

Contemporary Christian Ethics

ETHC9402 Contemporary Christian Ethics • FALL 2015

Sept 4, Oct 2, Nov 6, Dec 4 (all meetings 8:00—11:00am; 1:00-5:00pm)

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

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NOBTS Mission Statement

The mission of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries

Course Purpose, Core Value Focus, and Curriculum Competencies Addressed

The purpose of a Ph.D. seminar at NOBTS is to prepare students for teaching in colleges, universities, and seminaries; for holding administrative positions; for working in boards, agencies, and commissions of the Southern Baptist Convention; and for providing specialized ministry leadership.

The Contemporary Christian Ethics seminar seeks to produce in students *characteristic excellence* with regard to academic discipline, *doctrinal integrity* in the pursuit of truth regarding contemporary moral issues, and a *mission focus* that sets reflections on contemporary ethical issues into the ecclesial context of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. These core values will be attained through the development of competencies in Christian theological and ethical heritage, and spiritual and character formation. The core value focus for 2015-16 is *Mission Focus*.

Course Description

The seminar surveys recent trends in Christian ethics by studying major contemporary theological movements and evaluating the key theologians\ethicists who have made significant contributions to Christian ethics. Students will analyze the biblical, theological, and historical bases for moral character development and ethical decision making in these contemporary resources to develop an adequate ethical methodology.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. The student will demonstrate conversancy with major trends in contemporary ethics through seminar discussions and written reports on assigned readings in the field.
2. The student will demonstrate conversancy with particular contemporary ethical issues and ethicists through seminar discussions and by writing reports on assigned readings in the field.
3. The student will design, implement, and report research on a topic related to a particular contemporary ethical issue or ethicist.
4. The student will demonstrate proficiency in imparting knowledge gained in research by reporting and leading discussion on assigned readings and on a research paper.

Course Teaching Methodology

The seminar will utilize reading assignments, written reading reports, a research paper, formal response to a research paper, and interaction with professors and members of the seminar. The professor will provide a critical response to each writing assignment as well as to each formal in-seminar response to writing assignments.

Textbooks

General Textbooks:

- Banner, Michael. *Christian Ethics: A Brief History*
- O'Donovan, Oliver. *Self, World, and Time: An Induction*. Vol. 1 of *Ethics as Theology*
- O'Donovan, Oliver. *Finding and Seeking*. Vol. 2 of *Ethics as Theology*

Texts for Book Review Presentations 1 (Sets):

<u>Ethical Reality Set:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mouw, <i>The God Who Commands</i> • Caputo, <i>Against Ethics</i> • Smith, <i>In Search of Moral Knowledge</i> 	<u>Character/Virtue Set:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boyd, <i>A Shared Morality</i> • Hauerwas, <i>The Hauerwas Reader</i> • Wells, <i>Improvisation</i>
<u>Christ and Culture Set:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carson, <i>Christ and Culture Revisited</i> • Hunter, <i>To Change the World</i> • Neuhaus, <i>The Naked Public Square</i> 	<u>Natural Law Set:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budziszewski, <i>What We Can't Not Know</i> • Charles, <i>Retrieving the Natural Law</i> • George, <i>In Defense of Natural Law</i>

Texts for Book Review Presentations 2:

- Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*
- Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*
- Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*
- Fletcher, *Situational Ethics* and Ramsey, *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics*
- Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective. Volume 1: Theology and Ethics*
- Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*
- O'Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order*
- Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics. Volume 1: Foundations*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

General Text Discussion 5% of final grade:

In the third and fourth Meetings, time will be taken to discuss the "General Textbooks." Each student should be prepared to lead discussion on any of the books (Banner in session 3 and O'Donovan texts in session 4). Each student should bring one page synopsis of each book and a second page with 5 to 10 quality discussion questions.

Book Reviews:

Use the following instructions to prepare your Set Reviews and your Book Reviews.

