

Introduction to Christian Ethics
ETH601S – Spring 2015
Andover Newton Theological School

**BE SURE TO READ THROUGH THIS ENTIRE SYLLABUS, INCLUDING ALL ASSIGNMENTS.
THERE IS AN ASSIGNMENT DUE FOR THE FIRST CLASS SESSION WHICH, IF NOT
COMPLETED, WILL RESULT IN THE STUDENT BEING DROPPED FROM THE CLASS.**

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Course Meeting Time: Thursday, 9:00 – 11:50 a.m.

Course Description

This introductory course gives students a spectrum of theological, biblical, and neuroscientific resources for studying ethical reflections in the Christian West. The course pays particular attention to the ethical reflections of four formative figures in the Christian tradition – Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Major assumptions about human nature by these authors are assessed using insights from affective neuroscience, which studies emotions as “value-coding tools” that guide human thought and behavior. As a consequence of the theological, biblical, and neuroscientific work in this course, students will be able to discern and explain mutually conflicting Christian ethical claims about human nature and the role of God, the Holy Spirit, and Christ in human behavior.

Requirements:

Students must have internet access and a Schoology account. Contact the Andover Newton IT Help desk with any technical issues.

****ALL TEXTS (including Schoology Readings) MUST BE BROUGHT TO CLASS ON THE ASSIGNED DATE OF THE TEXT READING.**** Students with laptops may bring them to class and read online if that is their preference.

Required Texts:

Books

- St. Augustine. *The Confessions*, Revised (The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Vol. 1). Translated by Maria Boulding, O.S.B. (Books I – VIII) Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1997. [ISBN 1-56548-084-8, pbk]

- Martin Luther. *Lectures on Galatians 1535* (Chapters 1-4): *Luther's Works* Vol. 26. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963. [ISBN 0-570-06426-0]
- Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven. *The Archaeology of Mind: Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human Emotions*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012 [ISBN 978-0-393-70531-7]

Celluloid Text:

- Margin Call [a feature film starring Kevin Spacey and Paul Bettany], 2011

Schoology Readings

- Reinhold Niebuhr. "Introduction" by Edmund N. Santurri, "Preface to the 1956 Edition", and "An Independent Christian Ethic" (pp. ix – 34). *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. Knoxville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013. [ISBN 978-0-664-23693-9 (paper)]
- Friedrich Schleiermacher. pp. 38-141. *On Freedom*, trans. Albert L. Blackman. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.
- New Revised Standard Version of the Bible: Galatians, Rom. 1: 16 – 32, Rom. 2: 12 – 29, Rom. 7: 7 – 25, 1 Cor. 3:1-11, 1Cor 7: 1-10, 1 Cor. 8, 1 Cor. 10: 23-11.1. (The introductions and notes found in the *HarperCollins Study Bible* are especially useful as study guides. If you use the online biblical text, select the NRSV in the American version, i.e., not the Anglicized edition.)
- John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Introduction, pp. 3 - 19). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. [ISBN-13 978-0-19-515085-8 (pbk.)]
- Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Introduction and Chapter One, pp.1-44). Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006. [ISBN: 1-59752-538-3]
- Krister Stendahl. "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," (pp. 78-96). *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976 [ISBN 0-8006-1224-8]
- Philip Bosman. *Conscience in Philo and Paul: a Conceptual History of the Synoida Word Group* (Chapters One and Two, pp.1-27). Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2003. [ISBN 3-16-148000-7]
- Ishay Rosen-Zvi, "Two Rabbinic Inclinations? Rethinking a Scholarly Dogma" (pp.1-27) *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 39 (2008).
- Peter Brown. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography –A New Edition with an Epilogue*. (Chapter 1, pp. 7-14), "New Evidence" and "New Directions 441-513). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967. [ISBN 0-520-22757-3 (paper)]

- John Dillenberger. "Introduction (pp. xiv-xxv)." In *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1961.
- Martin Luther. "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants," <http://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/Luther-Peasants.html>
- Martin Luther. "On the Jews and Their Lies (Chapter XI)"
- D. W. Winnicott. "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" (pp. 1 - 14). *Playing and Reality*. London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1971
- D. W. Winnicott. "Fear of Breakdown" (pp. 87-95). *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*. Eds. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, Madeleine Davis. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989 [ISBN 0-674-72091-1]
- Thandeka. "Future Designs for American Liberal Theology." *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 30:1, January 2009

Course Requirements & Grading

To pass this course, students must participate in class discussions, read all written assigned texts, view the assigned movie, and complete all written assignments on time and in a satisfactory manner. **Students with disabilities who wish reasonable accommodations must first meet with the Director of Student Life.**

40% of Grade:

Students must write seven discussion notes, due, respectively, at the beginning of each class session. Bring enough copies for distribution to each member of the class.

