christian Social Ethics 1301-151: Course Schedule v. 1

		topic	read for class	due today
	m	1/14	Introduction to the Course	
1	w	1/16	Ethics and Morals	
	f	1/18	Human Person: Character <i>Character, Choices & Community, 1 & 2</i>	
	m	1/21	Martin Luther King Day No Class	
2	w	1/23	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , 1-8, 13-17 (R) Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , 86-91 (R)	
	f	1/25	St. Thomas Aquinas, from the <i>Summa Theologiae</i> , II-I, qq. 1, 3, 4 and 5. (R)	
	m	1/28	Human Action: Choices CCC, chapter 3	
3	w	1/30	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 3	
	f	2/1	Human Society: Community Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , 91-111 (R) Pope John Paul II, <i>From Justice of Each Come Peace for All</i> (R)	
	m	2/4	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (R)	<i>Song Essay</i>
4	w	2/6	CCC, chapter 4 Economic Justice for All, par. 63-74 (R)	
	f	2/8	Exam	<i>Exam</i>
	m	2/11	Sources: Stories CCC, chapters 5 [and 6] Scripture Passages (R)	
5	w	2/13	Scripture Passages (R)	
	f	2/15	Scripture Passages (R)	
	m	2/18	Shea, "Storytelling & Religious Identity," 23-32 (R)	<i>Scripture Essay</i>
6	w	2/20	Bettsworth, "Cultural Narratives," 15-25 (R) [<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , Chapter 1]	
	f	2/22	Warren, "Images and the Structuring of Experience," 247-57 (R) Daly, "Television Images of Work and the Moral Imagination," 107-115 (R)	
	m	2/25	<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , Chapter 2	
7	w	2/27	Shanks, "Power, Truth, and the Flow of Information," 43-51 (R) Various articles about media to be e-mailed out.	
	f	2/29	Midterm Exam	<i>Exam</i>

	m	3/3	Spring Break	No Class	
8	w	3/5			
	f	3/7			
	m	3/10	Sources: Natural Law	CCC, chapter 10	
9	w	3/12		Maritain, "The Person and Society," 47-70 (R)	
	f	3/14	Sources: Norms	CCC, chapter 9, pages 154-162 Gula, <i>Reason Informed By Faith</i> , chapter 19 (R)	<i>Discussion Essay</i>
	m	3/17		Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologia</i> , II-II, q. 66 (R)	
10	w	3/19	Sources: Voices from the Margins	Gutierrez, "A Theology of Liberation," xx-xl (R)	
	f	3/21	Easter Break		
	m	3/24			
11	w	3/26	Methods of Moral Reasoning	Beauchamp and Childress, <i>Principles of Biomedical Ethics</i> , "Types of Ethical Theory," 44-100 (R)	
	f	3/28		Beauchamp and Childress, 44-100	<i>Paper Proposal</i>
	m	3/31		Beauchamp and Childress, 44-100	
12	w	4/2	Relativism and Rationality	Carson, "An Approach to Relativism," 161-83 (R)	
	f	4/4	Conscience	CCC, chapter 7 [and 8]	
	m	4/7		Vatican II: <i>Dignitatis Humanae & Nostra Aetate</i> (R)	
13	w	4/9	Mind, Body, and Being	<i>Consuming Faith</i> , chapter 1-2	
	f	4/11		<i>Consuming Faith</i> , chapter 3	
	m	4/14		<i>Consuming Faith</i> , chapters 4 and 5	
14	w	4/16		<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 8	<i>Issue Assessment</i>
	f	4/18	Sin and Evil	CCC, chapter 11	
	m	4/21		<i>Fast Food Nation</i> , chapter 9	
15	w	4/23	Christian Moral Conversion	CCC, chapter 12	
	f	4/25		Course Wrap-up	

	r	5/1	Final (Preliminary Schedule)	Thursday, May 1, 9:00-11:00 AM	
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