Syllabus

REL 230 Christian Social Ethics
Elmhurst College
Spring 2020
T/R 9:50–11:30am Schaible 236 (section 2)
T/R 1:00–2:40pm Circle Hall 012 (section 1)
Dr. Jeffrey D. Meyers
jeffrey.meyers@elmhurst.edu

About this Course:

Course Description:
This course is a critical introduction to normative Christian social ethics (its methodology, theology, and moral principles) on selected contemporary moral issues such as war, racism, hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation. Students will be introduced to the decision-making processes of Christian ethics, examine the moral impact of central Christian convictions, and better understand the moral decision-making processes of others and themselves.

Objectives:
This course has been designed to achieve the objectives of an ethics course in the discipline of religious studies and the Integrated Curriculum’s objectives for Religious Studies in Context, Experiential Learning, and Intercultural Domestic Engagement.

Course Objectives:
1. Develop critical self-awareness of your own convictions, perceptions, theological beliefs, and philosophical principles when making ethical decisions.
2. Deepen your understanding of Christian ethics through the communal examination of some of its basic concepts, fundamental commitments, and important questions.
3. Explore the Bible, theology, experience, reason, and the voices of those on the margins as sources for thinking about Christian ethics.
4. Practice reading carefully, thinking critically, communicating clearly, and writing effectively.

Religious Studies in Context Objectives:
5. Identify major theoretical approaches to the study of religions.
6. Recognize specific religions in their contexts.
7. Interpret religions as formed by their contexts and those contexts as shaped by religious traditions.

Experiential Learning Objectives:
8. Integrate course-based learning with related learning experiences outside of the classroom.
9. Analyze reflectively classroom learning and an outside class experience.

Intercultural Domestic Engagement Objectives:
10. Demonstrate an understanding of culture in the United States and the relation between individual values and dominant norms.
11. Analyze the way that dominant cultural norms affect social and political actions.
12. Examine critically the structures and organizations that contribute to the establishment of societal norms and relationships.
**Required Readings:**


Additional readings are posted on Blackboard and listed in the course schedule below.

**Course Policies:**

**Office Hours**
I will hold office hours Tuesdays 11:45am–12:45pm in Old Main 232. You are always welcome to stop by my office during my office hours or email me to set up an appointment.

**Content Notice**
This course engages with a number of challenging and sensitive topics. When engaging in discussions of violence, trauma, and other sensitive topics I ask that you be careful in how you speak, keeping in mind that there may be others in the classroom who have had experiences like those being discussed and who may be deeply impacted by the discussion. I also invite and encourage you to contact me to discuss potential triggers or your reactions to the course content.

**Grading**
This class uses a standard grading scale:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93–100</td>
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<td>A–</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>D–</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>F</td>
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**Late Work**
All students are expected to turn in work on time. I may choose to accept late work, but your grade will be affected unless you receive prior approval for an extension. Extensions will be granted only for extraordinary circumstances. You should contact me before the assignment is due if you have reason to seek an extension.

**Absences**
I appreciate it if students who are going to be absent from class inform me ahead of time via email. While I understand that there are occasionally legitimate reasons to be absent, repeated absences will affect your attendance and participation grade. Missing more than half of the class sessions will result in an automatic “F” in the class.

**Withdrawing From the Class: Don’t Ghost the Professor**
If you plan to withdraw or stop participating after the first week of classes I ask that you meet with me or email me to discuss your reasons before you officially withdraw. You can drop a course without penalty (and without meeting with me) through February 9. Between February 9 and March 8, you can withdraw and receive a grade of “W.” If you stop participating after March 8, you will receive a grade based on the work you completed until that point.
Technology in the Classroom
Students should use laptops and tablets in class for class-related purposes only. Technology can be a helpful tool in the classroom, but it can also be a distraction. You are expected to regulate your technology use and avoid personal uses such as checking email or visiting social media websites. Cellphones should not be used in the classroom unless I give explicit permission for a particular activity. Failure to abide by this policy will affect your participation grade.

Access and Disability Services
Elmhurst College will make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities based on the presentation of appropriate documentation. If you believe that you have a disability that may impact your work in this course, contact Linda Harrell, ADS Coordinator, at disability.services@elmhurst.edu or 630-617-6448. The ADS office is located on the main floor of the A.C. Buehler Library. Classroom accommodations must be renewed each term.

Learning Center: Academic Support
The Learning Center offers services to support the academic performance of all Elmhurst College students. Sessions are structured to promote principles of self-regulated learning and academic management. The Learning Center is located on the main floor of the Buehler Library.

Academic Integrity
It would be ironic for you to violate Elmhurst’s academic integrity policy in a class on ethics. The community expectations for academic integrity prohibit cheating, fabrication (for instance, of data or research), collusion (inappropriate help), and plagiarism (representing someone else’s work as your own or failing to cite when you rely on a source). Please see the student handbook for further definitions, examples, and consequences. If you have questions about how to avoid plagiarism, you can seek help at the library, learning center, or from me.

