

School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University
901 12th Avenue, PO Box 222000
Seattle, WA 98122-1090

Spring Quarter 2014

COURSE INFORMATION

STMM 5040 Christian Ethics (P/C)

Thursdays, 1:30pm-4:20pm

Classroom: HUNT 100

Prerequisites: none

INSTRUCTOR

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda PhD

Office: Casey 223

Office Hours: by appointment

Phone: 206 384-8760

SU Email: moe-lobc@seattleu.edu

And this is the meaning of ethics: to express the ways in which love embodies itself and life is maintained and saved.

Paul Tillich

Injustice, embedded to the point of invisibility in social structures and assumptions, is the basic problem of society.... The basic problem is the reification of such injustice into sacred canopies (or master narratives) so that they seem impervious to, even outside of, human control.

Gloria Albrecht

There is difference and there is power. Who owns the power determines the meaning of difference.

June Jordan (poet)

How then, do individuals and groups see through and resist such formation of structurally based injustice? The answer to this question is neither easy nor self-evident."

Janet Ruffing,

We will have to repent...not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Until we see what is possible, what is appears necessary.

Jean Piaget

Walk Forward Questioning.

Awe, wonder, reverence, gratitude.....these will lead the way.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What does it mean to live a “moral life” in a world of exquisite beauty that also is brutalized by colonialism, racism, a soul-shattering gap between rich and poor, gender inequity, and “ecocide”? What is my vision of the moral life if morality is seen in light of the Great Mystery that Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions call God? Who or what forms that vision? Who or what mal-forms it? With whose eyes do we see society as it is and as it could be? As it ought be? How do concerns for social justice and ecological well-being fit in the work of ethics? Who are our conversation partners in asking questions like these and in digging for responses? Participants in this course will explore these questions with diverse contemporary voices, and with figures and communities of the past.

This course will introduce the practice and theory of moral formation, discernment, and conduct through the inter-disciplinary lens of Christian Ethics. Christian Ethics will be viewed as the art-science enabling Christian communities to draw critically upon their traditions, and to read the “signs of the times” in order to shape ways of living consistent with faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced in the Spirit. Participants will dialogue across the ages with faith forbearers, and with diverse contemporary voices. Particular attention will given to views from “the underside,” to the relationship of Christian scripture and traditions to contemporary moral deliberation, and to the ambiguity and complexity underlying moral dispute. Three components of Christian ethics will be considered, and located in a practical conceptual framework. Those components include: the historical legacy of Christian morality; tools for moral formation, discernment, and action; and specific contemporary moral issues in their historical contexts. The informing undercurrent of this course is hope and moral-spiritual empowerment in the face of profound moral challenges facing contemporary U.S. society.

COURSE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal is that participants will experience themselves as critical, constructive, collaborative theological ethicists, and will lay groundwork for on-going ethical work that weds morality, spirituality, and theology in the everyday practices of Christian life and ministry. To that end, the intended outcomes for those who participate fully in this course and complete it are:

- To gain tools for bringing religion (including scripture) to bear appropriately on issues of public life in a secular society, and tools for critiquing inappropriate use of religion in the public sphere.
- To develop critical consciousness regarding culturally produced assumptions that parade as natural, normal, inevitable, or divinely ordained.
- To develop working familiarity with the discipline of Christian Ethics: its methods, tools, “languages,” vocabulary, key concepts, vibrancy, contested areas, and multi-faceted diversity.
- To explore and articulate one’s working method for ethical discernment.
- To appreciate the diversity of Christian moral traditions, how they are formed and altered, and the interplay between moral traditions and their cultural, political, economic, and ecological contexts.
- To nurture hope and a sense of agency for bringing faith to bear on crucial and vexing moral issues of our day.
- To become attuned to what “voices are missing from the table” of theological and ethical discourse.

- To enhance the capacity to have moral convictions, while respecting deeply the differing convictions of other people.
- To ask good probing question about all of the above.
- To have a good time as a community of theologically informed and critically conscious Christian ethicists working together.

A second set of intended outcomes pertain to intellectual formation.

