

Ethics, Religion and International Politics

INTL/THEO/PHIL 556301 #ERIP2014

Boston College, Fall 2014

Meets MW 3:00 - 4:15pm; discussion sections Wed 4:30-5:20 and Thu 3:00-3:50

Professor Erik Owens

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Course description:

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

This course meets learning goals 2 and 3 of the undergraduate theology major, which prepares students to reflect theologically on contemporary social, cultural, and ethical dimensions and implications of Christian faith; and to mount cogent, constructive theological arguments in dialogue with other disciplines.

Course requirements:

- 1. Participation (15%):** Active and informed participation is crucial to understanding this material, so you will be graded on a balance of quality and quantity of participation. The baseline expectation is that students will attend every class, complete all the required reading, contribute to class discussions, and submit assignments on time. In addition, you are expected to:
 - a. attend at least 10 of the 12 discussion sections
 - b. attend the Boisi Center's November 12 panel on the Jewish diaspora (5:30pm, McGuinn 121)
 - c. initiate 5 substantial discussions on our course web site and write a substantial comment on 10 others (by 5pm Dec 12)

** Unannounced, graded quizzes may be administered as needed, and will come out of this grade area.

- 2. Short essays (30%):** Students will write two short (2-3 pages double-spaced) essays on an assigned topic, due Oct 3 and Nov 21; each paper is worth 15% of the course grade. Papers must demonstrate critical understanding of the key themes and readings of that portion of the course.
- 3. Midterm exam (20%):** Closed-book, in-class exam on Wednesday October 15.
- 4. Group presentation (5%):** Students will work in small groups to prepare and present a short (10-minute) presentation on a topic to be assigned, using class readings and mapping modules.
- 5. Final take-home exam (30%)** due before our scheduled exam time (Friday Dec 19 at 9am).

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)

Laptop policy:

Laptops, tablets and other electronic devices should only be used in class to access electronic class assignments, not for note-taking, web surfing, email or social media. Extensive research over the last decade has proven that students better comprehend and retain material from classroom lectures and conversations when they write notes on paper than when they type notes on laptops or tablets. Digital distraction is only part of the issue; there is a large benefit to cognition and retention when you are forced to summarize more quickly and to physically write your notes.

Disability services:

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan (617.552.8093 or dugganka@bc.edu) at Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD; or Paulette Durrett (617.552.3470 or paulette.durrett@bc.edu) in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

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. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to your class dean and judged by the College's academic integrity committee. 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 or your class dean about any questions you may have.

Course Readings:

Most of the course readings will be posted online on the class Canvas site. Substantial portions of the following texts are also required reading. These are all on physical reserve at O'Neill Library; some are also available as e-books through the library. All may also be purchased (new or used) at the BC bookstore or online (as physical or electronic books).

Required books/software:

- 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)
- Michael Gross, *Moral Dilemmas of Modern War: Torture, Assassination, and Blackmail in an Age of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge, 2009) [Available as e-book from library]
- Martha Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen, *For Love of Country?* (Beacon, 2002)
- Timothy Shah, Alfred Stepan & Monica Toft, eds. *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs* (Oxford 2012) [portions available as e-book from library]
- All students need to install (or have access to) the latest version of the free **Google Earth** software.

Recommended books:

- Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Brookings, 2009)
- Sohail Hashmi and Jack Miles, *Islamic Political Ethics* (Princeton, 2002)
- John Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* (Oxford, 2011 2nd edition)
- E.J. Dionne, Jean Bethke Elshtain and Kayla Drogosz, *Liberty and Power: A Dialogue on Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy in an Unjust World* (Brookings, 2004)
- Eliza Griswold, *Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line Between Christianity & Islam* (FSG, 2010)
- Glenn Carle, *The Interrogator: An Education* (Nation, 2010)

SYLLABUS:

