

Assemblies of God Theological Seminary
PHIM 633 Ethical issues in Contemporary Society

Rev. Charles E. Self, Ph.D.

May, 2006

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the catalogue: This course is a study of ethical issues facing contemporary Christians from the perspective of biblical principles. The implications of biblical ethics for moral decisions in individual and social contexts will be examined.

Further explanation: This is a compact and comprehensive survey of the biblical and philosophical foundations for ethics, with particular attention given to the integration of critical thinking and Christian spirituality. There is examination of current ethical controversies, with the aim of constructing solutions that are faithful and relevant.

Course Goals

Our aims include personal maturity, advanced understanding of ethics and the ability to wrestle with complex issues of moral import. Particular challenges for leaders will be reviewed and the “hot-button” issues surveyed so that ministry moved forward effectively.

Course Objectives

Cognitive:

- The student will understand the biblical foundations of ethics, including OT covenant community precepts, NT imperatives for the eschatological community and the particular strategies of key biblical authors.
- The student will gain a solid understanding of the discipline of critical thinking, with a view to effective personal and community decision-making
- The historical and philosophical foundations of current ideas will be analyzed carefully.
- There will be an apologetic component to this course as student confronts non-Christian and sub-Christian perspectives.
- Specific, intelligent responses to current debates will be evaluated in light of the global, post-modern ethos that is pervasive among thought-leaders
- The student will learn the specific intellectual, emotional and spiritual facets of morality that move people away from or towards the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Affective:

- The student will be called to make a personal commitment to a biblical code of conduct, with the understanding of the believers call to holiness in every area of life (Colossians 3)
- The student will appreciate the timeless power of the gospel to transform thinking and moral behavior of individuals and communities.

Behavioral:

- The student will demonstrate an ability to correctly and wisely use Scripture in oral and written communication.
- Students will demonstrate honest engagement of challenging issues
- The student will demonstrate excellent in research and writing on a particular issue, with the ability to see the various sides and clearly articulate a personal position.

Course Outline (General overview)

- I. Biblical Foundations for Ethical philosophy and decision-making
- II. The Discipline of Critical Thinking
- III. Defining Christian Ethics
- IV. Historical and Contemporary Approaches to Ethics
- V. Making Wise Decision
- VI. Confronting the Issues
 - a. Being Human: Abortion, Euthanasia and Reproductive Technologies
 - b. Capital Punishment and Criminal Justice
 - c. Peace and War
 - d. Sexual Ethics
 - e. Political Ethics
 - f. Business Ethics – there is only one set of rules!
 - g. Ministerial Ethics
- VII. Confronting Evil: Ethics, Apologetics and Theodicy
 - a. Integrating biblical, theological, philosophical and moral disciplines
 - b. Confronting tough issues
 - c. Transforming the world one decision at a time

Textbooks

Required:

- Scott B. Rae. *Moral Choices*. Zondervan. 2000
- Os Guinness, *Unspeakable*. HarperSanFrancisco. 2005 0-06-083300-9

Recommended:

- Peter Kreeft. *Making Choices*
- Feinberg and Feinberg. *Ethics for a Brave New World*. Gospel Light
- Norman Geisler. *Christian Ethics*

Course Requirements

Reading and Written Work

Assigned reading is listed in the course outline. It must be completed before each class session! **Students should do as much pre-reading as feasible because of the intensive nature of the course.**

Each written assignment **should be completed before the class session** so that you will be able to participate in and benefit from the class discussions.

Written Work

Qualities valued include clarity, succinctness, and precision.

- 1" margins top, bottom and sides
- Double-space (= 3 vertical lines per inch, 27 lines per page)
- 12-point standard.
- Indent paragraphs 5 spaces or 0.6 inch (Western's Thesis standard is 5/8 inch)
- No extra line-feed between paragraphs (Format-Paragraph-Space After)
- Underline section headings
- **Staple; no paperclips, folders, or fanfold**
- **Page numbers**
- Title page is preferred. Any paper sent by email **must** include a title page.

All work must reflect Master's Level use of the English Language. Plagiarism will result in failure of the first assignment so discovered. A second instance will result in failure in the course.

Attendance

Prompt arrival and consistent attendance are vital in a course that meets in an intensive format. Please inform the instructor if you can not attend all or part of any class. Unexcused absences may affect a final grade, at the discretion of the professor.

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Grading

Grades are recorded and averaged on the following scale: A=95%; A-=90%; B+=87%; B=83%; B-=80%; C+=77%; C=73%; C-=70%; D+=67%; D=64%; D-=60%; F=<60%

Methodology

This will be an intense, lively course, using multiple learning modalities. The professor's lectures, student reports, class discussion, small group interaction and selective media will unite to help everyone learn. Participation is a must!

Assignments

1. **There will be four (4) essay assignments**, dues on Tuesday through Friday. These will be worth 25 points each and will cover a specific topic reflected in the reading and discussion in the previous class. The topics are given in the schedule below. Each essay should be 2-3 pages and reflect the aforementioned excellence in composition.
2. **One Research Paper** is due a week after the conclusion of class. The student may choose any current ethical issue; however, the topic must be approved by the professor by the fourth day of class. This will be a 10-12 page paper employing at least 7 sources outside of the two used in class. It is worth 100 points.
3. **There will be a brief, open-book Final Exam** in class on the final day. It will be worth 100 points.

Bibliography (a complete guide will be passed out the first day of class)

Contact Information

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Course and Assignment Outline

Class Session	Class Date	Topics & Assignments
1	5/22/06	Biblical Foundations of Ethics and Critical Thinking Reading: Genesis 1-4; Exodus 19-24; Deuteronomy 1-11; Proverbs 1-6; Jeremiah 7; Amos; Micah 6; Matthew 5-7; Mark 8-10; Romans 12-14; I Corinthians 6; Colossians 3
2	5/23/06	Reading: Rae, 11-122 Class Topic: Developing a Christian Ethic First Essay: "Five Key Elements in Ethical Decision-Making"
3	5/24/06	Reading: Rae, 123-208 Essay due: "Foundations for a Fully Pro-Life Ethic" Class Topic: Life at the Beginning and the End...what are the boundaries of Healing?
4	5/25/06	Reading: Rae, 209-270 Essay due: "toward an Ethic of Peace – when is War Morally Acceptable?" Class topic: Uniting Complete Our Survey of Key Issues PAPER TOPICS DUE
5	5/26/06	Reading: Guinness (all) Essay due: "A Good God in an Evil World – Defending the Faith" Class Topic: Christian Responses to the challenge of evil FINAL EXAM