At the end of the term, students must write a Grade Evaluation Essay (500-word maximum), which must be turned in at the final class session on April 30, 2015. This essay consists of an assessment and evaluation by students of their own work (excluding the term paper) for the course. This assessment process includes a critical review of their (1) discussion notes and (2) contributions to class discussions throughout the course. Students must evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their own work and determine which areas need improvement and which areas demonstrate strong development. Based on this assessment and evaluative process, the student then determines the appropriate grade for all the reviewed course work (excluding the term paper) done for the course. The grades that the students give themselves will constitute 40% of their total grade for the course. As preparation for this grading process, students must write down a few notes to themselves evaluating their work for and in each class session. Time will be provided at the end of each class session for this purpose. These notes should be used at the end of the term to help students reflect upon, evaluate, and finally grade their work throughout the course. This aspect of the grading system for the course is designed to encourage students to engage in a disciplined, self-reflective process, one that can strengthen their ability to critique and effectuate positive change in their own vocational development.

As part of this grading process, students must meet with the instructor for a mid-term review.

Instructions for this mid-term review:

Divide your mid-term evaluation essay (350-word maximum length) into three sections.

Section One: Evaluate your class work based on the criteria you established to assess your progress in this course.

Section Two: Select and evaluate an outstanding discussion note written by one of your classmates. Compare and contrast it with the strengths and weaknesses of your own strongest discussion note. Identify insights gained by means of this process and indicate ways in which you can improve your future discussion notes.

Section Three: Evaluate your participation in class discussions. Are you fully satisfied with your participation or are there areas you would like to improve?

The mid-term meeting with the professor will begin with a review of your essay. Bring two copies of your essay with you to this meeting.

60% of Grade:

The remaining 60% of the grade for this course is based on the student's term paper (maximum length 5000 words) and will be evaluated by the professor. The term paper is **due on Monday, April 13, 2015.**

TERM PAPER OVERVIEW AND INSTRUCTIONS:

Building upon texts from this course, identify and assess a theory of moral agency espoused by a major theologian or ethicist within your faith community.

First. Use the selected text from your faith community to answer the following three questions: How do human beings learn to live and act as moral agents? What standards should be used to assess, judge and foster the actions, values, and moral character of human beings? How does the faith community help to establish the ethical standards that shape their members' moral character?

Second. Using insights you have gained from texts read for this course, assess the adequacy (i.e., the strengths and weaknesses) of the moral theory of human agency you have selected. Compare and contrast the claims to one of the four "case studies" used in the course. **Use affective neuroscientific insights (and insights from other neuroscientific and psychological fields) to help you assess the adequacy of the moral**

theory. Refute or qualify these claims as you deem appropriate and explain your rationale.

Third. Create a supplementary strategy for ethical reflections on moral agency that will strengthen the case study you selected from your faith community. Explain how this new strategy will guide your own work of ministry.

Term Paper Structure:

Maximum word limit 5000 words.

Your paper must have five sections. (1) introduction; (2) case study of a contemporary theory of moral agency within your faith community; (3) your analysis of the case study; (4) the further development of the case study for your own use in ministry ; (5) conclusions.

1. Introduction: A brief paragraph describing insights you have gained by means of this process of developing a moral theory useful in your own ministry.
2. A systematic summary of the case study.
3. Analysis of the case study. Demonstrate how various writers have helped you assess the adequacy of the moral theory of human behavior. Here you must use texts from this course to support your claims. You are also encouraged to use texts not discussed in this course to help you analyze the selected theory. When citing texts, paraphrase the authors' words, using direct quotations only when absolutely necessary (and if you use direct quotes, you must restate the authors' arguments using your own words). All citations must be documented using footnotes or endnotes according to the *Chicago Manual of Style* format.

