

CE 1051: INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN ETHICS

(Summer Session 2012)

Course Overview:

This introductory-level course fulfills PSR's foundational requirements in Christian Ethics and is intended for students who have completed their basic classes in biblical studies. In the first portion of the class, participants will develop a solid grasp of the fundamentals of moral theory as well as the basic tools of doing ethics from the vantage point of Mainline Protestant traditions in America. In the second half of the course, students will use their new-found skills and knowledge to deepen and clarify their ethical perspectives on a number of contemporary issues. Classical and emerging perspectives in Christian Ethics will be used throughout the course.

Class Duration:

July 2- August 10th (Six Weeks)

Teaching Team:

Professor:

Dr. Randall Miller , Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics & Social Theory
PSR, Holbrook #129 Email: rmiller@psr.edu Phone: 510-849-8207

Learning Outcomes:

Through lectures, readings, and group discussions, students are expected to achieve the following learning outcomes:

1. A demonstrated knowledge of the basic methods and modes of moral reasoning.
2. A demonstrated ability to apply the four sources of moral guidance, i.e., scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, in formulating moral responses.
3. A demonstrated awareness and understanding of a range of Christian responses to contemporary moral issues.
4. A demonstrated ability to develop and communicate coherent moral responses using the skills and information acquired in this course.

Required Texts:

1. Kyle Fedler, *Exploring Christian Ethics: Biblical Foundations for Morality*
2. Robert L. Stivers et al. *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach, Third Ed.*
3. Course Reader

Class Requirements:

1. Timely completion of weekly reading assignments. Students should read, take notes, and be ready to participate in Moodle discussion groups.
2. Timely submission of five reflection papers (3-4, double-spaced pages). Passing grades on both the Midterm & Final Exams.

Plagiarism Policy:

The wholesale re-use of other people's publications *without proper citation*, whether these are online or in print, is considered plagiarism and will not be tolerated. Similarly, re-using other people's words with slight modifications is also considered plagiarism unless such efforts are properly footnoted.

To learn more about PSR's policy on plagiarism, please see: <http://www.psr.edu/plagiarism-policy>.

Participation in Moodle Groups:

Every student will be assigned to a Moodle Group to discuss weekly readings, analyze assigned case studies, and delve deeper into contemporary ethical issues.

Policies on Submission of Papers

Reflection papers must be turned in at the start of class on the day stated in the syllabus. Unless special approval is given by the Professor, tardy papers will be reduced one letter grade for each day they are late.

Calculation of Final Grade:

1. Class participation (Moodle discussion groups) – 30%
2. Average grade for the six reflection papers – 30%
3. Midterm Exam – 20%
4. Final Exam or Project – 20%

Grade Values

1. A = 95%: Student demonstrates an *excellent* grasp of course content and materials, excellent abilities in formulating coherent moral responses – using the tools provided by the course, and participates well in both large and small group discussions.
2. B = 85%: Student demonstrates an *above average* grasp of course content and materials, strong abilities in formulating coherent moral responses – using the tools provided by the course, and participates well in both large and small group discussions.
3. C = 75%: Student demonstrates *average* knowledge of course content and materials, makes a good effort to integrate course materials into coherent moral responses, and participates regularly in large and small group discussions.
4. D = 65%: Student demonstrates a *below average* knowledge of course content and materials, little ability to integrate course materials, and little participation in large or small group discussions.
5. F = 55% or lower: Student demonstrates little or no effort to complete class assignments, has extended absences, and as a result is unable to participate meaningfully in class discussions.

Weekly Format:

Each week will include the following elements:

1. Weekly Reading Assignment (roughly 150 pages)
2. Online Lectures (4 per week)

3. Reviewing Online Videos
4. Online Discussions of Assigned Case Studies (three)
5. Weekly Reflection Paper

Course Schedule

Week One: Course Overview/Introduction to Ethics

Description: During this week, students will be offered an overview of the study of Christian Ethics, with special attention to specific, postmodern challenges and issues related to the tasks of moral discernment and decision-making.

**Reflection Paper #1: Due – Your Personal Approach to Moral Decision-Making.*

Week Two: Modes of Moral Reasoning

Description: During this week, students will be offered an overview of moral theory. They will also be introduced and become proficient in recognizing four basic modes of moral reasoning, including deontological, teleological, responsibility, and virtue ethics approaches.

