

**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

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***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:**

Ellison, Marvin M. *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia D. *Resisting Structural Evil: Love As Ecological and Economic Vocation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.

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:

A	93–100	B	83–86	C	73–76	D	63–66
A–	90–92	B–	80–82	C–	70–72	D–	60–62
B+	87–89	C+	77–79	D+	67–69	F	0–59

### **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](mailto: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) complete 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.

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

## ***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

De La Torre, Miguel A. “Doing Christian Ethics.” In *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*, 2nd ed., 3–17. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014.

### **3. Tue, Feb 11: Loving the Neighbor in a Globalized World**

Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 2

King, Martin Luther Jr. “On Being a Good Neighbor.” In *Strength to Love*, 26–35. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981.

## **Economic Justice**

### **4. Thur, Feb 13: Globalization, Poverty, and the Environment**

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

Berry, Wendell. “The Idea of a Local Economy.” In *Food and Faith: Justice, Joy and Daily Bread*, edited by Michael Schut, 125–36. New York: Morehouse, 2009.

### **5. Tue, Feb 18: Biblical Perspectives on Wealth and Poverty**

Volf, Miroslav, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz. “Wealth” and “Poverty.” In *Public Faith in Action: How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, and Vote with Integrity*, 31–39, 67–75. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016.

Astorga, Christina A. “Wealth and Prosperity.” In *Asian American Christian Ethics: Choices, Methods, Issues*, edited by Grace Y. Kao and Ilsup Ahn, 109–29. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015.

## **6. Thur, Feb 20: Consumerism as an Evil that Pretends to be Good**

Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 4

Douglass, Gordon, and Ward McAfee. "Consumerism." In *Resistance: The New Role of Progressive Christians*, edited by John B. Cobb Jr., 55–74. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008.

### **Ecological Justice**

## **7. Tue, Feb 25: A Moral Vision that Includes the Earth**

Genesis 1–3

Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 5

Tinker, George E. "An American Indian Theological Response to Ecojustice." In *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, edited by Jace Weaver, 153–76. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996.

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

American Association for the Advancement of Science Climate Science Panel. *What We Know: The Reality, Risks, and Response to Climate Change*. Washington, DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2014.

Franzen, Jonathan. "What If We Stopped Pretending?" *The New Yorker* (September 8, 2019).

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/what-if-we-stopped-pretending>.

Antal, Jim. "Living Hope-Filled Lives in a Climate Crisis World." In *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*, 155–70. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

## **9. Tue, Mar 3: Eating Responsibly**

Berry, Wendell. "The Pleasures of Eating." In *What are People For?*, 145–52. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010.

Graham McMinn, Lisa. "Eating Closer to Home: On Being Neighborly." In *To the Table: A Spirituality of Food, Farming, and Community*, 89–117. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016.

### **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

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Loving Your Enemies." In *Strength to Love*, 49–57. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981.

## **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**

Keller, Tim. "Racism and Corporate Evil: A White Guy's Perspective." *Race and the Christian*. New York City. March 28, 2012. [www.desiringgod.org/messages/racism-and-corporate-evil](http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/racism-and-corporate-evil).  
Douglas, Kelly Brown. "More Than Skin Deep: The Violence of Anti-Blackness." In *Anti-Blackness and Christian Ethics*, edited by Vincent W. Lloyd and Andrew Prevot, 3–18. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017.

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

King, Martin Luther Jr. "The World House." In *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 177–202. Boston: Beacon, 2010.  
Hauerwas, Stanley. "Why War Is a Moral Necessity for America: Or, How Realistic Is Realism?" In *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity*, 21–34. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.

### **14. Thur, Mar 19: Nuclear Weapons**

Science and Security Board of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. "Closer Than Ever: It Is 100 seconds to Midnight: 2020 Doomsday Clock Statement." January 23, 2020. <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time>.  
Niebuhr, Reinhold. "The Hydrogen Bomb." In *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, edited by D. B. Robertson, 235–37. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1957.  
Muste, A. J. "The Man on the Cross Against the Atomic Bomb." In *The Way of Peace: A. J. Muste's Writings for the Church*, edited by Jeffrey D. Meyers, 189–205. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016.

