TH 01711 Introduction to Christian Theology
PL08701 Shaping Cultural Traditions
4 Credits, Spring Term, 2012

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Office Hours: Monday evenings after class, 9-10 PM; Tuesdays, 1:30-3 PM
Class times Mondays, 6:30-9 PM  Room: Fulton 425

Notice that Class does meet on Presidents’ Day, Feb. 18, and Easter Monday, April 1.
Jewish students are excused from class for the First Night of Passover, March 25,
but they must indicate this to the professor.

Boston College Mission Statement

Strengthened by more than a century and a half of dedication to academic excellence, Boston College
commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate and
professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its
faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the
nation's finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary
society the richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between
religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition.
As a Catholic and Jesuit university, it is rooted in a world view that encounters God in all creation and
through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and
in the call to live justly together. In this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious
traditions and value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous
development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.

Course Description

What does it mean to be good? Is it possible to be both good and happy, both good and
successful? Is morality subjective or are there clear ways to regulate it? How can we balance the
individual and the community in our moral struggles? Course examines eight traditions of
morality and ethics: existentialist, utilitarian, Catholic, Protestant, Christian feminist, Black
theology, rights theories, and Aristotle. Students apply classic and modern thinkers to
contemporary ethical problems emphasizing current events and movies. Interactive discussion
emphasized so students discover the sources of values that formed their lives and develop a
perspective for themselves and their futures.
Course Objectives

1. The student will gain factual knowledge of the major terminology and classification used by different approaches to ethics, as well as the chief difference between philosophical methods and Christian theological procedures. This knowledge will come from the readings, discussions, and lectures, and will be assessed through quizzes, discussions, and papers.

2. The student will learn to apply course materials to contemporary reality by weekly study and discussions of a major news item or a major film. Some of the films will be required viewing; others will be considered based on plot outline. This applied learning will take place chiefly through weekly class discussions. It is hoped that this will lead also to a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, a code of personal values.

3. The student will develop skill in oral and written expression. Discussion is evaluated and graded, as are the mid-term and final papers.

4. “The student will demonstrate skill across cultural settings and will learn the impact of culture, gender, and age in ethics as demonstrated by the work they submit related to the course segments on Black theology, Christian Feminism, Aristotle, and rights theory.

5. “The student will demonstrate ethical knowledge and skill as grounded in the entire content of the course. The knowledge is demonstrated in the quizzes, mid-term and final papers. The skill is demonstrated in the papers and weekly discussions.

Grading Components

WCAS Grading System  Undergraduate grading consists of twelve categories:  A (4.00), A-(3.67), excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), B- (2.67), good; C+ (2.33), C (2.00), C- (1.67), satisfactory; D+ (1.33), D (1.00), D- (.67), passing but unsatisfactory; F (.00), failure; I (.00), incomplete; F (0.00), course dropped without notifying office; W (.00), official withdrawal from course.

Grade Reports  All students are required to log into the web through Agora to access their semester grades. Students must utilize their BC username and password to log on. If your username or password is not known, the Student Learning and Support Center in the O’Neill Library Computer Center will issue a new one. The SLSC requires a valid picture ID (a BC ID, driver’s license or passport) to obtain your password.

1. Participation (criteria will be given in a class handout)  15%
2. Two case studies presented in class  10%
3. Eight quizzes  25%
4. Mid-term essay (5-8 pages)  25%
5. Final essay (5-8 pages)  25%
Course Requirements  Attendance at all class meetings is required.

1. Participation (15%) and Case Studies (10%)  25%

Every member will contribute to the success of the whole class in these ways: by attentive listening, by prepared contributions, by verbal reactions to others’ contributions, and by engaged discussion. While personality styles will differ (just as writing skills differ), part of an education includes the ability to sustain a good discussion (just as education involves learning to write well). A casual and familiar atmosphere in class will allow these discussions to occur. Specific roles and assignments are described under “Class Procedure”. Both your oral participation and your written comments on your case study will be graded.

Case studies are NEVER accepted late. If you need to be absent, your case study is STILL DUE BY 9 PM on the class night. You can submit your comments by e-mail, refer to the news article or movie summary used, and send the article through US or campus mail.