In this section, define key terms. These definitions must include a delineation of the core assumptions about the role of human reason and emotions in ethical reflections. What are the basic presuppositions found in the selected case study about human nature that frame the approach to the text's moral assessment of human thoughts, feelings, and actions? You must identify all major presuppositions, state them clearly, and explain them.

4. Use insights gained from this course to assess the adequacy of the selected ethical theory. Compare and contrast it to one of the case studies of a moral theory of human agency studied in this course. Explain how this evaluative work helps you formulate principles for ethical codes of behavior that will guide your ministry. How will it help persons who have turned to you for moral insight and guidance?

5. Conclusions and further personal reflections: Briefly, offer reflections as to how this project is linked, for you, to your vocational formation process in Unitarian Universalist and/or Christian ministry.

Documentation: Failure to document written work properly (omission of page numbers from full bibliographical citations; failure to use quotation marks for direct quotes; direct paraphrase of sources or splicing together several sources; etc.) will be considered plagiarism and is a very serious matter. Egregious cases will be referred to the Academic Dean for disciplinary action.

Students may not submit the same paper, even in-part, for two different assignments without explicit permission from both instructors. Cases where students fail to honor this expectation may be subject to disciplinary action; reusing one's own work without acknowledgement is a form of plagiarism.

Term Paper Evaluation:

Your paper will be assessed for internal coherence and integrity.

- How thoroughly developed is your case study?
- How precisely have you defined the primary terms and delineated the basic presuppositions?
- Are there internal contradictions in your case study that you have not addressed?
- How well do you support and explain the efficacy of the theory of moral agency you develop?
- How carefully do you pinpoint aspects of moral theories developed in texts read for this course that complement or challenge your own standpoint?

The 5000-word limit is absolute. Penalty is one letter grade for exceeding the limit. For each 250 words exceeding the limit, the grade will be lowered another full letter grade.

DISCUSSION NOTE INSTRUCTIONS:

Each discussion note must contain two parts. **Part One** (200-word maximum) always entails an analysis of an assigned text and must include parenthetical citations identifying the page number for each major claim. In sum, document your claims about the text by using citations from the text itself as evidence to support your summary of the claim. Citations should include the author's last name, page number, and when appropriate the title of the work (if more than one work by the author is used). Example: (Winnicott, "Fear of Breakdown," 88). Words in the reference citations do not count toward the word-count limit. **Part Two** (100-word maximum) gives you the opportunity to express your own personal concerns, insights, opinions and perspectives on the text. **Papers that exceed the maximum word limit cannot be read in class and will be given the grade of F.**

Course Outline

Session I: Thursday, January 29, 2015

Topic: The Human Side of Christian Ethics: Human nature and the human soul reconsidered.

Required Texts: (Read the following texts and view the movie and write the first discussion note BEFORE this first class session. FAILURE TO DO SO WILL RESULT IN THE STUDENT BEING DROPPED FROM THE CLASS.)

- Reinhold Niebuhr. "Introduction" by Edmund N. Santurri, "Preface to the 1956 Edition", and "An Independent Christian Ethic" (pp. ix – 34). *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*.
- D. W. Winnicott. "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" (pp. 1 - 14). *Playing and Reality*.
- D. W. Winnicott. "Fear of Breakdown" (pp. 87-95). *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*.
- Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven. "Toward a Neurobiology of the Soul" (Chapter 11, pp. 389 – 423). *The Archaeology of Mind: Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human Emotions*.
- Margin Call [a feature film starring Kevin Spacey and Paul Bettany], 2011

Discussion Note (300-word maximum):

Part One* (200-word maximum limit): What, according to Winnicott, are "transitional objects" and "transitional phenomena" and how are they related to the "intermediate area of experience"?

Part Two* (100-word maximum limit): Express your personal comments, insights, and queries related to your work on the above assignment in Part One.

***Note: Each subsequent discussion note, as explained above, must contain two parts. Part One (200-word maximum); Part Two (100-word maximum).**

Sessions II and III: Thursday, February 5 and 12, 2015:

Topic: Paul's doctrine of gentile human nature

Required Texts:

- Gal. 2: 15 – 21 [NIX LAW FOR GENTILES]; Rom. 1: 16 – 32 [God gave them up to the lusts in their hearts to impurity]; Rom. 2: 12 – 29 [their own conscience also bears

witness; a person is a Jew who is one inwardly] Rom. 7: 7 – 25 [law and sin and inner conflict]; 1 Cor. 3:1-11 [that foundation is Christ]; 1Cor 7: 1-10 [self-control rather than consumed by passion]; 1 Cor. 8[conscience –food to idols not eaten]; 1 Cor. 10: 23-11.1 [conscience, don't eat]; (New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. The introductions and notes found in the *HarperCollins Study Bible* are especially useful as study guides. If you use the online biblical text, select the NRSV in the American version, i.e., not the Anglicized edition.)