### ***Mar 23–27: Spring Recess***

## **Resistance and Nonviolence**

### **15. Tue, Mar 31: A Moral Framework for Resistance**

Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 9  
Barbé, Domingos. "The Spiritual Basis of Nonviolence." In *Relentless Persistence: Nonviolent Action in Latin America*, edited by Philip McManus and Gerald Schlabach, 268–81. Philadelphia, PA: New Society, 1991.

### **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**

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Nonviolence and Racial Justice." In *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington, 5–9. New York: HarperOne, 1986.

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Muste, A. J. "What the Bible Teaches About Freedom." In *The Way of Peace: A. J. Muste's Writings for the Church*, edited by Jeffrey D. Meyers, 171–88. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016.

### **Option 2: Catholic Peacemakers**

Merton, Thomas. "Blessed are the Meek." In *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice*, 14–29. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968.

Pope Francis. "Nonviolence: a Style of Politics for Peace." Message for the 50th World Day of Peace. December 8, 2016. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161208\\_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html).

### **Option 3: Nonviolence Theorists**

Nagler, Michael N. "Right Intention: Cultivating a Nonviolent Soul." In *The Nonviolence Handbook: A Guide for Practical Action*, 13–20. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2014.

Nepstad, Sharon Erickson. "What Nonviolence Is and What It Is Not." In *Nonviolent Struggle: Theories, Strategies, and Dynamics*, 1–22. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

## **17. Tue, Apr 7: Peacemaking in Christianity**

Romans 12

Moltmann, Jürgen. "Dragon Slaying and Peacemaking in Christianity." In *Ethics of Hope*, 189–206. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

Wink, Walter. "The Gift of the Enemy." In *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, 161–79. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

## **18. Thur, Apr 9: Resistance and Rebuilding**

Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 10

Townes, Emilie M. "Everydayness: Beginning Notes on Dismantling the Cultural Production of Evil." In *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 159–65. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

### **Sexual Ethics**

## **19. Tue, Apr 14: Investigating Sexual Ethics**

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, introduction, chapter 1

De La Torre, Miguel. "A Sexual Ethics for the Body." In *A Lily Among the Thorns: Imagining a New Christian Sexuality*, 70–86. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

## **20. Thur, Apr 16: Christian Sexual Ethics in Historical Perspective**

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 2

Jennings, Theodore W. "Theological Issues." In *An Ethic of Queer Sex: Principles and Improvisations*, 25–38. Chicago: Exploration Press, 2013.

## **21. Tue, Apr 21: How Do We Decide What Is Ethical?**

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 3

Farley, Margaret A. "Framework for a Sexual Ethic: Just Sex." In *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, 207–44. New York: Continuum, 2006.

## **22. Thur, Apr 23: Same Gender Relationships and Marriage Equality**

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 4

Rogers, Jack. “What the Bible Says and Doesn’t Say about Homosexuality.” In *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church*, 2nd ed., 66–87. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009.

## **23. Tue, Apr 28: Sexual Violence**

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 5

Lebacqz, Karen. “Love Your Enemy: Sex, Power, and Christian Ethics.” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1990): 3–23.

## **24. Thur, Apr 30: Birth Control**

Pope Paul VI. *Humanae Vitae*. July 25, 1968. [w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html).

McCarty, Richard W. “Selective Acts of Procreation.” In *Sexual Virtue: An Approach to Contemporary Christian Ethics*, 243–53. Albany: SUNY Press, 2015.

## **25. Tue, May 5: Abortion**

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 6

Pope John Paul II. Sections 1–4, 13, 58–63, 99 from *Evangelium Vitae*. March 25, 1995. [w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html).

## **26. Thur, May 7: Youth and Sexual Ethics**

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, chapter 7, epilogue

Bolz-Weber, Nadia. “The Fireplace.” In *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation*, 119–30. New York: Convergent, 2019.

### **Moving Forward in Hope**

## **27. Tue, May 12: Hope and Despair**

Revelation 21–22

Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chapter 6

Meyers, Jeffrey D. “The New Jerusalem: Envisioning Another Way.” In *The Nonviolent Apocalypse: Revelation’s Nonviolent Resistance Against Rome*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books / Fortress Academic, forthcoming.

## **28. Thur, May 14: Moving Forward in Hope**

Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, “closing words”

Muste, A. J. “Saints for this Age.” In *The Way of Peace: A. J. Muste’s Writings for the Church*, edited by Jeffrey D. Meyers, 271–87. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016.

## **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.*