Once again, to be clear: case studies are NEVER accepted late. If necessary, you can switch a date with a classmate. Otherwise your case study is due when due, as follows:

Group 1:  Jan. 28,    Mar. 18
Group 2:  Feb. 4,    Mar. 25
Group 3:  Feb. 11,   Apr. 1
Group 4:  Feb. 18,   Apr. 8
Group 5:  Feb. 25,   Apr. 22
Group 6:  Mar. 11,   Apr. 29

2. Essays and Quizzes

Quizzes on  25%
First essay (4-8 pages), assigned Mon. Feb. 25, due Mon. Mar. 11  25%
Final essay (4-8 pages), assigned Mon. Apr. 29, due Tues. May 7, 6 PM  25%

Class Procedure

After the quiz to begin class, we will have a student-led discussion of the previous week’s lecture and readings. For these discussions, each class member will be assigned to one of six groups. If your group is due to present on an evening, each one of you will bring to class a case study of a real situation that involves the ethical concerns of the previous week. Your case study should come from a news article, or an editorial, or an op-ed piece in either the Boston Globe, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Time, or Newsweek. Your case study can also be based on a feature film, but not on a TV show or series. If you are using a film, bring 12 copies of a plot summary for the class. Please note that the Boston Herald or Boston Metro are not acceptable sources.

Your handout should have some kind of highlight marking (underlining, a star in the margin, arrows, etc.) to show the class the key part of your article that helps us understand the philosophy that we are discussing that week.
Case Studies and Participation

How to Present a Case Study

(1) Make 12 copies of the news article or movie plot summary for the whole class.

(2) Give class a brief oral summary of the facts of the case: three minutes maximum!

(3) Then explain (5 minutes maximum) why this case is a good example of the ethical theory that we studied in the previous week. You can speak informally, but you will give Prof. W. a written summary of your comments, 500 words minimum (two typed pages). You should show:
   (a) why the case study reflects the basic outlook of that theory;
   (b) how the case study involves specific ways of thinking and reaching a decision as recommended in that theory;
   (c) how you can use technical words & terms from that theory to fit the case.

Of course, you can also describe how the case study does not completely fit the theory, but you still need to use the terms and ways of thinking of that theory.

(4) If you are a member of that week’s group, and you do not get called on to present your case study, you have the responsibility to begin the discussion by probing how completely and how accurately the case study presenter utilized that week’s theory.

How to Participate by Listening & Responding

If you are not presenting a case study, then you are an “participant listener”. This means that you have studied the assigned readings from the previous week and now you are ready to ask questions about the case you have just heard about. Your task is either to illustrate how the case and the theory do fit each other, or to challenge the case study by showing how it does not fit the theory.

Here are several ways to be a participant listener. There are more than these.

(1) Ask questions to clarify or challenge either the case or the theory.

(2) Use materials from the lecture and readings that were not used by the presenter, but would apply to the case.

(3) Use those materials to show how the theory does not apply to the case.

Your role is to be sympathetic but sharp-minded, constructive but insistently curious. You are not “hurting anyone’s feelings” or “costing them points” by asking questions or raising further points for thought.
Texts Required

These texts are required for purchase and use. Other required readings are available on O’Neill Course Reserves or as handouts. The readings you should prepare for each week are listed for that week in the syllabus below.

Albert Camus  The Plague  (Vintage edition ONLY)
Michael Sandel  Justice  (Farrar Straus Giroux)

Text Recommended for extra reading (found in O’Neill Library)

Lawrence Hinman  Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach  (2007 or 2012 editions are OK)
Kenneth Himes, ed.,  Modern Catholic Social Teaching  (Georgetown U. Press)
Karen Lebacqz  Six Theories of Justice  (Augsburg)
Elizabeth Johnson  Quest for the Living God  (Continuum)

Important Policies

Academic Integrity  Every student is expected to know BC’s policy on academic integrity: http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/advstudies/guide/academicinteg.html

It is expected that students will produce original work and cite references appropriately. Failure to reference properly is plagiarism. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, cheating on examinations or assignments, and submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without seeking permission of all instructors concerned. Scholastic misconduct may also involve, but is not necessarily limited to, acts that violate the rights of other students, such as depriving another student of course materials or interfering with another student’s work.

