

Vancouver School of Theology

RESOURCING HUMAN BEING FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

ETH500 Christian Ethics

Spring 2018, January 15 through April 6

W 900am – 1200pm

Ashley John Moyses, PhD

P. 778.233.0266

E. amoyse@regent-college.edu

“There is no norm, no ideal, no grandiose principle from which hypothetical, preconceived or pretentious answers can be derived because—to the [Christian]—there are no disincarnate issues . . . In other words, any ethical system, which is settled and stereotyped, uniform and preclusive, neat and predictable, is both dehumanizing and pagan . . . inflating the role of the principalities while vitiating the human vocation.”

—William Stringfellow, *Conscience and Obedience* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004 [1977]), pp. 25–27.

“An ethics cannot be a work of reference for moral action that is guaranteed to be unexceptionable, and the ethicist cannot be the competent critic and judge of every human activity. An ethics cannot be a retort in which ethical or Christian human beings are produced, and the ethicist cannot be the embodiment or ideal type of life, which is, on principle, moral.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBW vol. 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), pp. 369–370.

Course Description:

This course will introduce participants to case histories, stories, and readings that consider the foundations of ethical thought and behaviour, stressing the importance of well informed ways in which Christian life, thought, and action can serve the wider community. Our goal is to reach greater understanding of how one might cultivate moral being and deal with ethical dilemmas while helping others do the same in both secular and religious spheres.

Purpose:

When we encounter our own lives and the lives of others, several questions about responsibility and requirement are raised. Such questions often demand not only careful discernment but also decisive action. Yet many often wonder whether certain actions are right or wrong, just or unjust, good or evil. Others are restrained from action, debilitated by a sense of power but without any clear understanding of where to direct such power. Others still might act with a particular confidence and steady resolve. How are we to understand ethical demands and where might we discover the resources to navigate the dilemmas that confront us each day, whether such demands and dilemmas are obviously insignificant or potentially catastrophic? The intent of this course is to stimulate not only engaged thinking but also practiced postures that ready us all to confront the demands and dilemmas we will face each day. Put differently, this course aims to cultivate astute clergy, clinical caregivers, lay-persons, and professionals who are responsive to the needs, contexts, and insights of parishioners and members of the larger moral community who will be confronted by the panoply of questions and claims that arise each day in our everyday lives from before the cradle to after the grave.

Competence Objectives:

The graduate of this course will be enabled:

- To explain the similarities and differences among the ethical theories used to navigate ethical discourse and decision-making;
- To evaluate both philosophical and theological analysis in response to contemporary issues raised by life and death issues confronted in society;
- To demonstrate competence in responding to moral issues that are most likely to arise when confronted throughout everyday life from before the cradle to after the grave;
- To recognize and to reflect upon distinctive insights arising from particular social locations (i.e., ethnic, gender, and class locations; specific recognition of the insights of persons with disabling conditions);
- To develop thoughtful and engaged responses to those dilemmas and demands both we and our neighbours confront each day;
- To describe how responses to the crises of everyday life might shape congregational/institutional life and how such responses might impact the greater society.

To assess whether the competencies have been achieved, each student will be evaluated on

- verbal and written ability to articulate the principal themes and theses of required readings;

- verbal and written ability to generate acute questions and constructive commentary reflecting thoughtful engagement with required readings and course learning experiences;
- verbal ability to introduce and sustain a discussion related to Christian ethics as delimited by selected readings and supplementary sources;
- written ability to state clearly the implications of theology and ethics for the contemporary context with its ethical challenges incumbent to the late modern milieu.

Course Texts and Readings (Available through UBC Bookstore)

Required:

- Michael Banner. *Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014)

With one of the following:

- Stanley Hauerwas. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983)
- Anne Morisy. *Bothered and Bewildered: Enacting Hope in Troubled Times* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009)
- Ethna Regan. *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010)
- Bonaventure Santos. *If God Were a Human Rights Activist* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015)

Or

- Samuel Wells. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004)

Additional readings and resources not included in these texts will be posted online (Moodle) or held on reserve in the library. The principal discussions each week will focus on these readings and selections. See outline below for details.

Course Format

This course will be delivered in both face-to-face and synchronous virtual formats. The virtual classroom will be established using Adobe® Connect, a web conferencing service. The virtual platform will allow for synchronous delivery of the ‘classroom’ experience; therefore, online students, in-class peers, and faculty will ‘meet’ together in the actual and virtual classroom each week where lecture content, group discussions, and engaging conversation will take place. Additional materials pertinent for the course,

including articles or other readings, digital artifacts, and the like, will be delivered via Moodle, an open source software learning management system. Moodle will host the relevant content you will need to begin preparing for each week of the course.