- John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Introduction, pp. 3-19)
- Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Introduction, Chapters One and Two pp. 1 – 44)
- Krister Stendahl. "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," pp. 78-96.
- Philip Bosman. *Conscience in Philo and Paul: a Conceptual History of the Synoida Word Group* (Chapters One), pp. 1-27
- Ishay Rosen-Zvi, "Two Rabbinic Inclinations? Rethinking a Scholarly Dogma." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 39 (2008) pp. 1-27.

Discussion Note (300-word maximum):

Part One (200-word maximum length): According to Paul, "When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret [inward, hidden] thoughts of all. (Romans 2:14-16). Paul concludes: "For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God. (Rom. 2: 28-29). How, according to Paul, does a Gentile become inwardly a spiritual Jew? Use insights from the secondary texts assigned for this class session to help you answer this question using claims made by Paul to his followers.

Part Two (100-word maximum length): Express your personal comments, insights, and queries related to your work on the above assignment in Part One.

Sessions IV and V: Thursday, February 19 and 26, 2015

Topic: Augustine At Odds With Himself

Required Texts:

- Patricia Hampl. "Preface to the Vintage Spiritual Classics Edition" and "Chronology of the Life of Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo" (pp. xiii–xxxvii). *The Confessions: St. Augustine*.

- St. Augustine. *The Confessions: St. Augustine*
 (1) Books I-III, pp. 3-53
 (2) Books VII-VIII, pp. 120-169
- Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven. "Ancestral Passions" and "Beyond Instinct: Learning and the Affective Foundations of Memory" (Chapter One, pp. 1-46; Chapter 6, pp. 236-243). *The Archaeology of Mind: Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human Emotions*

Discussion Note:

Part One (200-word maximum). Augustine says he was "at odds with himself, and fragmenting himself (p. 163). Explain (1) why Augustine believes he felt this way and (2) the role Christ played – according to Augustine – in stopping his self-fragmentation.

Part Two: (100-word maximum) Describe your feelings, personal reflections, evaluations, insights and/or commentary about Augustine's self-war and the way it was resolved through Christ.

Session VI: Thursday, March 5, 2015

Topic: Luther's conscience.

Required Texts:

- John Dillenberger. "Introduction" (pp. xiv-xxv). In *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1961.
- *Galatians, The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*.
- Martin Luther. (*Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1-4* (pp. 4-155).

Discussion Note:

Part One. According to Luther, how does his tormented conscience become the bride of Christ?

Part Two. Personal reflections.

Session VII: March 12, 2015

- Martin Luther. "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants," <http://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/Luther-Peasants.html>
- Martin Luther. "On the Jews and Their Lies," (Chapter XI approximately 11 pages)

Luther: "When I convince another pious Jew to take baptism,
 I will take him to the bridge across the Elbe river immediately after his baptism,
 tie a stone around his neck and throw him in the water."

Discussion Note:

Part One. What links can you discern between Luther's doctrine of human nature and his attacks against peasants and Jews?

Part Two. Personal reflections.

Session VIII: Thursday, March 19, 2015

Topic: Schleiermacher: Is he "soft" on crime?

Required Texts:

- Thandeka, "Future Designs for American Liberal Theology."
- Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, pp. 38-83.

Discussion Note:

Part One: How does Schleiermacher, as a determinist, justify punishment and leniency for convicted criminals?

Part Two: Personal Reflections

Session IX: Thursday, March 26, 2015

Topic: Schleiermacher's Anatomy of the Self

Required Text:

- Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, pp. 84 – 141.

Discussion Note:

Part One: According to Schleiermacher, what is the nature and structure of human freedom?

Part Two: Personal Reflections

NO CLASS SESSIONS THURSDAY APRIL 2 AND APRIL 9, 2015

Sessions X - XII: April 16, 23, 30 – Final Papers Analyzed and Critiqued by Student Respondents