

Religious Studies 148: ETHICAL ISSUES IN RELIGION

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Department of Religious Studies
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Office Hours
Office location
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MWF 1:00-1:50 p.m.
MWF 12:00-12:50 p.m.
MWF 10:15-11:45 a.m.
Trinity Hall 244 Telephone: 898-5221

Course Content and Goals

This course is an introduction to religious and secular ethical analysis. Following a basic introduction to the Christian moral tradition, we move to an ethical consideration of four important topics in contemporary America: abortion, homosexuality and same-sex marriage, capitalism and economic life, and the proper relation of church and state in public life.

The **American election of 2004** saw a major contest over values. Exit polls suggested that many Americans voted the way they did because they strongly identified with their candidate's values or strongly disagreed with or worried about the values of the candidate they rejected. Once again abortion became a hot topic, amid hopes by many conservatives that the appointment of new justices to the Supreme Court might bring about the reversal of *Roe vs. Wade* and strong concerns by others that a woman's right of choice might be lost. The decision of some states to recognize same-sex marriage, the passage of anti-same-sex marriage initiatives in eleven states coupled with the hope for a constitutional amendment opposing it, and continuing debate about the morality of homosexuality constituted another major topic. Less obvious but no less important is an ongoing ethical debate over the hegemony of capitalism and market-driven values in economic life. Finally, amidst debates about Republicans and red-staters being too religious and Democrats and blue-staters being insufficiently religious, the role of religion in politics and the proper relation between church and state again came to the fore.

This course meets the General Education Upper-division Thematic requirements of **Theme E: Ethics and Social Policy**. Therefore this course seeks to provide students with opportunities to study the relationship between the moral values that you, as a member of society, hold and their embodiment in the social institutions within which you live your daily life. You will explore ethics as philosophical and religious theory, as a social and cultural phenomenon, and as practical decision and public policy making.

Course Introduction

Students may be coming into the class with strong moral opinions and positions already in place. Good. But the aim of the course is to complexify and deepen the issues (help you see they are more complicated than you might have thought) and deepen your understanding of the foundational traditions of Western ethics and the several concerns of normative ethics (deepen your own reflection and moral action by immersing them in a larger context). You will learn to be self-critical of your own positions, to take seriously

alternative views, and to develop greater maturity as a moral thinker and actor. If these goals and purposes are to be achieved, you will need to read closely and carefully all the assigned literature and demonstrate your ability to follow ethical arguments. It is this mastery that will move class discussions and your own critical moral reflection beyond the level of residence hall bull sessions and beyond the level of what you already knew when you entered the class.

Textbooks and Course Supplies

Required Textbooks: Robert Baird, *Ethics of Abortion* (revised edition 1993)
 E. J. Dionne, *One Electorate Under God*
 Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God*
 Robert Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*
 Robin Gill, *Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*
 Andrew Sullivan, *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con*

Lecture Schedule, Textbook Assignments & Due Dates

All reading assignments will come from the required textbooks. Be sure to read your assignments prior to the lecture sessions. Reading the material ahead of time will make the lecture meetings much easier to understand and follow. Keep in mind that the entire course revolves around the hot contemporary debate about American values, set against the backdrop of a predominant Christian moral universe.

<u>Class Meeting</u>	<u>Subject Matter</u>	<u>Reading Assignments</u>
Mon Jan 24	Introduction to Religious Studies and to this course What is Religious Studies doing in the University? What is the academic study of religion? What is ethics? What is religious ethics?	
Wed Jan 26	Making Moral Decisions	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 1
Fri Jan 28	The authority of the Bible for ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 2
Mon Jan 31	The Old Testament and Christian ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 3
Wed Feb 2	The four gospels and Christian ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 4
Fri Feb 4	The letters of Paul and Christian ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 5
Mon Feb 7	Natural law in ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 6
Wed Feb 9	The virtue tradition in ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 7
Fri Feb 11	Liberation theology and ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 9
Mon Feb 14	Jewish perspective on Christian ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 10
Wed Feb 16	World religions and Christian ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 11
Fri Feb 18	Christianity and war	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 12
Mon Feb 21	Homosexuality and the Bible	<i>Homosexuality and the Bible</i> , Dan Via

