

Ethics, Religion and International Politics

Boston College, Fall 2017

INTL/THEO/PHIL 556301

Meets MW 3:00 - 4:15pm (Cushing 334B)

Discussion sections (50 minutes): Wed 4:30 and 5:30 (Gasson 206) & Thu 3:00 (Gasson 207)

Professor Erik Owens

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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 (20%):** 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 and discussion section, complete all the required reading, contribute to class discussions, and submit assignments on time. In addition, you are expected to:
 - a. sit in the metaphorical Hot Seat, along with 4 other students, as assigned, to discuss readings;
 - b. attend two related campus events (submit photo and 1 paragraph summary to TA Sarah);
 - c. contribute news updates from your selected country, in class and discussion posts (see below).
- 2. Discussion posts (15%):** In each of the three course parts, students must initiate at least 2 substantial discussions on Canvas (by writing a 200-350 word post, one of which from/about your country of choice), and write a substantial comment (150+ words) on at least 3 others. (That's 6 posts and 9 responses, total.)
- 3. Short essay (15%):** Students will write a short (3-4 pages double-spaced) essay on an assigned topic, due on the date noted in syllabus. Your paper must demonstrate critical understanding of the key themes and readings of that portion of the course. Late penalties noted in online syllabus.
- 4. Geography quizzes (10%):** Six short quizzes on political maps will be given during the semester.
- 5. Simulation (15%):** Students will write a short position memo in advance, and work in teams (during a discussion section) to respond to a simulated developing crisis.
- 6. Final exam (25%)** taken in class during our scheduled exam time (**Saturday 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 17, 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.

Required books/software:

- Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (Norton, 2007)
- Martha Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen, *For Love of Country?* (Beacon, 2002)
- All students need to install (or have access to) the latest version of the free **Google Earth** software.

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

SYLLABUS:

Part One: Religion and the Political Order

- (1) Mon 8/28 **Ethics, religion and international politics**
What's going on here?
- (2) Wed 8/30 **Religion and international relations theory**
Why was 9/11 such a surprise? What's the value of a grand narrative in IR theory?
- *** Mon 9/4 **Labor Day – no class**
- (3) Wed 9/6 **The politics of “religion” and “secularism” in international relations**
What is “religion”? Is the world around us “secular”?
- (4) Mon 9/11 **Conceptions of sovereignty [+Geo Quiz 1: Africa]**
Who's in charge here?
- (5) Wed 9/13 **Critiques of sovereignty: God and country**
What's God got to do with it?
- *** Sun 9/17 **Class BBQ dinner at Prof. Owens' home (5-8pm)**
- (6) Mon 9/18 **State/religion in comparative perspective**
Is there a proper or necessary relationship between religion and the state?
- (7) Wed 9/20 **Religions & U.S. foreign policy [Guest Speaker: diplomat Elizabeth Prodromou]**
Should the United States promote religious freedom abroad?
- (8) Mon 9/25 **Christian Realism [+Geo Quiz 2: Europe]**
Why has Reinhold Niebuhr remained so influential?

Part Two: Global Ethics and the Ethics of Globalization

- (9) Wed 9/27 **Conceptions of human rights: the history of an idea**
Do human rights need God? Were human rights invented?
- (10) Mon 10/2 **Critiques of human rights in global context**
Is the modern human rights regime a colonialist enterprise?
- (11) Wed 10/4 **Patriotism, exceptionalism and ethno-nationalism**
What makes us special? Is patriotism natural or necessary?
- *** Mon 10/9 **Columbus Day – no class**
- (12) Wed 10/11 **Cosmopolitanism and global citizenship [+Geo Quiz 3: Central/West Asia]**
Can we be “citizens of the world”?
- (13) Mon 10/16 **Cosmopolitanism and cultural relativism**
Are cross-cultural critiques valid?
- (14) Wed 10/18 **Economic justice and theologies of liberation**
Why is Pope Francis so focused on the poor?
- (15) Mon 10/23 **International trials and tribunals**
Whose justice should prevail?

- (16) Wed 10/25 **Transitional justice and truth commissions** [+Geo Quiz 4: South/East Asia]
How can a society rebuild after great trauma?
- (17) Mon 10/30 **Torture and interrogation** [Guest speaker: CIA interrogator Glenn Carle]
What's so bad about torture?
- (18) Wed 11/1 **Environmental justice**
Is climate change a religious issue? What claims do religious groups have on sacred land?

*** Fri 11/3 **Op-Ed Assignment due by 6:00 pm**

- (19) Mon 11/6 **The global migration crisis**
Are political boundaries morally relevant? Who is our neighbor? Who is a refugee?

Part Three: Peace, Justice and Conflict

- (20) Wed 11/8 **Religious traditions of nonviolence** [+Geo Quiz 5: North/Central America]
What kind of person is nonviolent in the face of injury and injustice?

- (21) Mon 11/13 ***Jus ad bellum* and R2P**
Is war a moral act? Why go to war?

- (22) Wed 11/15 ***Jus in bello*: discrimination, drones and targeted killing**
Must war be hell?

*** TBA **Students participate in Refugee Portal project one morning Nov 13-16**

- (23) Mon 11/20 **Just peace theory** [+Geo Quiz 6: South America]
Is just war theory too permissive? How can we actively promote peace over war?

*** Wed 11/22 **Thanksgiving break – no class** [No sections this week]

- (24) Mon 11/27 **Humanitarian Intervention**
When is military force required to prevent atrocities?

*** Nov 28 **Simulation policy memo due 6pm**

- (25) Wed 11/29 **Just peace theory and religious peacebuilding**
Is just war theory too permissive? How can we actively promote peace over war?

*** Nov 29-30 **Simulation on Rohingya refugee crisis (in discussion sections)**

- (26) Mon 12/4 **War by other means: lawfare, cyberwar, sanctions and blockades**
What are the rules for nonviolent conflict? What coercive options exist short of war?

- (27) Wed 12/6 **Conclusion**
So...what?

*** Tue 12/12 **Optional movie night: "Eye in the Sky" (3-5:30pm, at the Boisi Center)**

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

Note: This paper syllabus is only an initial guide to our work this semester. The official syllabus is an active document in the course's Canvas site, and will be updated throughout the semester to reflect current events.