

**Ethics, Religion and International Politics**  
**International Studies 600 / Theology 563**  
**Boston College, Fall 2009**  
**Mon/Wed 3:00 - 4:15pm**

**Professor Erik Owens**

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**Course description:**

This class examines diverse religious and secular models for relating ethics to international affairs, as well as specific areas of international politics where ethical questions are likely to arise, including sovereignty, terrorism, peacemaking, human rights, globalization, economic justice, and the use of force in war or humanitarian interventions. Special attention is given to theological perspectives and religious actors.

**Course Readings:**

Most of the course readings will be posted online at our class' BC Share site for you to print, read and **bring to class**. In addition, **the following texts have been ordered at the BC bookstore** or may be purchased online:

- Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (Norton, 2007)
- John Carlson and Erik Owens, eds., *The Sacred and the Sovereign: Religion and International Politics* (Georgetown, 2003)
- John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Harvard, 2007).
- Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* [4e] (Basic Books, 2006)

Suggested readings about many topics are provided for those who want to dig deeper into the issues. You will not be responsible for this material on papers or your exam, though it will help you in class discussions as well as in your exams and papers.

You should also consult a variety of news sources regularly throughout the week. My suggestions:

- **Council on Foreign Relations** ([www.cfr.org](http://www.cfr.org))  
*The U.S. foreign policy Establishment. Their weekly email newsletters are highly recommended.*
- **Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life** ([www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org))  
*Influential source for nonpartisan info, analysis and polls; their email newsletters are excellent.*
- **The Immanent Frame** ([http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent\\_frame](http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame))  
*Long-form blog posts on secularism, religion and the public sphere.*
- **Muslim-West Facts Initiative** ([www.muslimwestfacts.com](http://www.muslimwestfacts.com))  
*Gallup World Poll of opinion leaders in the West and the Muslim world*
- **Weekly newsmagazines:** *Economist, Atlantic, New Yorker, Time, Newsweek*
- **International affairs sections of major media sites:**  
Newspapers: *WaPo, NYT, WSJ, Boston Globe, CSM*; foreign papers if you read the language  
Radio: BBC, NPR  
Television: American networks, CNN, BBC, perhaps Al Jazeera English
- **Aggregators:** *Arts & Letters Daily* ([www.aldaily.com](http://www.aldaily.com)), Google News (use keywords), etc.

### Course requirements:

- 1. Participation and presentations (10%):** Active and informed participation is crucial to understanding this material, so you will be graded on a balance of quality and quantity of participation. Students are expected to attend each class, complete all the required reading, contribute to class discussions, and submit assignments on time. In addition, each student must **initiate 5 posts on our course blog (on BC Share) and comment on 10 others** during the semester.
- 2. Two short papers (50%):** Students will write two short essays, each 5-6 pages in length (double-spaced), on an assigned topic. Papers must demonstrate critical understanding of the key themes and readings of that portion of the course. Each is worth 25% of your final grade; due dates Oct 14 & Nov 16.
- 3. Final exam (40%):** Closed-book, in-class, comprehensive final exam at the date/time established by the university registrar. A study guide will be distributed in advance of the exam; students are encouraged to study in groups outside of class.

### The grading scale:

- A = excellent work** (A = 95-100; A- = 90-94)  
**B = good work** (B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82)  
**C = adequate work** (C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72)  
**D = poor work** (D = 60-69)  
**F = inadequate or insufficient work** (59 & below)

### Academic integrity:

I don't need to elaborate on the obvious seriousness of academic integrity in an ethics course. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the university's policy on this matter at [www.bc.edu/integrity](http://www.bc.edu/integrity). Violations of academic integrity will be reported to your class dean and judged by the academic integrity committee in your school. If you are found responsible for violating the policy, penalties may include a failing grade as well as possible probation, suspension, or expulsion, depending on the seriousness and circumstances of the violation. Please talk to me about any questions you may have.

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## PART ONE: RELIGION AND THE POLITICAL ORDER

- (1) Wed 9/9: Ethics, religion and international politics**
- (2) Mon 9/14: Religion and international relations theory**  
*Why was 9/11 a surprise to so many people?*
- (3) Wed 9/16: Secularization and secularism in international relations**  
*Is the world around us "secular"?*
- (4) Mon 9/21: Sovereignty: past, present, future**  
*Who's in charge here?*
- (5) Wed 9/23: Sovereignty: "us" and "them"**  
*How should we define the "us" and "them"?*
- (6) Mon 9/28: The clash of civilizations?**

## PART TWO: GLOBAL ETHICS AND THE ETHICS OF GLOBALIZATION

- (7) Wed 9/30: Cosmopolitanism and patriotism, part 1**  
*Who is our neighbor?*

- (8) Mon 10/5: **Cosmopolitanism and patriotism, part 2**  
*Are political boundaries morally relevant?*
- (9) Wed 10/7: **State/religion in comparative perspective**  
***Which is the outlier: the United States or Europe?***
- \*\*\* Mon 10/12: Columbus Day break \*\*\*
- (10) Wed 10/14: **Human migration [PAPER #1 DUE]**  
*Are forced migrants stateless or merely homeless?*
- (11) Mon 10/19: **Immigration and national identity**  
*What does immigration policy say about a nation's values?*
- (12) Wed 10/21: **Religion, ethics and United States foreign policy**  
*Is a "moral foreign policy" irresponsible—and thus immoral?*
- (13) Mon 10/26: **Political economy and economic justice**  
*What makes the good life possible?*
- (14) Wed 10/28: **international law & local justice**  
*Whose justice should prevail?*
- (15) Mon 11/2: **Human rights: the history of an idea**  
*Were human rights "invented"?*
- (16) Wed 11/4: **Human rights and God**  
*Are human rights religious and/or universal?*

### PART THREE: PEACE, VIOLENCE AND THE USE OF FORCE

- (17) Mon 11/9: **Religious traditions of nonviolence**  
*Is pacifism nonviolent?*
- (18) Wed 11/11: **Christian Realism**  
*Why is Reinhold Niebuhr so popular in the post-Bush era?*
- (19) Mon 11/16: **The just war tradition, part 1 (*ad bellum* considerations) [PAPER #2 DUE]**  
*Is war a moral act?*
- (20) Wed 11/18: **The just war tradition, part 2 (*in bello* considerations)**  
*Must war be hell?*
- (21) Mon 11/23: **Islam and the just war**  
*Is jihad an ethic of restraint?*
- \*\*\* Nov 25-29: Thanksgiving break \*\*\*
- (22) Mon 11/30: **Torture**  
*Is torture ever justified?*
- (23) Wed 12/2: **Terrorism**  
*What are religious terrorists thinking? Can violence ever be "religious"?*
- (24) Mon 12/7: **Religious peacebuilding**  
*How can religion be/come a source of reconciliation?*
- (25) Wed 12/9: **Conclusion**  
*So, what?*