

Ethics, Religion and International Politics

Boston College, Fall 2016

INTL/THEO/PHIL 556301

#ERIP2k16

Meets MW 3:00 - 4:15pm (Stokes 215N)

Discussion sections: Wed 4:30-5:20 (Gasson 301) & Thu 3:00-3:50 (Gasson 308)

Professor Erik Owens

Office: The Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Rd. (bc.edu/boisi)

Office Hours: Thursdays 9-11am & by appt.

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TA: Sarah Thomas

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-4pm & by appt.

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Course description:

This class examines diverse religious and secular models for ethical analysis of 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, environmental justice, and the use of force in war or humanitarian interventions. Special attention is given to theological perspectives and religious actors.

Students will critically examine and challenge ideas at work in the world of international politics. This requires an understanding of the contexts in which those ideas took hold, and in which they are employed today (hence the case studies). But it also requires normative engagement: are the actions and ideas we discuss right, wrong, or something else? Do they square with your reasoned judgment, received wisdom, and/or theological interpretation? We will not be mere spectators of the world's moral complexity, but rather participants in it.

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 11 of the 13 discussion sections
 - b. attend two related campus events: an Oct. 20 panel on "Just War Revisited" (5:30pm, Higgins 300), and an Oct. 25 lecture on "Ethics for the Coming Storm" (6:00pm, Fulton 511)
- 2. Short essays (30%):** Students will write two short (3-4 pages double-spaced) essays on an assigned topic, due on dates noted in syllabus; 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. Discussion posts (10%):** Students must initiate at least 5 substantial discussions on our course web site and write a substantial comment on at least 10 others by 10pm on Dec 5.
- 4. Geography quizzes (5%):** Four or five short quizzes on political maps will be given during the semester.
- 5. Group presentation (10%):** Students will work in small groups to prepare and present a short (10-minute) presentation during a discussion section, on a topic related to that week's class.
- 6. Final exam (30%)** taken in class during our scheduled exam time (Friday Dec 16, 12:30-3:30pm).
**** Do not book holiday travel before this time. ****

Course extras (not required):

1. **Class cookout:** All are invited to Professor Owens' home on Sunday Sep 25, 5-8pm
2. **Movie night:** Either "Eye in the Sky" (2016, on the ethics of drone warfare) or "Of Gods and Men" (2011 US release, on a Trappist community's nonviolent response to an Islamist uprising in 1990s Algeria).

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 let me know and also contact Kathy Duggan (617.552.8093 or dugganka@bc.edu) at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD; or Paulette Durrett (617.552.3470 or 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 BC'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)
- 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.

SYLLABUS:

Part One: Religion and the Political Order

- (1) Mon 8/29 **Ethics, religion and international politics**
What's going on here?
- (2) Wed 8/31 **Religion and international relations theory**
Why was 9/11 a surprise to so many people?
- *** Mon 9/5 **Labor Day – no class**
- (3) Wed 9/7 **The politics of “religion” and “secularism” in international relations**
What is “religion”? Is the world around us “secular”?
- (4) Mon 9/12 **Conceptions of sovereignty: past, present, future**
Who's in charge here?
Case studies: *United Kingdom, Ukraine, ISIL, Israel/Palestine*
- (5) Wed 9/14 **Critiques of sovereignty: God and country**
What's God got to do with it?
- (6) Mon 9/19 **State/religion in comparative perspective**
Is there a proper or necessary relationship between religion and the state?
Case studies: *Turkey, Indonesia, China, France, Saudi Arabia, Israel, UK, USA*
- (7) Wed 9/21 **Religions and U.S. foreign policy**
What does the State Department care about religion?
- *** Sun 9/25 **Class BBQ dinner at Prof. Owens' home (5-8pm)**
- (8) Mon 9/26 **The politics of religious freedom**
Should the United States promote religious freedom abroad?

Part Two: Global Ethics and the Ethics of Globalization

- (9) Wed 9/28 **Conceptions of human rights: the history of an idea**
Do human rights need God? Were human rights invented?
- *** Fri 9/30 **SHORT PAPER #1 DUE by 6:00 pm (uploaded in Canvas)**
- (10) Mon 10/3 **Critiques of human rights in global context**
Is the modern human rights regime a colonialist enterprise?
- (11) Wed 10/5 **Cosmopolitanism**
Can we be “citizens of the world”? Are cross-cultural critiques valid?
- *** Mon 10/10 **Columbus Day – no class**
- (12) Wed 10/12 **Patriotism, exceptionalism and national identity**
What makes us special? Is patriotism natural or necessary?
Case studies: *USA, Turkey*
- (13) Mon 10/17 **Conceptions of law and justice in international politics**
Whose justice should prevail?
Case study: *The ICC, the ICTR and local trials*
- (14) Wed 10/19 **Economic justice and theologies of liberation**
Why is Pope Francis so focused on the poor?
- *** Thu 10/20: **Required: “Just War Theory Revisited” (5:30pm, Higgins 300)**

(15) Mon 10/24 **Religion and environmental justice**
How are religious communities responding to climate change? What claims do religious communities have on sacred lands?

*** Tue 10/25: **Required: "Ethics for the Coming Storm" (6:00pm, Fulton 511)**

(16) Wed 10/26 **The global migration crisis**
Who is our neighbor? Are political boundaries morally relevant?

Part Three: Peace, Violence and the Use of Force

(17) Mon 10/31 **Religious violence and terrorism**
Can violence ever be "religious"? What are religious terrorists thinking?
Case study: Islamic State

(18) Wed 11/2 **Religious traditions of nonviolence**
What kind of person is nonviolent in the face of injury and injustice?

*** Fri 11/4 **SHORT PAPER #2 DUE by 6:00 pm (uploaded in Canvas)**

(19) Mon 11/7 **Christian Realism**
Why is Reinhold Niebuhr so popular in the Obama era?

(20) Wed 11/9 **Introducing the just war tradition**
Is war a moral act?

(21) Mon 11/14 **Part 1: Guest speaker Amie Harris, USAID, on religion and human development**

Part 2: *Jus ad bellum* and the responsibility to protect (R2P)
Why go to war?

(22) Wed 11/16 ***Jus in bello***
Must war be hell?

(23) Mon 11/21 **Testing just war theory**
Case studies: Israel/Gaza; Syria; Libya; Ukraine; Central African Republic

*** Nov 23 **Thanksgiving break – no class [No sections this week]**

(24) Mon 11/28 **War by other means: "lawfare," cyberwar, and blockades**
What are the rules for nonviolent warfare?
Case studies: Syria, Libya and the

(25) Wed 11/30 **Just peace theory**
What coercive options exist short of war?
Case study: Russia and Gaza

(26) Mon 12/5 ***Jus post bellum*, reconciliation and religious peacebuilding**
How can religion be/come a source of reconciliation?
Case study: Nigeria, South Sudan, Northern Ireland

(27) Wed 12/7 **Conclusion**
So...what?

*** Fri 12/16 **Comprehensive in-class final exam (12:30 – 3:30pm)**