A few matters regarding form and style:

1. Do not use a title page. In the heading of the first page, include your name and the bibliographic data of the book being reviewed (for the set, separate bibliographic information by a semi-colon. For example, New York: Seabury, 1981; Review of . . .) :

Jeffrey Riley. Review of Karl Barth, *Ethics*. Edited by Dietrich Braun. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. New York: Seabury, 1981.

2. Include proper referencing of direct citations, using in-text parenthetical notes: (page)
3. If you use or cite other books, include a bibliography and reference using in-text parenthetical notes: (last name, page).
4. On all questions of style, refer to Turabian, *A Manual of Style* (approved edition)
5. Edit. Edit. Edit. Someone has said, "There are no good writers, just good editors." Perhaps an overstatement, but heed the advice (I actually had to edit this point 4 times).
6. Use a standard, 12-point font like Times New Roman or 11-point Calibri (Body), 1 ½ spaced, one-inch margins.
7. Length: 2500-3000 words (approximately 8-10 pages).

Book Review 1 (Sets), 25% of final grade:

Each set includes three books that are related thematically, more or less. Let the theme of the set help you frame your review. The goal is not to stack 3 reviews but to engage all three, bringing them into conversation, if you please. Use the outline below to help you frame the set review:

1. Introductory matters (1-2 page):
 - a. Information on the authors. What are some of the author's working assumptions (e.g., his or her denominational background, field of research, or view of Scripture)?
 - b. Situate the books together within the thematic context
 - c. What is the primary contribution of each book (relate theses, aims, approaches)
2. Content of the book (2-4 pages)
 - a. Draw out major ideas and arguments in each book and relate to the others
 - b. Using the whole set, elaborate on the theme of the set.
3. Critical Engagement (2-4 pages)
 - a. Major insights communicated by the books—ethical, theological, or philosophical. What points are particularly helpful for applying Christian ethics? What ideas or arguments find strong biblical, philosophical, and historical support?
 - b. What Ideas are interesting, novel, or problematic? Ideas that changed or challenged your thinking. How and Why?
 - c. What Insights practically relate to life and ministry, the life of the church, and to moral life in broader cultures
4. Conclusion (1 page)
 - a. Of review, not the book
 - b. Sum up importance and/or liabilities of the books/themes/topics. If one book(s) corrects the others or provides more appropriate content or strategy for a Christian ethic, then highlight that book(s) and describe why it should be heard rather than another.
 - c. Include a recommendation (or not) based on strengths and weaknesses for each book. Who should be the primary audience?

Book Review 2, 20% of final grade:

Get a sense of the big picture. The review is not a summary of the book. You are engaging and evaluating the content of a book. Broadly divide the review into the following, attending to specific matters recommended within each section (pages are approximations; balance is the key):

1. Introductory matters (1 page):
 - a. Information on the author. What are some of the author's working assumptions (e.g., his or her denominational background, field of research, view of Scripture, etc.)?
 - b. State the book's primary aim/thesis and approach
 - c. Situate the book in a larger context, discussion, or issue
 - d. State the book's primary contribution
2. Content of the book (3-4 pages)
 - a. Brief outline (describe in prose)
 - b. Sketch the book's contents, being sure to account for the main threads of the book's arguments.

- c. Present the whole book, remembering, however, that this is not a chapter by chapter summary.
3. Critical Engagement (3-4 pages)
 - a. Major insights communicated by the book—ethical, theological, or philosophical. What points are particularly helpful for applying Christian ethics?
 - b. Does the author provide strong biblical, philosophical, and historical support for his or her positions?
 - c. Ideas that are interesting, novel, or problematic
 - d. Ideas that changed or challenged your thinking. How and Why?
 - e. Insights in this book that practically relate to life and ministry, the life of the church, and to moral life in broader cultures
 - f. Major strengths and weaknesses of the book
 4. Conclusion (1 page)
 - a. Of review, not the book
 - b. Did the author fulfill his or her purpose?
 - c. Sum up importance and/or liabilities of the book
 - d. Include a recommendation (or not) and for whom