- To develop skill in various modes of thinking (systematic and creative; analytical and synthetic; sympathetic and critical), and to experience the value of so doing for the life of faith.
- To develop the intellectual virtues of concentration, curiosity, perseverance, generosity, and mutually supportive collaboration with others.
- To nurture tenacity in the face of intellectual roadblocks (not to give up when the going is difficult).
- To experience the joy, freedom, and power to be found in disciplined intellectual inquiry into faith life and ministry using the tools of Christian ethics.
- To enhance contextual imagination (the capacity to perceive others= perspectives and situations, and through that perception to develop critical insight into one=s own).
- To deepen the ability to live with paradox and ambiguity while also maintaining conviction and seeking clarity.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: MAPS

MAPS Students will give evidence of:

- Ability to reflect theologically on the central themes of the Christian Tradition.
- Knowledge of the interaction of religious/spiritual experience and culture in their ecumenical and multicultural dimensions.
- Ability to read scriptural texts critically.
- Knowledge of the tradition in relation to sacramental theology, liturgical method, worship elements and structure, and the ability to engage them in an ecumenical diversity of praxis.
- Ability to draw critically and constructively on Christian moral traditions to lead toward a more just and sustainable world.
- Ability to discern and nurture spiritual experience in relation to self and others.
- Ability to lead from spiritual depth toward practice for justice and wholeness in the world.
- Ability to articulate one’s relationship with God, as it is informed by theological reflection in one’s social context.
- Ability to articulate and live from an understanding of self as human, minister, and leader.
- Ability to be a responsive, discerning listener who can enter another’s worldview.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Preparation:

- Read and reflect on all readings in their entirety before the designated class session; be prepared to question and discuss them in class.
- Bring to class for discussion purposes your “Critical Reading Notes.” They are brief written notes reflecting your engagement with the readings for the week and their

relationship to the coursework of the previous weeks. The notes are *not* meant to be formal and will *not* be turned in or evaluated, unless students are not doing them. Do them in whatever note-taking form works best for your learning purposes, and to enable your participation in classroom discussion. The notes should respond to study guide questions if they are assigned. If no study questions are assigned, please respond to the following:

- What is the main question asked or the main thesis argued in each reading?
- How do these readings intersect with my experience (historical or current) or the life of a community of which I am a part? (The readings might intersect with another class, home life, church life, national or international affairs, ministry, community life, workplace, or elsewhere.)
- What have I learned from discussing or testing out a concept, theory, or claim developed in these readings?
- What one or two key questions for class discussion that I formulate from reading these texts as a self-conscious Christian ethicist?

2. Participation:

- Attend every class session and be ready to begin at 1:30. (Please see attendance policy under “Policies” at the end of this syllabus.)
- Engage in the class discussion in ways that contribute to the development of a trusting and exciting learning community in the context of this course:
 - Bring your relevant experience and knowledge “to the table of discourse” in the course.
 - Participate respectfully--verbally and non-verbally--in seminar group discussions and in full class discussion.
 - Listen actively to what your colleagues in the class are saying.
 - Occasionally, at close of class session, contribute to the professor written comments on “when I was most engaged, and when most disengaged in the class this day,” or on “what I found particularly empowering or disempowering in the class this day.”
- Contribute to one class project. It will require very little outside work and will not be graded.

3. Moral Deliberation Paper

4. Critical Response Essay

5. Interrupting Injustice Project (team project)

Additional suggestions but not requirements

1. Do all reasonably possible to read the assigned texts as early as possible in the week so that during the week you may reflect on how these readings intersect with your life, and may test out--in interaction with someone else--a claim made in the readings.

2. Shortly before each class session, review your reading notes (in book margins and notes taken), the written work you are turning in, and your journal entry.