Sexual and Relationship Violence
While I always want to be available for support, it is important for you to know that faculty are required to report information reported to us about experiences with sexual or relationship violence to Elmhurst’s Title IX Coordinator. That said, disclosing experiences with sexual or relationship violence in course assignments or discussion does not constitute a formal report and will not begin the process of Elmhurst providing a response. You can find information on Title IX reporting on Elmhurst’s website. Students seeking to speak confidentially about issues related to sexual and relationship violence can do so at Student Health Services or Counseling Services.

Mandated Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect
The Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act mandates that all university personnel who have reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 known to them in their professional or official capacity may have been subjected to physical or sexual abuse, may be at risk of physical or sexual abuse, or is being deprived of the proper or necessary care immediately report such mistreatment to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.
Assignments:

First Week Survey (2.5% of your final grade)
This short survey helps me get to know you better so that I can best facilitate your learning.

Class Attendance and Participation (15%)
Attendance and active engagement in class is central to the learning process. You are expected to come to each class session on time and ready to engage in discussion of the assigned readings. Short in-class writing assignments will also be included in this part of your grade.

Reading Reactions and Quizzes (15%)
For each reading in the course schedule below (except Bible passages) compete a reading reaction that includes:

- A 2–4 sentence summary of the reading focused on summarizing what the author is arguing.
- A list, in complete sentences, of 2–5 key points from the reading that you found important, interesting, or surprising.
- One question you still have about the topic of the reading.

A template and example are on Blackboard. Also included in this grade are periodic short quizzes intended to test your comprehension of the readings. I will drop your lowest three reading reaction or quiz grades.

Concentration Proposal (2.5%)
Select a topic or question that you think needs to be addressed by the Christian community to focus on throughout the course. You might phrase this as a question, for example: “What ethical responsibilities do Christians have in light of climate change?” Eventually, this question will lead to a thesis for your ethical position paper. It will also be integrated into your service learning experience. Consult the list of service learning community partners on Elmhurst’s service learning website to make sure there are organizations doing work related to your topic. I recommend choosing an organization from the list, though you are welcome to find another organization with my permission. You may also want to coordinate with another student to do your service together at the same site. After doing some preliminary reading and research, submit a one-paragraph description of your topic and indicate which service learning partner you have contacted about the possibility of working with them.

Concentration Bibliography (5%)
Compile a bibliography of 10–15 books, scholarly articles, and book chapters on your concentration topic using the library catalog and databases like the ATLA Religion Database and WorldCat. Entries should be formatted according to a formal citation style like Chicago, MLA, or APA. Think of this as a preliminary bibliography for your ethical position paper. At least four of your sources should be books.

Book Study (10%)
Select a book from your bibliography that you think will be particularly helpful for your ethical position paper. This should be a book in Christian theology or ethics and a monograph by a
single author (not an anthology). Read the opening and closing chapters of the book carefully, taking notes about the book’s key arguments and claims. Skim the rest of the book, focusing on reading the introduction and conclusion of each chapter. Write a one-page abstract of the book that introduces its key arguments and claims. Find three scholarly reviews of the book in academic journals (the ATLA Religion Database is a good place to start, narrowing your search to reviews using the advanced search features). Read them and write a 1–2 page summary of scholarly reactions to the book that compares the different reviews and presents an overall summary of the reviewers’ opinions of the book. Include a bibliography listing the reviews. Submit both your abstract and your summary of scholarly reactions together in one document.

Ethical Position Paper (20%)  
In this 4–5 page paper (double spaced) you will articulate an ethical position based on Christian convictions on a topic related to your concentration and present a persuasive argument in support of that position. Necessary elements include your precise issue (topic statement), your position (thesis), the justification for your position (argument), your response to at least one counter-argument (rebuttal), and analysis of the practical implications of your position (implications for living). You may want to bring in insights from the course readings, your book study, and your service learning experience. Your paper should be followed by a bibliography of works cited.

Service Learning Experience and Paper (20%)  
To fulfill the experiential learning aspect of this course, you need to complete at least 15 hours of volunteer service through the service learning program. After you have completed your hours, write a 3–4 page paper (double spaced) about the organization and your experience volunteering with it. As part of this assignment, you should collect written materials about the organization, review their website, and talk to staff members about what they do. In your paper you should:

- Introduce the primary problem or issue on which your organization focuses, drawing on (and citing) sources used in class (if possible) and the sources in your concentration bibliography.
- Describe the organization and its history, goals, and organizational philosophy/theology.
- Analyze how the organization addresses the problem it seeks to address. For example, does it focus more on addressing the symptoms of the problem or the root causes?
- Examine how what you experienced in working with and learning about this organization resonates with what you have read for this course. Be specific in your response, indicating which author/reading and in what ways you see the connection.
- Reflect on what you have learned from your experience. Has it impacted how you think about ethics or your concentration topic?