How Reviews are evaluated (see Rubric below):

- **“A” papers (93-100)**
 - clearly state the book’s thesis
 - successfully and succinctly outline its argument in its own terms
 - demonstrate advanced critical engagement with the argument and content of the book
 - make clear and well-structured arguments that engage the content
 - exhibit a proficient grasp of grammar, spelling, and style
- **“B” papers (85-92)**
 - clearly state the book’s thesis
 - show an attempt to understand the book on its own terms
 - attempt critically to reflect on the issues at hand,
 - make satisfactory arguments that engage the content
 - show sufficiency in grammar, spelling, and style
- **“C” papers (84 and less)**
 - state the book’s thesis
 - present the content of the book without demonstrating evidence of grasping the books ideas
 - shallow reflection on the issues at hand
 - raise preliminary critical questions for further evaluation
 - limit evaluation to preformed judgments without serious consideration of the book’s ideas ,or simply approve or disapprove the author’s ideas/arguments
 - make repeated mistakes in grammar, spelling, and style, and/or demonstrate little or no attempt to proofread

Evaluating Book Reviews

Factor	Superior Review (A: 100-93)	Competent Review (B: 88-92)	Adequate Review (87-83 Borderline B-C)	Weak Review (C- Failing)
Representation of the Book's Substance/Content	A <i>superior review</i> sets the book in context, articulates clearly the book's thesis, and traces the argument of the book in its entirety and with attention to detail appropriate to exemplify the argument.	A <i>competent review</i> articulates clearly the book's thesis and provides an overall map of the book's argument. It typically struggles with balancing attention to detail with a focus on the overall agenda of the book.	An <i>adequate review</i> generally presents the contents of the book, but without demonstrating one's grasp of the whole of the book's contents and/or without attending well to the argument that shapes the book's substance.	A <i>weak review</i> fails to consider the whole book and shows few or no signs of grasping the book's thesis. Often, a weak review misrepresents the book's contents.
Engagement with the Book's Substance/Content	A <i>superior review</i> engages with the substance of the book critically, interacting with assumptions or claims critical to the book's argument, and assessing the success of its argument and the overall significance of the book.	A <i>competent review</i> begins to raise questions demonstrative of critical and/or personal engagement. Its assessment may tend toward matters of detail that do not substantially affect the overall thesis of the book or only marginally engage the book on its own terms.	An <i>adequate review</i> raises questions of a critical nature, but these are underdeveloped; it may provide little more than an overall judgment of approval or disapproval.	A <i>weak review</i> provides only impressionistic or prejudicial assessments, or fails to demonstrate any critical or personal assessment of the book's argument.
Form & Style	A <i>superior review</i> includes a relevant introduction and conclusion and is reasonably structured, with material well-organized for the length of the paper. It is presented in a professional manner in terms of spelling, sentence and paragraph construction, and acceptable form/style.	A <i>competent review</i> includes a relevant introduction and conclusion, but lacks transparent clarity in its presentation and argument. It evidences only minor and infrequent errors in spelling and grammar, and/or lapses of style.	An <i>adequate review</i> fails to provide a suitable introduction and conclusion, and is unclear in its presentation and argument. It evidences repeated lapses in form/style, spelling errors, and/or grammatical irregularities—enough so as to begin to adversely affect reading and understanding.	A <i>weak review</i> evidences little or no attention to structure. It contains major grammatical errors (e.g., sentence fragments, subject-verb disagreement), evidences no real attempt at proofreading and/or does not conform to an acceptable form/style.

Rubric adapted from *How to Write a Book Review*, Joel B. Green, Ph.D.