Wed Feb 23	Homosexuality and the Bible	<i>Homosexuality and the Bible</i> , Robert Gagnon
Fri Feb 25	Homosexuality and the Bible	<i>Homosexuality and the Bible</i> , Via vs. Gagnon
Mon Feb 28	Same-Sex Marriage Pro	<i>Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con Reader</i>
Wed Mar 2	Same-Sex Marriage Pro	<i>Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con Reader</i>
Fri Mar 4	Same-Sex Marriage Pro	<i>Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con Reader</i>
Mon Mar 7	Same-Sex Marriage Con	<i>Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con Reader</i>
Wed Mar 9	Same-Sex Marriage Con	<i>Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con Reader</i>
Fri Mar 11	<i>Mid-Term Examination</i>	
March 14-18 Spring Break		
Mon Mar 21	The quest for social justice	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 14
Wed Mar 23	Economics and ethics	<i>Christian Ethics</i> , chapter 16
Fri Mar 25	The triumph of “market populism”	<i>One Market Under God</i> , preface, chapter 1
Mon Mar 28	Legitimizing business as everything	<i>One Market Under God</i> , chapter 6
Wed Mar 30	Advertising and intellectuals	<i>One Market Under God</i> , chapter 7
Fri Apr 1	Cultural Studies and economic populism	<i>One Market Under God</i> , chapter 8
Mon Apr 4	USA Today, the press, and the market	<i>One Market Under God</i> , chapter 9
Wed Apr 6	What the dot-com boom and the bust meant	<i>One Market Under God</i> , afterward
Fri Apr 8	Abortion: facts on the ground	<i>Ethics of Abortion</i> , chapters 1-6
Mon Apr 11	Abortion: feminist perspectives	<i>Ethics of Abortion</i> , chapter 14
Wed Apr 13	Abortion: feminist perspectives	<i>Ethics of Abortion</i> , chapter 15
Fri Apr 15	Abortion: Christian perspectives	<i>Ethics of Abortion</i> , chapters 16-18
Mon Apr 18	Abortion: philosophical ethics	<i>Ethics of Abortion</i> , chapters 21-22
Wed Apr 20	Abortion: philosophical ethics	<i>Ethics of Abortion</i> , chapters 23-24
Fri Apr 22	Abortion: law; science	<i>Ethics of Abortion</i> , chapters 25, 28
Mon Apr 25	Religion and Politics: two views	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 1-40
Wed Apr 27	Religion and Politics: rebuttals	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 96-100, 168-171
Fri Apr 29	Faith-based initiatives	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 78-87, 212-216, 217-221
Mon May 2	Was there a religious left?	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 57-62, 129-133

Wed May 4	Against secularism	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 52-6, 67-71, 172-5, 189-193
Fri May 6	Framing religion rationally	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 63-6, 75-7, 94-5
Mon May 9	The look of American religion	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 110-15, 116-20
Wed May 11	Using and mis-using religion	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 72-4, 106-9, 150-4
Fri May 13	Using and mis-using religion	<i>One Electorate under God</i> , pp. 184-8, 194-9

Final Examination

Wed May 18	2-4 p.m.	Section 1
Wed May 18	12-2 p.m.	Section 2

Course Requirements and Student Responsibilities: Attendance, Assignments and Class Requirements

Getting to know you. During the first week of class, scope things out and decide where you would like to sit. Then sit there for the rest of the semester so that I and your classmates can learn your name. By the beginning of the second week, **I require a 3X5 card with a personal photo** (passport type) in the upper right corner, together with your name, address, phone, email, major, and anything else you want to tell me about yourself..

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken every session. You are granted one excused absence, so save it for a very important reason. Beyond that, expect a serious penalty—reduction in final grade for each class missed. Every class is divided between lecture by me and discussion by all of us. Learning is a joint venture between faculty and students. Usually, **every class will begin promptly with a brief quiz**, in order to help you gauge your comprehension and progress. Occasionally, there will be in-class writing and formal debates. Complete all assigned readings before class. **You must bring the assigned texts to every class.** Some of the reading is quite difficult, so we will engage in close interpretation of the texts and I will help you follow the ethical argument. A learning community, especially in an ethics class, must be a safe community: I will see to it, and you must see to it, that we create a climate of respect for the opinions of others.

Campus Culture Requirement. One part of going to college is immersing yourself in the intellectual and cultural life that goes on outside regular classes. To be sure you don't short-change yourself, this GE course requires your attendance at four cultural events related to issues and approaches of this class. The most obvious choices for these events are CAPE (Center for Applied and Professional Ethics) forums that address significant questions of the day with an ethics-across-the-curriculum approach. Other possibilities are Humanities Center presentations, Anthropology forums, International forums, campus guest speakers and events, and films or videos. For each event you will hand in a one-page critical response.

Midterm and Final Examination These two exams, whose dates are noted on the

syllabus calendar, may be both objective (T/F or multiple choice) and essay. The essay will be written in class or will be a take-home test due at the beginning of the class on the day of the exam.

- A missed exam will result in 0 points unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor, or there is evidence of a serious and compelling reason.
- If you have a documented disability that may require reasonable accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for coordination of your academic accommodations. DSS is located in Building E. Building E is adjacent to Meriam Library and Bell Memorial Union (BMU). The DSS phone number is 898-5959 V/TTY or FAX 898-4411. Visit the DSS website at <http://www.csuchico.edu/dss/>.
- Students are responsible for handling the necessary paperwork for adding or dropping this class. University guidelines for dropping classes are strictly adhered to.
- No food is allowed in my classroom.

Grading for this Class

Quizzes and in-class participation: 33%
Mid-term and Final: 33% each

If there is evidence that you have been involved in any form of academic dishonesty, you will receive an “F” grade for the course, and a report will be provided to Student Judicial Affairs for further action. Copying material without attribution from books or other sources, or copying or reworking other student papers, from this or other classes, are examples of academic dishonesty. In short, this means you must acknowledge any and all use of other peoples’ ideas, writing, and other work.

Other Important Information

It is recommended that students make and keep a copy of all assignments and papers submitted to the instructor.

Expected Student Behavior in the Classroom

- Students turn off all pagers, cell phones and other electronic devices during class.
- Students pay attention and participate in class meetings.
- Students do not read other materials (newspapers, magazines) during class.
- Students remain in class during the entire session.
- All class participants exhibit respectful behavior to other students and the instructor.
- All students have the right and privilege to learn in the class, free from harassment and disruption.
- Children of enrolled students are not allowed in the classroom.
- Inappropriate language or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.
- The class follows the standards set in the *Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities (EM 96-38)* and students are subject to disciplinary action for violation of that code.