

**Contemporary Religious Ethics III: Peril and Responsibility**  
RETH 30804/RLST 25804  
Winter 2023  
T/Th 3:30-4:50pm  
Swift 200

Professor Richard B. Miller  
Office: Swift 202  
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### Description

This is the third of my three-quarter sequence of courses examining pioneering work in field of contemporary religious ethics. With one exception, this quarter's readings will draw from work published between 2011-2022. Our focus will be on structural problems in domestic politics and international life, including reproductive rights, responses to global conflict, environmental responsibility, political solidarity, and gender and racial justice. Materials will draw from religious, philosophical, legal, journalistic, literary, and political sources, reflecting the many genres in which prophetic social criticism is practiced. Authors include Nicole Flores, Atalia Omer, Michael Walzer, Katherine Stewart, Janet Jakobsen, Eddie Glaude, Pope Francis, Anna Gade, and the U.S. Supreme Court (*Roe, Dobbs*). There are no prerequisites.

TA: Ms. Ranana Dine. Ms. Dine will lead a discussion section (Thursdays, 2:00-3:20pm in Swift 208), hold office hours (Mondays Zoom, from noon-1:30pm), and serve as an assistant to me in seminar discussions and undergraduate student assessment. She will work to accommodate those for whom these time slots pose a conflict. Please contact her at [rdine@uchicago.edu](mailto:rdine@uchicago.edu). Ms. Dine's Zoom link is:

<https://uchicagomedicine.zoom.us/j/5746403947?pwd=OFI1dTVId0FBQVJwOGVRR2N0UzNEdz09>

Meeting ID: 574 640 3947  
Passcode: 20222022

### Format

Class meets twice a week in a lecture and discussion format. As you read through the assignments, concentrate on these questions:

- What central ideas and methods characterize each author's work? What would you say are the distinctive marks of each author's methods and core claims?
- What merits and weaknesses of each author's work can you identify? Explain.
- How would you compare one author's work with at least one other author, either by way of similarity or contrast? What resemblances and differences can you identify? What concepts shape your comparison? Why are these comparisons important?
- What features of moral experience and moral reasoning are opened up by each work on the syllabus?
- What assumptions about the concepts of *religion* and/or *ethics* are made by the authors in our course?
- What is the peril discussed in each work? What responsibilities (if any) are stated or implied as ways to address them?

## Texts

- Nicole Flores, *The Aesthetics of Solidarity: Our Lady of Guadalupe and American Democracy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021).
- Atalia Omer, *Days of Awe: Reimagining Jewishness in Solidarity with Palestinians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
- Michael Walzer, *A Foreign Policy for the Left* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).
- *Roe v. Wade* (1973), <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep410/usrep410113/usrep410113.pdf> On Canvas/Files
- *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Care Organization* (2022), [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392\\_6j37.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf) On Canvas/Files.
- Janet Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession: Perversity and Possibility in American Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).
- Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019).
- Eddie Glaude, *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Message for Our Own* (New York: Random Hous, 2020).
- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home* (2015) [laudato-si-pdf-english](#). On Canvas/Files.
- Anna M. Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

Books have been ordered by the Seminary Co-op Bookstore.

## Requirements

1. **Regular attendance and participation:** 10%
2. **Two Critical Papers:** 30% each. 2-4pp., 12pt font, single-spaced. Papers should take up a central question, problem, concept, or thesis from one or more of the readings and subject it to critical scrutiny.

The first Critical Paper is to engage materials from Weeks 1-4; the second Critical Paper is to engage materials from Weeks 5-8. The second Critical Paper will require you to engage a select sample of work in the *Journal of Religious Ethics* and put it in critical conversation with themes and issues in the course. One aim of the second assignment is to familiarize you with that scholarly publication venue. The Critical Papers are due on **Jan. 27** and **Feb. 24**.

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., (LL, 14). Attach a bibliography that provides the full publication information of your sources. I recommend that you use the format for bibliographic references provided by the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Whichever format you use, please be consistent. You will find tips for writing your papers on Canvas/Files.

Summary or expository papers are not acceptable and will be returned for revision. Late papers are docked 1/3 grade for each day, starting when the paper is due.

3. **Final Exam**, comprehensive: 30%. **March 9, 3:30-5:30pm. Take home.**

### Auditing Policy

Students may enroll as Auditors with my approval. They are expected to keep up with the readings, attend all classes, and submit a 1-2 page single-spaced summary paper on one assigned text by March 9.

### Calendar

#### Wk 1

Jan 3 Flores, *The Aesthetics of Solidarity*, Introduction, chaps. 1-3  
Jan 5 Flores, *The Aesthetics of Solidarity*, chaps. 4-5

#### Wk 2

Jan 10 Walzer, *A Foreign Policy for the Left*, Preface and chaps. 1-4  
Jan 12 Walzer, *A Foreign Policy for the Left*, chaps. 5—Postscript

#### Wk 3

Jan 17 Omer, *Days of Awe*, chaps. 1-4  
Jan 19 Omer, *Days of Awe*, chaps. 5-9

#### Wk 4

Jan 24 *Roe v. Wade* <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep410/usrep410113/usrep410113.pdf>.  
On Canvas\Files. Selections TBA  
Jan 26 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*  
[https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392\\_6j37.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf). On Canvas/Files.  
Selections TBA

**Recommended:** *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern PA vs. Casey at*  
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/505/833/>

**Friday, Jan. 27: First Critical Paper due via email as a Word attachment at 5pm**

#### Wk 5

Jan 31 Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession*, Introduction, chaps. 1, 2  
Feb 2 Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession*, chaps. 3, 4, Conclusion

#### Wk 6

Feb 7 Stewart, *The Power Worshipers*, Introduction, chaps. 1-6  
Feb 9 Stewart, *The Power Worshipers*, chaps. 7-Epilogue

#### Wk 7

Feb 14 Glaude, *Begin Again*, Introduction and chaps. 1-4  
Feb 16 Glaude, *Begin Again*, chaps. 5—Conclusion

**Wk 8**

Feb 21 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Introduction, chaps. 1-3. On Canvas/Files

Feb 23 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, chaps. 4-6 On Canvas/Files

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

**Friday, Feb. 24: Second Critical Paper due via email as a Word attachment at 5pm**

**Wk 9**

Feb 28 Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms*, chaps. 1-4

Mar 2 Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms*, chaps. 5-7

**Final exam: Monday March 9, Comprehensive, 3:30-5:30pm.**