Research Papers 35% of final grade:

Each student will write and present a research paper on an ethical issue or a personality contributing to the field of contemporary ethics. For example:

- Current issues: bioethics and other issues of life and death, technology, economics and government issues (recent interest on world hunger and international debt), Environmental issues, human sexuality, peacemaking and violence, punishment and the government, war, and so forth.
- Fundamental theological, philosophical, and moral positions that provide direction for understanding current ethical issues: personhood; understanding “love” as a moral term; the “people of God” or “community” in moral positioning, Darwinism and intelligent design, free will and determinism, resurgence of natural law position, and so forth.
- The ethical position or philosophical/theological morality of a late 20th or 21st Century theologian, philosopher, or ethicist: C. Ben Mitchell on Bioethics, Stanley Hauerwas’s narrative ethic, Oliver O’Donovan’s political theology, Peter Singer on personhood and life, Alasdair MacIntyre’s account of virtue in the moral life, and so forth.

General Research Paper Guidelines (for full guidelines, refer to Turabian)

- 1) The official style and form guide is Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, latest edition.
- 2) Use **Times New Roman 12 or Calibri (Body) 11** point fonts for body of text.
- 3) Paper should be **30 to 35 pages in length**, not counting front matter or bibliography.
- 4) Staple the paper; do not put it in a folder/binder.
- 5) Include a title page and blank page.
- 6) Include a table of contents that shows at least at least two levels of subheadings (functioning as an outline). Normally a paper this size does not include a table of content, so this is for practice.
- 7) Use footnotes, not endnotes
- 8) Utilize **at least 25 primary and secondary sources**, including at least one article or chapter in a **modern language other than English**. Variety and quality sources are important, particularly texts and peer review articles.
- 9) Include a Select Bibliography
- 10) Default style is third person, not first person (I or we) and second person (you). Arguments should be presented in such a manner so as to eliminate the need for all but third person references.
- 11) Use correct grammar and spelling.
- 12) The uses of past tense and present tense must be consistent. Generally, past tense is used to refer to historical events and persons, including writers of published materials. Present tense is utilized to present arguments, interact with opinions and viewpoints, and cite extant texts.
- 13) Do not use split infinitives.
- 14) Avoid one-sentence paragraphs.
- 15) Do not overuse indefinite pronouns (such as “it” or “there” without an antecedent).
- 16) Avoid “widows” and “orphans.”

Formal Response to Research Papers 15% percent of final grade

- A. Each seminar participant will choose a research paper to evaluate critically. Each student will evaluate the research paper for form and style, communication of important concepts, content, and critical engagement of materials.
- B. Evaluations will be prepared for and presented on the day the research paper is presented in class.
- C. Written evaluations should be **no less than three single-spaced pages**. A copy of the written evaluation will be provided for the professors and for the student whose paper is being evaluated.
- D. Each evaluation should include a separate page of good, discussion evoking questions.
- E. Each evaluation should **include a separate log (errata)** of form and style errors or concerns.
- F. Beyond the written evaluation, the formal response is graded on the quality of in-seminar participation, engagement, and interlocution.

Course Evaluation

Grades will follow the NOBTS scale: A: 93-100%; B: 85-92%; F: 84 or below. Grades will be based on the professor's evaluation of written assignments and in-seminar responsibilities.

Grade Distribution:

General Text Discussion:	5%
Book Review 1 (Set):	25%
Book Review 2:	20%
Research Paper:	35%
Formal Response:	15%

Course Schedule

FIRST MEETING: September 4, 2015

Book Review 1 Presentations: see above for "Texts for Book Review Presentations 1 (Sets)":
Ethical Reality Set; Character Set; Natural Law Set; Christ and Culture Set

SECOND MEETING: October 2, 2015

Submit Research Paper Topics and Outline (Discuss Research and Writing Strategy)
Book Review 2 Presentations (see above for "Texts for Book Review Presentations 2")

THIRD MEETING: November 6, 2015

Discuss (Everyone) Banner, *Christian Ethics: A Brief History*
Research Paper Presentations 1-4 and responses

FOURTH MEETING: December 4, 2015

Discuss (Everyone) O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time* and O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking*.
 Research Paper Presentations 5-8 and responses

Select Bibliography

- Baggett, David, and Jerry L. Walls. *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
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Neuhaus, Richard John. *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1951.

_____. *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

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_____. *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

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