Part One: Religion and the Political Order

- (1) Wed 9/3 **Ethics, religion and international politics**
What's going on here?
- (2) Mon 9/8 **Religion and international relations theory**
Why was 9/11 a surprise to so many people?
- (3) Wed 9/10 **Secularization and secularism in international relations**
Is the world around us "secular"?
- (4) Mon 9/15 **Sovereignty: past, present, future**
Who's in charge here?
Case studies: the United Kingdom, Ukraine, ISIL, Israel/Palestine
- (5) Wed 9/17 **Sovereignty: God and country**
What's God got to do with it?
- (6) Mon 9/22 **State/religion in comparative perspective**
Is there a proper relationship between religion and the state?
Case studies: Indonesia, Iran, Norway, Turkey, UK, USA
- (7) Wed 9/24 **Religions, religious freedom and US Foreign Policy**
What does the State Department care about religions?
- *** Sun 9/28 Class BBQ dinner at Prof. Owens' home (5-8pm)**

Part Two: Global Ethics and the Ethics of Globalization

- (8) Mon 9/29 **Human rights: the history of an idea**
Do human rights need God? Were human rights invented?
- (9) Wed 10/1 **Human rights in global context**
Is the modern human rights regime a colonialist enterprise?
Case study: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- *** Fri 10/3 SHORT PAPER #1 DUE by 4:00 pm (uploaded in Canvas)**
- (10) Mon 10/6 **Cosmopolitanism and global citizenship**
Are political boundaries morally relevant?
- (11) Wed 10/8 **Patriotism, exceptionalism and national identity**
What makes us special?
- *** Mon 10/13 Columbus Day break**
- (12) Wed 10/15 Midterm Exam**
- (13) Mon 10/20 **International law and local justice**
Whose justice should prevail?
Case study: The ICC, the ICTR and local trials
- (14) Wed 10/22 **Human development and the status of women**
What makes the good life possible? Is it gender-specific?
Case study: Women in the MENA region

- (15) Mon 10/27 **Economic aid and human development**
Is humanitarian assistance counterproductive?
Case studies: Ebola, Earthquakes and Tsunamis
- (16) Wed 10/29 **Environmental factors in religions and international politics**
Did climate change cause the "Arab Spring"?
Case studies: the Jordan River and Middle Eastern water policy; conflict minerals

Part Three: Peace, Violence and the Use of Force

- (17) Mon 11/3 **Religious traditions of nonviolence**
Can a religion be nonviolent? What kind of person is nonviolent in the face of injury and injustice?
- (18) Wed 11/5 **Religious violence and terrorism**
Can violence ever be "religious"? What are religious terrorists thinking?
Case study: Al Qaeda and the Islamic State
- (19) Mon 11/10 **Christian Realism**
Why is Reinhold Niebuhr so popular in the Obama era?
- (20) Wed 11/12 **Introducing the just war tradition**
Is war a moral act?
- *** Wed 11/12 **Panel discussion: The Blessings of Exile (McGuinn 121, 5:30-7:00pm)**
Author Meets Critics panel with Alan Wolfe, professor of political science @ BC
- (21) Mon 11/17 ***Jus ad bellum***
Why go to war?
Case study: Israel/Gaza; ISIL;
- (22) Wed 11/19 ***Jus in bello***
Must war be hell?
- *** Fri 11/21 **SHORT PAPER #2 DUE by 4:00 pm (uploaded in Canvas)**
- (23) Mon 11/24 **Targeted killing, assassination and drones**
What are the risks of pinpoint strikes and automated warfare?
- *** Nov 26-28 **Thanksgiving break**
- (24) Mon 12/1 **Humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect**
When is military intervention morally admissible? Is it ever required?
Case studies: Syria, Libya and the Central African Republic
- (25) Wed 12/3 ***Jus ad vim*: sanctions, blockades, and sieges**
What coercive options exist short of war?
Case study: Russia and Gaza
- (26) Mon 12/8 **Just Peace, *jus post bellum* and religious peacebuilding**
How can religion be/come a source of reconciliation?
Case study: Nigeria, South Sudan, Northern Ireland
- (27) Wed 12/10 **Conclusion**
So...what?

**** Final take-home exam, due before 12noon on Fri Dec 19**