CRITERIA AND METHODS OF EVALUATION

The course grade will consist of:

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|--|-------|
| - Participation and preparation (including attendance) | (40%) |
| - Moral Deliberation Paper | (30%) |
| - Critical Response Essay | (15%) |
| - Interrupting Injustice Project (team project) | (15%) |

Papers will be assessed for the following:

- doing what was assigned.
- content: depth of understanding and thought; extent of drawing upon relevant reading and lectures from the class; clarity of thought and organization of expression; skill in descriptive, critical, and constructive thinking where appropriate to the assignment (we will learn and work with these distinctions in class); coherence.
- effort.
- quality of writing: writing conventions (grammar, punctuation, spelling, correct endnotes or footnotes, etc.); voice; word choice; sentence and paragraph structure; organization and clarity.
- late assignments will be reduced in grade.

Please note: On the two papers, respect yourself, your work, and my time enough to turn in your best writing. Make every paragraph, sentence, and word have a purpose. Write multiple drafts, review and edit them. Proofread final draft three times: once for solid paragraphs, once for complete sentences, once for grammar/ spelling/ punctuation.

TEXTS (REQUIRED)

- * Anderson, Terrance. *Walking the Way: Christian Ethics as a Guide*. Latest ed. Vancouver, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 2005.
- * Birch, Bruce and Larry Rasmussen. *The Bible and Ethics*. rev. ed. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1989.
- * Gudorf, Christine; Robert Stivers; Alice Frazer Evans; Robert Evans; Stivers, Robert. *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996.
- * West, Tracy. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006.
- * Additional readings downloaded and printed from the web.

Suggestions for Expanded Reading

If you would appreciate expanded (additional) reading, please request it. I am happy to provide!

COURSE SCHEDULE, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS

Readings for each week are listed in the order that I recommend reading them for ease of comprehension.

Week One (April 3)

*Introduction to Each Other and to the Course, and to Christian Ethics.
What is Christian Ethics?*

Week Two (April 10)

Mapping the Terrain of Moral Formation, Deliberation, and Practice.

Readings:

Anderson: Preface, Intro, Chap 1

Stivers, et.al.: Intro, and Peruse to choose 3 top choices for your moral deliberation paper.

Assignments Due:

List of top three choices in order, for final paper.

Week Three (April 17)

Mapping the Terrain of Moral Formation, Deliberation, and Practice (Day 2)

Readings:

Anderson: chaps. 2, 3, 4, 6

TBA: on-line readings related to "privilege"

Week Four (April 24)

The Bible and Other Sources in Ethics: What Sorts of Authority? How? Why?

Readings:

Birch and Rasmussen: Preface, Intro, chaps. 1, 2, 8, 9

Anderson: Chap. 5

Assignments due but not to be turned in:

Critical Reading Notes: 1) How do you or your faith community commonly use scripture as an authority in moral considerations, 2) How would you critique that "method," and 3) How might revise it given what you have learned in this class and in particular the readings for this week.

In class: Receive Kennedy handout for Week Five.

Week Five (May 1)

Moral Formation and Malformation in Contexts of Structured Injustice

Readings:

Kennedy

Birch and Rasmussen: Chap. 5

West: Intro and Chap. 2

Website TBA to peruse

Assignment due:

Critical Response Essay regarding West, Chapter 2

Week Six (May 8)

Moral Formation and Malformation in Contexts of Structured Injustice (week 2)

Reading:

West: 1 and 3

Week Seven (May 15)

Moral Practice in Contexts of Structured Injustice (Week 2)

Reading:

West: Chaps 4 and 5

Week Eight (May 22)

The Christian Ethical Norm: Earth-Honoring Justice-Making Neighbor-love

Reading:

Moe-Lobeda: chapter 7 (on Canvas site; bring to class) and pp. 195-9.

Re-peruse Anderson: 28-69.

Maguire: "Justice" (selected pages posted on Canvas site; bring to class)

Assignment Due but not to be turned in:

Critical Reading Notes: Drawing upon these readings and the readings and discussion of previous weeks, what is my emerging method of doing ethical deliberation, and how am I using it in my paper? (Consider, for example: the norms, basic convictions, moral vision, and sources that inform your method.)

Week Nine (May 29)

Practicing the Arts of Critical Mystical Vision

Readings:

TBA

Week Ten (June 4)

Hope and Moral Agency: Practicing the Art of Christian Ethics

End of course celebration

Readings:

Birch and Rasmussen. Chaps. 7 and 10.