You also need to submit a log of your hours. This should include the name and contact information of someone at the organization you worked with who can confirm your hours and the names of any other students who served with you.

Final Reflection Paper (10%)  
Write a 2–3 page reflection paper (double spaced) engaging one or both of the following questions:

- What was the most impactful or important thing you learned through this class?
- How has your understanding of Christian social ethics developed as a result of this class?
Assignment Due Dates:

All assignments should be submitted on Blackboard. Giving the two sections different due dates allows me to provide you feedback on assignments more quickly.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>9:50am Section</th>
<th>1pm Section</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Reactions</td>
<td>10pm the night before class</td>
<td>Noon the day of class</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Week Survey</td>
<td>Wed, Feb. 5 by 10pm</td>
<td>Wed, Feb. 5 by 10pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration Proposal</td>
<td>Fri, Feb. 21 by 10pm</td>
<td>Wed, Feb. 19 by 10pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration Bibliography</td>
<td>Wed, Mar. 4 by 10pm</td>
<td>Mon, Mar. 2 by 10pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book Study</td>
<td>Fri, Apr. 3 by 10pm</td>
<td>Wed, Apr. 1 by 10pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical Position Paper</td>
<td>Fri, Apr. 24 by 10pm</td>
<td>Wed, Apr. 22 by 10pm</td>
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<td>Service Learning Paper</td>
<td>Wed, May 13 by 10pm</td>
<td>Mon, May 11 by 10pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Reflection Paper</td>
<td>Thur, May 21 by 10pm</td>
<td>Tue, May 19 by 10pm</td>
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Course Schedule:

1. Tue, Feb 4: Introductions
   No assigned reading

2. Thur, Feb 6: Introduction to Christian Ethics
   Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, “opening words,” chapter 1

3. Tue, Feb 11: Loving the Neighbor in a Globalized World
   Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 2

   Economic Justice

   Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 3

5. Tue, Feb 18: Biblical Perspectives on Wealth and Poverty
6. Thur, Feb 20: Consumerism as an Evil that Pretends to be Good
Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 4

**Ecological Justice**

7. Tue, Feb 25: A Moral Vision that Includes the Earth
Genesis 1–3
Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 5

8. Thur, Feb 27: Responding to the Climate Crisis

9. Tue, Mar 3: Eating Responsibly

**Jesus’ Command to Love**

10. Thur, Mar 5: The Love Command
Matthew 5:38–48, 22:34–40
Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 7

11. Tue, Mar 10: Love, Ecology, Economics, and Holistic Peacemaking
Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 8
Racism, Nationalism, and War

12. Thur, Mar 12: Addressing Systemic Racism

13. Tue, Mar 17: War, Racism, and Nationalism

14. Thur, Mar 19: Nuclear Weapons

Mar 23–27: Spring Recess

Resistance and Nonviolence

15. Tue, Mar 31: A Moral Framework for Resistance
Moe-Lobeda, Resisting Structural Evil, chapter 9

16. Thur, Apr 2: The Characteristics of Effective Nonviolence
Choose one set of readings (indicate your choice on Blackboard by Tue, Mar 31 at 10pm)
Option 1: Protestant Peacemakers

– continued on next page –

**Option 2: Catholic Peacemakers**

**Option 3: Nonviolence Theorists**

17. **Tue, Apr 7: Peacemaking in Christianity**
Romans 12

18. **Thur, Apr 9: Resistance and Rebuilding**
Moe-Lobeda, Resisting Structural Evil, chapter 10

**Sexual Ethics**

19. **Tue, Apr 14: Investigating Sexual Ethics**
Ellison, *Making Love Just*, introduction, chapter 1

20. **Thur, Apr 16: Christian Sexual Ethics in Historical Perspective**
Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 2

21. **Tue, Apr 21: How Do We Decide What Is Ethical?**
Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 3
22. Thur, Apr 23: Same Gender Relationships and Marriage Equality
Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 4

23. Tue, Apr 28: Sexual Violence
Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 5

24. Thur, Apr 30: Birth Control

25. Tue, May 5: Abortion
Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 6

26. Thur, May 7: Youth and Sexual Ethics
Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 7, epilogue

**Moving Forward in Hope**

27. Tue, May 12: Hope and Despair
Revelation 21–22
Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 6

28. Thur, May 14: Moving Forward in Hope
Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, “closing words”

29. Final Exam Period
Tue, May 19, 1–3pm (1pm section) | Thur, May 21, 10:30am–12:30pm (9:50am section)
Discussion topic TBA. We will not have a final exam.