**Reflection Paper #2 Due – Taking a Deontological or Teleological Approach.*

Week Three: The Fundamentals of Christian Ethics:

Description: During this week, students will be introduced and become proficient in utilizing the basic tools of Christian ethics, particularly the four sources of moral guidance: scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. Particular attention will be paid to integrating scriptural reading and interpretation into the practice of doing Christian ethics.

**Reflection Paper #3 Due – Using the Sources of Moral Guidance.*

Week Four: The Fundamentals of Christian Ethics/Issues in Ethics

Description: During this week, students will complete their study of the four sources of moral guidance and turn to in-depth examinations of six contemporary issues in Christian Ethics: race and ethnicity, the environment, poverty, human sexuality, war and peace, and gender justice.

**Reflection Paper #4 Due – Using the Sources of Moral Guidance.*

Week Five: Issues in Applied Ethics

Description: During this week, students will continue their in-depth examinations of five contemporary issues in Christian Ethics: race and ethnicity, the environment, human sexuality, war and peace, and

gender justice. Students will be challenged to use the knowledge, skills, and tools of the course in formulating their own moral arguments.

**Reflection Paper #5 Due – Making a Persuasive Moral Argument*

Week Six: Issues in Applied Ethics/Course Wrap-Up

Description: During this week, students will complete their study of the four sources of moral guidance and turn to in-depth examinations of five contemporary issues in Christian Ethics: race and ethnicity, the environment, human sexuality, war and peace, and gender justice.

**Reflection Paper #6 Due – Making a Persuasive Moral Argument*

GUIDELINES FOR REFLECTION PAPERS:

Week 1 –Your Personal Approach to Moral Decision-Making

For your first reflection paper, please write a three-four page (double-spaced) essay about your personal approach to making ethical or moral decisions, paying close attention to the following questions:

1. Can you describe some of the *formative experiences* that have had a lasting effect on your personal understanding of *being and doing* Good?
2. Please describe your *general approach* to ethical or moral decision-making. Without breaking any confidences, has there been any point in your life when you needed to make a difficult decision? What were the important factors or principles you weighed in making your final choices?
3. What, if any role, has your *religious or spiritual experience* played in shaping your ethical or moral beliefs? Do you belong to a particular religious institution or tradition? How important is this to your moral decision-making.

Weeks 2 & 3 – Taking a Deontological or Teleological Approach

For your second reflection paper, please write a three-four page (double-spaced) essay discussing an case-study, paying close attention to the following instructions:

1. Using the hand-out previously passed out in your small group section, provide an analysis of important factors to be considered in this case study -- with special attention to the key question: "What is going on?" (1/2 of essay)
2. Drawing on class lectures and readings, please describe how you would respond to the moral dilemma presented in the case study, using either the *deontological* or *teleological* approach to construct your response. (1/2 of essay)

Weeks 4 –Using the Four Sources of Moral Guidance

For your fourth reflection paper, please write a three-four page (double-spaced) essay discussing the assigned case-study, paying close attention to the following instructions:

1. Using the hand-out previously passed out in your small group section; please provide an analysis of important factors to be considered in this case study -- with special attention to the key question: "What is going on?" (1/3 of essay)
2. Drawing on class lectures and readings, please describe how you would respond to the moral dilemma presented in the case study, using the four sources of moral guidance to construct your response. (2/3 of essay)

Week 5 – Dealing with Church Conflicts

For your fifth and final reflection paper, please write a three-four page (double-spaced) essay discussing an assigned case-study that deals with church conflict. Pay close attention to the following instructions/questions:

1. Using the hand-out previously passed out in your small group section, provide an analysis of important factors to be considered in this case study -- with special attention to the key question: "What is going on?" (1/3)
2. Drawing on class lectures and readings, please describe how you would respond to the moral dilemma presented in the case study, using the four sources of moral guidance to construct your response. (1/3)
3. For those who are members of particular denominations, what specific rules or guidelines are spelled out in your church polity. Do you agree or disagree with these rules and guidelines? (1/3)

Week 6: Making a Persuasive Moral Argument

For your fifth reflection paper, please write a three-four page (double-spaced) speech reflection on an assigned case-study (TBA), paying close attention to the following instructions:

1. As someone trained in Christian ethics, you've have been invited to make presentation to a church council or nonprofit board, that provides them with specific guidance and advice regarding the moral dilemma raised in the case study.
2. Your speech should begin by analyzing the most salient or important features of "what is going on" using the hand-out previously passed out in your small group section. (1/3 of essay)
3. Following this initial analysis, please write a speech offering specific moral guidance. You will need to draw on the tools, insights, and information you've received in the course to construct a morally coherent and persuasive argument. (2/3 of essay)