Review Readings TBA (Different readings to be assigned to different students)

Assignments due:

- Final Paper.
- Be prepared to discuss the most important learning or challenge that you have encountered in doing your final paper, and one thing that you have learned in this course and do not want to forget.

Policies

- The centerpiece of this course is discussion. Much of the course learning will come from engaging in that discussion, and much knowledge will be generated by students in the classroom that is not available in your readings. Therefore attendance at all class sessions is required, as is timeliness. **One unexcused absence will lower your grade.** Timeliness means being ready to begin by 1:30. Late arrival will count against your participation grade. Should you have an **excused** absence, your responsibilities are to: 1) ahead of time ask at least three colleagues in the class to take notes for you; 2) read all of the readings; 3) get and read class notes from colleagues whom you contacted ahead of time to share notes with you; 4) after completing the readings, spend about three hours – that is, the amount of time you would have spent in class -- writing a 1.5 - 2 page double-spaced essay on how these readings interact with previous materials of the course. In addition, please ask a classmate to collect handouts for you and to note any changes in the syllabus that are announced
- Grades on assignments will be lowered if assignments are late.
- Academic Honesty (including plagiarism): The School of Theology and Ministry strictly adheres to the academic policy regarding Academic Integrity as indicated on the Seattle University Registrar website, as noted in the box below.
- Disability: If you have, or think you may have, a disability (including an 'invisible disability' such as a learning disability, a chronic health problem, or a mental health condition) that interferes with your performance as a student in this class, please see related note in the box below.

University Resources and Policies

Academic Resources

- Library and Learning Commons (<http://www.seattleu.edu/learningcommons/>)
 - *(This includes: Learning Assistance Programs, Research [Library] Services, Writing Center, Math Lab)*
- Academic Integrity Tutorial *(found on Angel and SU Online)*

Academic Policies on Registrar website (<https://www.seattleu.edu/registrar/academics/performance/>)

- Academic Integrity Policy
- Academic Grading Grievance Policy
- Professional Conduct Policy *(only for those professional programs to which it applies)*

Notice for students concerning Disabilities

If you have, or think you may have, a disability (including an 'invisible disability' such as a learning disability, a chronic health problem, or a mental health condition) that interferes with your performance as a student in this class, you are encouraged to arrange support services and/or accommodations through Disabilities Services staff located in Loyola 100, (206) 296-5740. Disability-based adjustments to course expectations can be arranged only through this process.

APPENDIX

Operative Guidelines for Responsible Collaborative Learning in this Learning Community

1. One never sees clearly until one sees the world outside of one's inherited perspectives. This implies a commitment to enabling the perspectives of historically under-represented people and peoples to be heard. The course is designed to honor that commitment.

2. Knowledge is not what is produced and transmitted by experts, but has to do with how we know, learn, and engage our world. Learning happens more deeply when it is, at least in part: collaborative/relational, participatory/active, integrative, experiential, and embodied. Therefore, in this class we will strive to: 1) be collaborative in our inquiry; 2) actively interpret material; 3) make interdisciplinary connections even within the discipline of Christian ethics; 4) draw upon and honor the rich life experience brought by each student, and 5) attend to what is learned through the senses and the heart, as well as through the intellect.

3. Different students learn differently . We will engage in diverse modes of learning.

4. The ecological crises of our day and the imperative of forging sustainable Earth-human relations call for a shift from anthropocentric philosophical, theological, and scientific frameworks to eco-centric ones. This shift entails fascinating and difficult moves in language, conceptual frameworks, theory, and method. We will struggle toward those shifts, recalling, as we interact with the course material, that human being is part of a larger web of life.

5. Follow your intellectual passions. If you do you'll find yourself surrounded by a lovely community of friends--living and passed. If you become highly interested in particular moral situation, historical community, concept, figure, or dilemma, and wish to do further reading and work on it, see me.

6. Aim at questions and at provisional answers not at answers cast in concrete.
! Thank you for the privilege of working with you !