

Contemporary Religious Ethics I: Method and History (1970-1990)

RETH 30802

Remote

T/Th 2:40-4:00pm

Autumn 2020

Professor Richard B. Miller

Office: Swift 202

Hours: T/TH 1:00-2:20pm
(20 minute slots)

Please contact Julia Woods
at jlwoods1@uchicago.edu
to sign up for office hours.
She will schedule you and
will have my Zoom link for
you to use.

Description

This is the first quarter of my three-quarter sequence surveying the rise and development of contemporary religious ethics. We will examine pioneering work that established a new style of scholarship and ethical argumentation during the “quiet revolution” when the study of religion gained an institutional footing in many North American colleges and universities in the 1950s and 60s. This quarter’s readings developed in the wake of that revolution and address moral controversies that arose within the cultural and intellectual ferment of the 1970s and 80s. The course is reading intensive, and it will focus on attempts to craft a method for religious ethics that aims to situate the study of ethics within the academic study of religion and the humanities more generally. These efforts were soon challenged by theories about the importance of history, interpretation, and power in the humanities and social sciences in the 1980s. Hence the title of this cycle: Method and History (1970-1990). Readings include works by Gene Outka, Sumner Twiss and David Little, John P. Reeder, Jr., Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michel Foucault, Michael Walzer, and Stephen Toulmin and Albert Jonsen. The course aims to introduce students to styles, genres, and patterns of moral reasoning and to innovative work in religious ethics as a foundation for future scholarship in the field. Over the three quarters, we will examine how normative inquiry moves across the domains of religion, society and culture, politics, literature, and science. We will also be asking meta-disciplinary questions about the shape, contours, and directions of the field of religious ethics.

The schedule of readings is arranged roughly in chronological order, but adjusted in places in order to cluster some common themes or approaches. The first quarter will focus on matters of theory and method. Readings for the second and third quarters will focus more on normative resources within religious traditions or on specific ethical questions. Central to the course’s readings in all three quarters is the question of religious, cultural, and moral pluralism. There are no prerequisites. Students may enroll in any quarter. Doctoral students in the RETH area are encouraged to enroll in all three quarters.

Format

Class meets twice a week in a lecture and discussion format. **I expect students to be actively engaged and on camera while on Zoom.** We’ll learn a lot as an interactive group. Our assignments invite a careful reading, and we’ll benefit from attending closely to our authors’ ideas, terms, foils, and concrete examples by engaging in dialogue with each other. If you require an exception, please reach out to me directly to discuss accommodations.

Online materials. The course website is accessible on Canvas at <https://canvas.uchicago.edu>. From our course page you can access the syllabus and other readings and questions that I have posted on Files. You will use our course page to Zoom for our synchronous meetings.

Before class each week you should consult the observations or questions on the Canvas>Files>Weekly Discussion Questions. These are specified per week and will help you delve into various claims made by each author. Class discussions will not cover all of the terrain suggested by these questions and observations. As a regular rule, consider the following:

- What features of moral experience and/or moral reasoning are opened up by each work on the syllabus?
- How would you describe the author's basic argument?
- What are the distinctive concepts of each author's method and central claims?
- What merits and weaknesses of each author's work can you identify?
- How would you compare one author's work with the work of at least one other author, either by way of similarity or contrast? What concepts shape your comparison? Why are these comparisons important?
- Would you say that the work under review contributes more to the *study of religion* or to work in *the field of ethics*? Why?
- What assumptions about the concepts of *religion* and/or *ethics* are made by authors in our survey?
- Gustafson, Reeder, and Schweiker offer different ways of organizing our understanding of religious ethics as a field of scholarship. How useful are these contributions for organizing your grasp of the works under review in this course?

Office Hours: T/TH 1:00-2:20pm (20 minute slots)

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Texts

Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (1972)

David Little and Sumner B. Twiss, *Comparative Religious Ethics: A New Method* (1978)

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981, and various editions)

James F. Childress, *Who Should Decide? Paternalism in Health Care* (1982)

Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (1984)

Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers I: Human Agency and Language* (1985)

Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987)

Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (1988)

John P. Reeder, Jr., *Killing and Saving: Abortion, Hunger, and War* (1996)

William Schweiker, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics* (2005)

Most of these books have been ordered for purchase at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore. The books by Childress and Little/Twiss are out of print; excerpted materials are available in PDF on Canvas>Files.

