

Wake Forest University School of Divinity
FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS
Prof. Kevin Jung

I. Course Description

This course is a survey of major themes, topics, and methods of contemporary Christian ethics. During the survey, we will explore how a particular method may shape one's ethical analysis and evaluation with respect to various ethical issues, both practical and theoretical.

Particular attention is to be given to the source of moral knowledge, the justification of moral beliefs, human nature, and the place of religious conviction in politics.

II. Required Texts

H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.

_____. *Responsible Self*, Westminster John Knox Press

Patricia Churchland, *Braintrust*, Princeton University Press, 2012.

Kevin Jung, *Christian Ethics and Commonsense Morality*. Routledge, 2015. (available as e-book through ZSR)

Robert Bolt, *Man for All Seasons*, Random House, 1990.

The following required texts are available on Sakai or the Internet:

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q 90-94.

Robert Adams, "Religious Ethics in a Pluralistic Society" In Outka and Reeder, eds., *Prospects for*

a Common Morality, Princeton University Press, 1992.

Karl Barth, "The Gift of Freedom" In *Humanity of God*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

James Cone, "The White Church and Black Power" In *Black Theology: A Documentary History*.

Vol. 1. Orbis Books, 1993.

Kwok Pui-lan, "Postcolonial Feminist Theology" In *Postcolonial Imagination*.

Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005.

Robert P. George, "Natural Law" In George, Robert P. In *American Journal of Jurisprudence*. Vol. 52, No. 1.

(<http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=ajj>)

Stanley Grenz, "Philosophers of Postmodernism" In *Primer on Postmodernism*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996.

Stanley Hauerwas, "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological" In *Hauerwas Reader*. Duke

University Press., 2001.

_____. "The Church as God's New Language" In *Hauerwas Reader*.

Jean Porter, "Does the Natural Law Provide a Universally Valid Morality?" in Lawrence Cunningham (ed.), *Intractable Disputes About the Natural Law: Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.

John Howard Yoder, "The Tradition and the Real World," *When War Is Unjust*. Maryknoll, 1994.

Kai Nielsen, "God and the Basis of Morality" in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Fall, 1982), pp. 335-350.

Recommended Texts

Jonathan Haidt, "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology," *Science* 316, 998 (2007).

Jean Porter, "The Natural Law and the Normative Significance of Nature" In *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2):166-173, 2013.

John Hare, "Is There an Evolutionary Foundation for Human Morality?" In Phillip Clayton &

Jeffrey Schloss (eds.), *Evolution and Ethics: Human Morality in Biological and Religious Perspective*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. 187-203, 2004.

Cheryl J. Sanders et al, "Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist

Perspective" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall, 1989), pp. 83-112.

III. Course Expectations

1. The instructor does NOT expect or require students to accept or reject particular ethical views. You are encouraged to thoroughly examine all concepts, ideas, and beliefs discussed in the course with respect and care.
2. Students ought to respect each other in class discussion. *The University's Honor Code guides student classroom and professional ethical behaviors. For more information, see the Divinity School Bulletin.*
3. Class attendance and active class participation are expected and required for each class. See absence policy below.

IV. Course Requirements and Evaluation

- Midterm and Final Papers
 - (1) Midterm Exam: 40%

You will be tested on the basic features of particular ethical approaches that distinguish each approach from others. You also need to explain the strengths and weaknesses of each approach as well as differing views within a particular approach.
 - (2) Final Paper: 40%

Write a critical essay on Bolton's *Man for All Seasons*. How would you morally evaluate the actions of Thomas More? What should a Christian do

in the kind of circumstances that More found himself in? Use some (at least two) of the ethical theories discussed in class for your ethical analysis and your own argument. The paper must be about 10-11 pages long, double-spaced, not including the bibliography. Use Times New Roman 12 pt font and one inch margins for each side of paper.

(3) Class Preparation and Participation: 20%

Read carefully the whole reading assignment for each class. You are required to post a set of prepared questions on the day's reading on the Sakai Blogs by 12 a.m. before each class meeting (except the first day of class). All questions must focus on a specific passage, idea, or concept that you find interesting, insightful, or puzzling. Be prepared to present your question at the beginning of class. Please note that one's participation in class discussion will also be graded.

VI. Course Schedule

- 1/14 Course Introduction
Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, Prologue.
- 1/19 Martin Luther King Day (no class)

Narrative/Communitarian Ethics

- 1/21 Yoder, "The Tradition and the Real World" (See Sakai)
- 1/26 Hauerwas, "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological" (See Sakai)
- 1/28 Hauerwas, "A Christian Critique of Christian America" (See Sakai)

Natural Law

- 2/2 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica I-II*, q. 90-94 (See Sakai)
- 2/4 George, "Natural Law" (see Sakai)
- 2/9 Porter, "Does the Natural Law Provide a Universally Valid Morality?" (See Sakai)

Divine Command Ethics

- 2/11 Barth, *The Gift of Freedom* (See Sakai).
- 2/16 Nielsen, "God and the Basis of Morality" (See Sakai)
- 2/18 Robert Adams, "Religious Ethics in a Pluralistic Society" (See Sakai)

Liberation Ethics

- 2/23 James Cone, "The White Church and Black Power" (See Sakai)
- 2/25 Kwok Pui-lan, "Postcolonial Feminist Theology" (See Sakai)

Postmodern Ethics

- 3/2 Stanley Grenz, "Philosophers of Postmodernism" (See Sakai)

- 3/4 Midterm Exam
- 3/9 Spring Break
- 3/11 Spring Break

Evolutionary Biology and Neuroscience

3/16 Churchland, *Braintrust*, chs. 1-2.

3/18 Churchland, *Braintrust*, chs. 3-4.

3/23 Churchland, *Braintrust*, chs. 5-6

3/25 Churchland, *Braintrust*, chs. 7-8.

Responsibility Ethics

3/30 Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, ch.1-2.

4/1 Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, ch.3-4.

4/6 Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, ch.5-6.

The Church and the World

4/8 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, Intro, chs.1-2.

4/13 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, chs.3-4.

4/15 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, chs.5-6.

Commonsense Approach

4/20 Jung, "Common Morality, Premoral Goods, and Religion."

4/22 Jung, *Christian Ethics and Commonsense Morality*, ch.9.

4/27 Robert Bolt, *Man for All Seasons*,

4/29 Final Reflection

5/6 Final paper due, 2pm.