Written Work

Students are expected to prepare professional, polished written work. Written materials must be typed Times New Roman, 12 point font, 1 inch margins on each page. Strive for a thorough, yet concise style. Cite literature as indicated by Prof. Weiss. Develop your thoughts fully, clearly, logically and specifically. Proofread all materials to ensure the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You are encouraged to make use of campus resources for refining writing skills as needed [http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring.html].
Disability Statement Classroom accommodations will be provided for qualified students with documented disabilities. Students are invited to contact the Connors Family Learning Center office about accommodations for this course. Telephone appointments are available to students as needed. Appointments can be made by calling, 617-552-8903. You may also make an appointment in person. For further information, you can locate the disability resources on the web at [http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html](http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html).

Attendance

- **Absence and Attendance** follow a firm policy for the good of all, based on long experience in the College of Advancing Studies.

  **Excused absence** is an absence with an urgent and documentable reason given to the professor as soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours after class. An excused does, of course, affect your participation in class. “Documentable” means a signed statement from infirmary, doctor/nurse, towing company, police document, or employer.

  **Unexcused absence** lowers your grade. Absence is unexcused if (1) you do not explain the reason for it to the professor within 24 hours; (2) you do explain it but your reasons are not compelling. Beginning with the first unexcused absence, your final grade is dropped by .10 (e.g., from 2.9 [=B] to 2.8 [=B-]); upon your third, by .30 and so forth.

  *Absence from the first class meeting is not excused without a compelling reason.*

  If you miss a quiz or arrive late after a quiz, you must write a summary of the readings due for that night. It is due by Wednesday evening at 6 pm by e-mail. Note: this can happen only twice. Any further missed or late quizzes count as 0 in your grade.

- **Late and make-up work** are allowed only at the discretion of the professor and only for pressing emergencies. Unexcused late work may be penalized. Late work might not be read until there is enough of it to read together.

- **E-mail.**
  1. You are expected to read promptly all e-mails from professor to class or from a student to the entire class. All e-mails from professor will go to your BC Agora e-mail account. *If you do not use this normally, you are responsible to set it to forward to your usual e-mail (G-mail, hotmail, etc.)* E-mails sent on Monday after 3 PM might not be read until after class.

  2. Essay assignments are not accepted by e-mail. If you cannot submit hard copy, arrange for a classmate to print and deliver your work.

- Our class does meet on Presidents’ Day (Feb. 15) and Easter Monday (Apr. 12). We do **not** meet during Spring Break (Mar. 1) or on Patriots’ Day (Apr. 19).
**Course Assignments & Time Spent in, on, and about class**

A credit means 50 minutes of time in class. A four-credit class should meet for 200 minutes (3 hours, 20 minutes). However, since our class grants 4 hours of credit, but meets for only 150 minutes (2 ½ hours each week), we are required to make up the remaining 50 minutes (a total of 11 hrs., 20 min. over the semester). This will be done when class is asked to watch feature-length films and take notes and reflect on them. The time spent obtaining the film, watching it, taking notes, and preparing reflections for class should come to the “remainder”, including breaks.

Regarding work outside of class (a.k.a. “homework”) University policy is that “a student should spend 2 hours per week for every hour of instructional time. Some weeks will require more time, others less, but the average is approximately 8 hours per week over the semester.”

**Schedule of Assignments and Discussions**

*Class meets on Presidents’ Day, 2/18, and Easter Monday, 4/1. Jewish students are excused for the First Night of Passover, March 25, but they must indicate this to the professor.*

Note: This schedule is likely to change based on the dynamics of class discussion and the professor’s ability to conclude topics in light of discussions. 
If you miss class, find out what’s coming up the following week.

Other than Camus’s *The Plague* and Sandel’s *Justice*, readings listed here are (1) either on e-Reserves in O’Neill; explanation given in class of how to access them; (2) or handouts in class.

- **January 14**
  - **Introduction** to Course
  - **Lecture:** The Ethics of Existentialism
  - **Readings**
    - This evening’s lecture & next week’s discussion & quiz are based on:
      - Handouts on existentialism
      - Camus, *The Plague* (Entire novel due by Jan. 28)

- **January 28**
  - **Quiz** on contents of *The Plague*

  **Discussion** of Existentialism **Group 1:**
  - Choose your topic from these two:
    a) The debate in the book between heroism and duty
    b) The book’s view of the townspeople as a whole

  **Readings** This evening’s lecture & next week’s discussion based on these texts, found on O’Neill e-reserve:
  - Sartre, “The Humanism of Existentialism”

  **Lecture:** Varieties of Existentialist Ethics: Camus and Sartre
February 4  
**Quiz** on Camus and Sartre readings from last week

**Discussion** of Camus & Sartre **Group 2**  
Choose topic from these:  
(a) Rieux’s life and major decisions and beliefs as existential or  
(b) Tarrou’s life and major decisions and beliefs as existential or  
(c) Why does the narrator call Grand the hero of novel?  