In general, the course will adopt the following format: Students can expect a weekly introduction to the material being studied and discussed. This will include lectures, reflective reading, probing questions, and group discussions. Throughout many of the classes, a flipped classroom experience will be included where two to three student-led discussions will be cultivated (and evaluated). Accordingly, it is imperative that students come ready to learn, having read and studied the relevant material(s), so that fruitful discussions and a supportive learning environment can be fostered.

Course Evaluation:

The following will serve as the principal tools for evaluating your progress in the course and your demonstration of competence noted above:

1. Book Review of Either Hauerwas, Morisy Regan, OR Wells (600 words)

- An analytic or critical review of a book is not primarily a summary; rather, it comments on and evaluates the work in the light of specific issues and theoretical concerns in a course (or field of study). It is your task to engage one of four books pertaining to our course and the content therein: S. Hauerwas' *The Peaceable Kingdom*, A. Morisy's *Bothered and Bewildered*, E. Regan's *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights*, or S. Wells' *Improvisation*.
- Your book review should demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the book, while focusing upon the principal argument(s) being developed. A critical summary of the material should not be more than one page. Beyond the summary, it should be your aim to focus upon one or two elements or arguments in the book that you might wish to highlight. It is important to demonstrate not only critical acumen but also intellectual empathy. Be sure to critically engage the author but aim towards a fair representation of the work being reviewed.
- A sample book review will be disseminated in class as a model to follow. We will review the features of this model in class.

DUE: Wednesday, 21 February 2018

2. Short Paper and Facilitated Discussion

- Throughout the course, beginning week 3, students will be required to lead class discussions. Accordingly, it will be imperative that we all come ready to support our peer discussion leader, having engaged the noted topic critically and constructively.

- The student discussion leader will present a short paper (approx. 1200 words) intended to stimulate thinking and to focus the discussion. The students will manage questions, responses, and the like, for the duration of their 30 minute discourse (i.e., 10-12 minutes presentation, 18-20 minute discussion).
- Students will use selected readings to serve as a springboard for the respective papers and class discussions. But further research will be encouraged and required. Drafts of student papers must be circulated one-week prior to the presentation so that fellow students can prepare for the event of conversation and constructive dialogue.
- The goal of this presentation and facilitated group discussion is to help us not only to understand the topic better but also to understand that ethics is an event of conversation that must be mediated and practiced and where a diversity of thoughts may be expressed and carefully considered.
- For those students who are completing this course online, a synchronous virtual space will be provided for you to lead the class as above

DUE: As scheduled and registered

3. Research Option (Due: Week 14) 50%

- The aim of the research paper or trio of op-eds is to demonstrate thoughtful and engaged responses to issues raised in class. Accordingly, the research options should deal with aspects of moral theology and the ethics of everyday life—it may be that a question you raised in the short paper and discussion is one you wish to pursue more deeply here. Alternatively, you might develop your particular thoughts about specific readings, concepts, or problems raised for the opinion essays. Regardless, topics must be submitted in writing for approval in advance by the instructor no later than **Wednesday, 7 March 2018**—in addition to the question(s) for which you seek approval, please include a preliminary bibliography of five principal sources.

- Complete one of the following research writing exercises:

1. *Research Paper* (3000 words)

You may address any issue within the limits of our course theme but your research needs to reflect thoughtful and probing engagement with philosophical, theological, and relevant resources (i.e., scientific, political, economic, etc.). This should be a research-oriented paper containing sufficient references and citations not only to carry forward but also to ground the argument you are making. In order to execute a thoughtful research paper, it will be necessary to constrain your topic within a narrow range as the paper length will not allow for an expansive thesis.

The paper may be written with a persuasive tone or with an objective to clarify the issue(s) in order to clear the space for future and fruitful discourse. The

paper may be written so as to explore the implications of the issue raised by your thesis for institutional and societal life. In the end, the paper should set out a clear and concise thesis, while working to attend to the wonder and analysis the thesis provokes, with the judicious use of primary (and selective use of secondary) sources.

2. *Scholarly Opinion Editorials* (3 x 1000 words)

Responding to and engaging with issues that arise at the intersection of theology, ethics, and crises of everyday life will be the focus of this exercise. You will be expected to explore the implications of theology and ethics for the crises raised, or vice versa. The aim will be either (1) to select a particular issue or relevant point of enquiry and establish three reasoned, well-researched, and cogent opinion editorials on said issue, or (2) to examine three different issues where you will establish reasoned, well-researched, and cogent opinion editorials for each.