I recommend that you peruse the many entries in Schweiker, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics* beyond those assigned for week 1. I have also posted a list of suggested readings on Canvas>Files. These range from background materials in ethics to secondary sources on the assigned authors.

Requirements:

1. **Regular attendance and participation:** 10%. In a class such as ours, interaction with the texts as a group is an essential part of learning. I assess quality of engagement using the following questions: Is your preparation for class evident in your remarks and questions? Are you clearly engaging with the assigned text, paying close attention to its arguments and details? Are you paying careful attention to your classmates' contributions and advancing the discussion on that basis? Are you offering thoughtful answers to the questions being discussed? How well are you helping to create and sustain a community of open, inclusive, and respectful discussion? If you have questions about your participation, please do ask.
2. **Case Analysis:** 2pp, 12pt font, single-spaced. 20%.

You are to choose one case from the three that are posted in PDF on Canvas>Files: **"3 Cases"** to analyze in light of the course readings through Week 4. Your analysis should address one of the prompts that I send in advance of the assignment. Submit your Case Analysis to me via an email attachment in Word. Please put your last name along with the prompt you chose in the subject heading of the email, e.g., Miller prompt 1. My email is: rbm1@uchicago.edu. Your Case Analysis is due **Oct. 25** at 3pm. Late papers are docked 1/3 grade for each day late.

The cases are:

- a. Barbara Barton
- b. George Orwell soldiering in the Spanish Civil War
- c. Mr. C./DAX

It is important, of course, to cite sentences or passages from the work(s) under consideration. Do so economically, as a way of focusing your discussion. When quoting, provide page references in parentheses, in an abbreviated way, e.g., (*WSD?*, 14). Attach a bibliography that provides the full publication information of your sources. You will find tips for writing your papers on Canvas>Files.

Summary or expository papers are not acceptable and will be returned for revision.

3. **Critical Paper:** 5-7pp., 12pt font, single-spaced. 40%. Papers should take up a central question, problem, concept, or thesis from one or more of the readings and subject it to critical scrutiny.

I will send out prompts in advance as suggestions for your paper topics. My instructions about using sources and submitting your paper for your Case Analysis apply here as well.

Your Critical Paper is due **Nov. 21** at 5pm. Late papers are docked 1/3 grade for each day late.

4. **Final comprehensive exam** on **Dec. 11:** 30%.

Calendar

I. Initial Developments: The Importance of Equality (1970s)

Wk 1

- Sept 29 James M. Gustafson, "A Retrospective Interpretation of American Religious Ethics, 1948-1998"; Michael Walzer, "Moral Minimalism." Both are on Canvas>Files.
- Oct. 1 John P. Reeder, Jr., "What Is a Religious Ethic?"; William Schweiker, "On Religious Ethics," in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, ed. Schweiker (Malden, Ma.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005). Both are on Canvas>Files.

Wk 2

- Oct 6 Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, Introduction, chaps. 1, 2
- Oct 8 Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, chaps. 5 (pp. 123-45), 6 (pp. 153-69, 181-95), 8 (pp. 257-91)

Wk 3

- Oct 13 Childress, *Who Should Decide?* chaps. 1, 2, on Canvas>Files.
- Oct 15 Childress, *Who Should Decide?* chaps. 3, 5, on Canvas>Files.

N.B. For this week, look at the cases on Canvas>Files: "Cases for Childress Session" from *Priorities in Biomedical Ethics*, pp. 18-19. Also, you will receive prompts for your Case Analysis this week.

Wk 4

- Oct 20 Reeder, *Killing and Saving*, chaps. 1-2.
- Oct 22 Reeder, *Killing and Saving*, chap. 3.

N.B. Read "3 Cases" on Canvas>Files re: Barbara Barton, George Orwell, and Mr. C/DAX.

Oct. 25: Case Analysis due via email at 3pm as a Word attachment.

Wk 5

- Oct 27 Little and Twiss, *Comparative Religious Ethics*, chaps. 1-3, on Canvas>Files.
- Oct 29 Little and Twiss, *Comparative Religious Ethics*: chap. 7 (required); chap. 8 (recommended), on Canvas>Files.