**Readings**  
This evening’s lecture & next week’s discussion based on handout and online reading about Marcel. Also required next week is class viewing of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*  

**Lecture:** Varieties of Existentialist Ethics: Marcel  
Introduction to Utilitarian Ethics

February 11  
**No Quiz**  

**Discussion** of Utilitarianism **Group 3**  
Case Studies from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (Film)*  

**Reading**  
This evening’s lecture & next week’s discussion based on:  
Hinman, ch. 5 “The Ethics of Consequences” (E reserve)  

**Lecture**  
Utilitarian Ethics

February 18  
**Quiz** on Hinman ch. 5 and lecture from last week

**Discussion** of Utilitarianism **Group 4**  
Case Studies from news or movies  

**Reading and required film viewing**  
This evening’s lecture & Feb. 25 discussion and quiz based on:  
Hinman, ch. 7 “The Ethics of Rights) (E reserve)  
*Erin Brockovich* (Video)  

**Lecture**  
On Rights Theory

February 25  
**Quiz** on Hinman ch. 7 & Lecture to Date & *Erin Brockovich*  

**Discussion of Rights Theory** **Group 5**  
Case Studies from *Erin Brockovich* (Video)  

**Reading and required film viewing**  
Lecture & next discussion based on handouts on Aristotle

*Mid-term essay assigned Feb. 25, due in class March 11.*
March 4  Spring Break – No Class

March 11  Mid-Term Paper Due in Class, except Group 1, due Friday, 3/15
No quiz

Discussion of Aristotle Group 6
Case Studies from news or movies

Lecture & next week’s discussion are based on:
handouts on Aristotle.

March 18  Quiz on Pursuit of Happiness (video to be viewed)

Discussion of Aristotle Group 1
Case Studies based on film, Pursuit of Happiness

Reading for next week’s quiz is a series of handouts from the Bible. The quiz will require that you memorize the Ten Commandments and be able to write out three of them from memory.

Lecture on:
Aristotle (conclusion)
Foundations of Christian Ethics: The Ten Commandments

March 25  Quiz on the Ten Commandments

Discussion of Aristotle’s Ethics or Biblical Ethics (Your choice)  
Group 2  Case Studies from news or movies

Lecture & next week’s discussion are based on:
Packet of readings and/or online materials on the Foundations of Christian Ethics: Commandments, Covenant, Counsels & Prophecy in Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, and Paul especially
Donahue, “Biblical Perspectives on Justice” (40 pp.)
April 1  Quiz on Christian Ethics: Lectures and Readings up to last week

Discussion of Christian Ethics from last week’s lecture & readings
for this week and last week – Group 3

Lecture & next week’s discussion are based on:
Wm. Byron, “Ten Building Blocks of Catholic Ethics”
Another essay, still to be determined, on Catholic Ethics

April 8  Quiz on Byron’s Ten Building Blocks

Discussion of Catholic Ethics Group 4
Case Studies from news or movies

Lecture & next week’s discussion are based on either handout or E-reserve:
Protestant Social Ethics (Two Versions)
Reading: Niebuhr, selection from Love and Justice
Cone, “The White Church and Black Power”, “Jesus is Black”

April 15  No class. Patriots’ Day

April 22  Quiz on Protestant Theology, Niebuhr, and Cone from previous readings
and lecture

Discussion of Protestant Ethics, Niebuhr, & Cone Group 5
Case Studies from news or movies

This evening’s lecture & next week’s discussion are based on:
Christian Feminist Ethics readings on E-reserve
Reading: Andolsen, Agape in Feminist Ethic”
Lebacqz, Love Your Enemy: Sex, Power, & Christian Ethics

April 29  Quiz on Andolsen and Lebacqz readings

Discussion of Christian Feminism Group 6
Case Studies from news or movies

Lecture on Christian Feminism

May 7 (TUESDAY!) Final essay assigned May 3, Due May 7 at 6:30 PM, McGuinn 100