The outcome of the three brief essays should demonstrate comprehension of the readings and selected sources, culminating in the articulation of various questions, comments, and/or concerns—not only questions that are of interest/importance to you but also questions which others might not have considered or that might arise from within particular social locations. Consider this exercise as an opportunity to raise questions, rather than to offer final answers.

The three opinion essays should be written in a way that might encourage conversation and challenge the reader towards thinking more deeply about those issues introduced. However, it is important to write these essays for a ranging audience. Thus, the language used should limit the use of jargon, and when technical terms are used, they ought to be defined clearly—again, consider the audience of these Op-Ed essays to be broad but learned.

DUE: Friday, 6 April 2018

Course Policies and Expectations

Attendance and Participation

- Learning is not a spectator sport. Fundamentally, the responsibility to learn is yours. Accordingly, for learning to happen in any course, you must take an active role in the process so that you might nurture the competencies established and evaluated.

- The class policy, then, will be as follows: It is the responsibility of the student to read all required materials, to study notes carefully, and to participate regularly in course lectures, group discussions, and other learning activities.
- Attendance is specified by VST requirements, which requires at least 80% attendance for this course. This means attending class on time with no more than 2 allowable absences for any reason.
- If you have a documented disability that might interfere with your success in this course, I encourage you to discuss it with me after class and/or solicit the appropriate services provided by the school. See your *Student Handbook* or talk to the Dean.
- *Please Note:* The students in this course all bring a good deal of experience and represent diverse worldviews. Thoughtful discussion will be encouraged and regular individual contributions to discussion expected—in this way, each of us should reap the full benefits of each other’s experience. However, you must be aware that there are standards of academic discourse. In general, discussion contributions should be substantive in that you explain the reasons or provide support for your position. Assertions without explanation of your reasons are mere opinions. Additionally, agreement or disagreement with others in the class can be spirited. We all benefit from knowing when we have made a strong case for our position. Similarly, we all benefit from thoughtful critiques that show the weaknesses in our arguments, present criticisms that are constructive, or suggest an alternate perspective for our consideration. This is how we learn. Such exchanges should focus on reasons and assumptions that support or fail to support the argument in question. They should never be attacks directed at the person or qualities of the person, e.g., their professional background, worldview, age, or experience. Exchanges should be respectful. Simply “blowing off steam”, “insulting” a peer, or otherwise “cheering or jeering” for another is not academic discourse. The instructor reserves the right to halt discussions that are offensive or not worthy of an academic forum.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

- “Plagiarism” means the representation of another’s work, either published or unpublished, as one’s own or assisting another in representing another’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own:
 - (a) No student shall represent another person’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own in any academic writing, such as an essay, thesis, research report, project, sermon, or assignment submitted in a course or a program of study, or represent as his or her own the work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part of the entirety of the work submitted.
 - (b) No student shall contribute any work to another student with the knowledge that the latter may submit the work in part or whole as his or her own. Receipt of

payment or other forms of compensation for work contributed shall be cause for presumption that the student had such knowledge.

(c) No student shall submit in any course or program of study, without both the knowledge and approval of the person to whom it is submitted, all or a substantial portion of any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project, sermon, or assignment for which credit has previously been obtained or which has been or is being submitted in another course or program of study in the School or elsewhere.

Late Papers and/or Assignments

- Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional, and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus for each course.
- Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment, and may affect your final grade for the course. Two late assignments without legitimate excuse will result in a reduction of one letter grade for the course.
- *Please note:* For this course, failure to upload group readings two weeks prior to the case presentation will also result in a full letter deduction for each member of the group.

Please Heed the Following Evaluation Submission Expectations:

- Submit all assignments electronically unless otherwise directed.
- All electronic submissions must be typed; they should be double-spaced and completed using 10-12pt Times New Roman or Cambria fonts (i.e., Microsoft Word default fonts).
- Electronic submissions ought to be formatted and documented according to the Chicago Manual of Style or Turabian Citation Guide and forwarded using a Word.doc or Word.docx file format.
- Electronic submissions should be saved using the following format:
YOURLASTNAME_AssignmentName_DateSubmitted.docx
i.e., MOYSE_ShortPaper_February21.docx
- Electronic submissions should be sent to my Regent College email address (amoyse@regent-college.edu) and should use the following subject heading format:
VST_ETH500_AssignmentName
i.e., VST_ETH500_ResearchOption