II. New Paradigms in the Humanities and Social Sciences: History, Power, Interpretation (1980s)

Wk 6

- Nov 3 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, skim the entire work and read chaps. 1, 2, 5
- Nov 5 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chaps. 12, 14, 15, 18

Wk 7

- Nov. 10 Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 51-75; 188-213
- Nov. 12 Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 292-329; 340-372

N.B. You will receive prompts for your Critical Paper this week.

Wk 8

- Nov. 17 Taylor, *Philosophical Papers I*, Introduction, chap. 1
Nov. 19 Taylor, *Philosophical Papers I*, chaps. 2, 4

Nov. 21: Critical Paper due via email at 5pm as a Word attachment.

November 23-27 Study Week/Thanksgiving Break

Wk 9

- Dec 1 Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*
Dec 3 Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, Prologue and chap. 1
N.B. Read "Case 4" on Canvas>Files, and as much of chaps. 15, 16 as you can (skim other chapters).

Wk 11

Friday, Dec. 11: Final, comprehensive exam (2:40-4:40pm EST)

Although this class will be taught remotely, please keep in mind the following campus policies and resources regarding remote as well as in-person instruction:

1. The Recording and Deletion Policies for the current academic year can be found in the Student Manual under Petitions, Audio & Video Recording on Campus. Please note:

- Do not record, share, or disseminate any course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats.
- Do not share links for the course to those not currently enrolled.
- Any Zoom cloud recordings will be automatically deleted 90 days after the completion of the recording.

2. UChicago Health Pact. All students on campus are required to adhere to the guidelines in the UChicago HealthPact in order to promote a safe environment in the classroom. Please note:

- Secure face coverings must be worn appropriately at all times at all times while in University buildings.
- Maintain a distance of 6 feet from others.
- Do not attend and in-person class if you feel unwell or are experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms.

3. Students who have been exposed to or who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should contact UChicago Student Wellness immediately to be tested, and reach out to their area Dean of Students to request accommodations for classes until: ● At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared and; ● At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery- defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement of respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough shortness of breath).

4. Reporting COVID-19 Exposure or a Confirmed Case: If you were potentially exposed to COVID-19 or your COVID-19 test results come back positive, please reach out immediately to c19HealthReport@uchicago.edu.

5. Reporting COVID-19 Related Concerns: Any concerns over inappropriate PPE usage, physical distancing, cleaning/disinfection, or other COVID-19 related public health concerns should be directed toUCAIR.10. If there is an emergency, please call 773-702-8181 or dial 123 on any campus phone.

6. Accessibility: The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations. Phone: (773) 702-6000. Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu.

7. Resources for Writing: The Writing Program is available to help students develop academic writing skills through courses, seminars, and workshops. Students can learn more at: <https://writing-program.uchicago.edu/>.

8. Academic Honesty: Students must adhere to all of the University of Chicago's Academic Honesty & Plagiarism and Academic Fraud policies as outlined in the Student Manual. Violations of academic integrity guidelines can result in failure of a class and may ultimately lead to dismissal from the University. For additional information, refer to: <https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism>.

9. Religious Accommodations: University policy allows students to miss class and related assignments to observe a religious holiday. Students must inform instructors in writing in advance of an absence that a religious accommodation is required. Instructors are required to give reasonable extensions without academic penalty; Instructors may not drop students from a course or assess academic penalties to students requesting religious accommodations. For more information, please visit: <https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/university-policies/policy-on-religious-accommodation-for-missed-classes-assignments-and-exams/>.

10. Missing class: While I hope that we can all be present for synchronous discussions, I know that technology is imperfect and that there are personal reasons why you might not be able to participate in a synchronous class meeting. When that is the case, there are two options. You should do ONE of the following if you are unable to participate in a synchronous discussion:

- a. Watch the video of the class discussion and write a 1-2 page single-spaced response to a theme discussed. If you refer to something that someone in class said, please also note their name, and if possible, the time of the video in which they made their comment. If you cite the text(s), please provide the page(s) referenced.
- b. If you cannot watch the video, then write a 1-2 page single-spaced paper on a theme from the readings for the day. In the course of your paper, pose a question about the author's ideas. Please reference page numbers when you cite the text(s) under review.

Please submit your paper to me at rhm1@uchicago.edu in a Word document, making note that it is a replacement for class participation.

As always, if you have any concerns or questions about any of these matters, please feel free to reach out to me.