

THEOLOGY 116
Ethical Matters of Life and Death
Union Presbyterian Seminary

Fall Term 2011
Office: Watts Hall 306
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Tuesday am
Tel: 278-4331
Office Hour: by appointment

Course Description: Using a case study method that acknowledges both the complexities of ethical issues and the variety of directions from which they can be approached, this seminar explores the use of sacred texts, tradition, reason, experience and revelation in helping people of faith respond to practical, real-life dilemmas.

Course Objectives: a) to weigh the consequences of different courses of action in relation to Christian character formation; b) to deepen critical consciousness about a variety of contemporary social problems; and c) to demonstrate facility in using inductively embodied reason and deductively applied norms so as to become conversant with elements of responsible decision-making.

Requirements:

(1) Everyone is expected to facilitate a **Case Study Analysis** (a maximum of 2-pages, 12 point font, double-spaced). Facilitators have the following responsibilities: to open with a devotional moment and distribute to all participants a copy of their analysis of the case study;

(2) complete the assigned reading as scheduled;

(3) all seminar participants must prepare a *case study brief*, an analysis (a maximum of 2-pages, 12 point font, double-spaced) based on the required reading each class session, according to the designated format. The first *case study brief* is due **Tuesday, September 20th**, and every seminar session thereafter.

Designated Format for the Case Study Analysis

Step One

Read the assigned case study and the commentary in Boundaries: A Casebook in Environmental Ethics. What is important to you in this case? Why do you care about this issue? What do you know thus far about this topic? What assumption do you need to test in thinking about this case?

Step Two

Select one individual among the cast of characters in the case study and identify a key dilemma about which this person needs to make a decision. Also, what growing-edge opportunity do you see for this individual? What question, if answered, could make the greatest difference to the future of the ethical situation you are debunking, unmasking, and disentangling?

Step Three

Next, read the assigned pages in Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide by Robin Lovin **or** Liberating Eschatology edited by M.A. Farley and S. Jones, and construct a one-page (12

pt font) cognitive map summarizing the essence of a motif discussed in the readings.

Step Four

Interface the analytical implications of the ethical ideas on your cognitive map with your answer to one of the discussion questions raised at the end of the case study. What ethical sources for a moral claim in this particular case need to be considered in light of your cognitive map?

Step Five

Research a biosketch of a theological ethicist in today's reading who offers you insights about tradition, sacred texts, reason, experience and/or revelation that inform your understanding of an appropriate answer to the central question/dilemma in this case study. What theo-ethical warrants does this formative thinker propose that enables you to pull this case apart so that new understanding might be revealed regarding viable options for your faith community?

Step Six

Identify a referral service/resource relevant to a plan of action.

(4) - In addition, everyone must facilitate an in-class centering presentation. During the first fifteen minutes of every class we will listen to designated presenters. Each presenter will share one answer from today's assignment as our centering point.

(5) - Report on a *Living Laboratory Experience*, due: **October 25, 2011**

(6) - Submit final draft of an *Original Case Study*, due: **December 6, 2011**

Make two copies of each *case study brief*. One copy is for the professor's files and the second copy is for a seminar colleague. The reader of the *case study analysis* should write in the margins her/his response to the analysis. The responses can include questions, ideas you liked, disagreements, analogies to other readings, bibliographical suggestions, etc. Include your signature at the end of your comments.

On the following class session, the reader should return the *case study analysis* to the original author. The author should read the comments and respond in writing to any comments that serve as a catalyst for further development of ideas and refinement of thought. Ideally, each student should have responses from each member of the seminar by the end of the term.

Required Text:

Boundaries: A Casebook in Environmental Ethics 2nd edition, edited by Christine E. Gudorf and James E. Huchingson (Georgetown Univ. Pr, 2010)

Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide by Robin W. Lovin (Abingdon Pr., 2000)

Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty Russell edited by Margaret A. Farley and Serene Jones (Westminster/John Knox Pr., 1999)

Students will select additional reading from sources chosen to meet the objectives of the required final original case study.

Criteria for Evaluation:

- accuracy and precision of scholarship
- clarity of oral and written presentation
- completion of assignments on the due dates
- contribution to the group process of inquiry, facilitation, role play, and discussion
- creativity, critical judgment, and imagination

50% for weekly case study analyses, 10% for living-lab report, and 40% original case study

SYLLABUS and ASSIGNMENTS

September 13 Introduction to Content and Process of Seminar

September 20 **We're All in This...Alone** in Boundaries, pp. 1- 45; and **Choices** in Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide, pp. 7 -20

Facilitators _____

Due: Case Study Analysis #1 **and** Original-Case-Study-Progress Report:

Conscientization -Write an abstract that clearly defines the contestable issue of your case study. What ethical problem do you want to research?

September 27 **Heart Thieves** in Boundaries, pp. 68 – 82;; and **Goals** in Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide, pp. 21 – 40.

Facilitators _____

Due: Case Study Analysis #2 **and** Original-Case Study-Progress Report:

Conscientization -Write a paragraph stating why you want to focus on this particular problem or dilemma.

October 4 **Buried Alive** in Boundaries, pp. 101 – 120; and **Rules** in Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide, pp. 41 - 60

Facilitators _____

Due: Case Study Analysis #3 **and** Original-Case-Study-in-Progress Report:

Emancipatory Historiography - Discuss why the topic of your case study is worthy of responsible action and ethical reflection.

October 11 **Water: Economic Commodity and Divine Gift** in Boundaries, pp. 121 – 140; and **Virtues** in Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide, pp. 61 - 79

Facilitators _____

Due: Case Study Analysis #4 **and** Original-Case-Study-in-Progress Report: Document the rationale for your case study by completing a minimum of two scholarly reviews of books relevant to your topic. Use the designated format in the syllabus to record your reviews.

October 18 **Guardian Angels of Angel Oak** in Boundaries, pp. 142 – 159; and **Church and Society** in Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide, pp. 81 – 125

Facilitators _____

Due: Case Study Analysis #5 **and** Original-Case-Study-Progress Report: Submit *Theoethical Resources* -Evaluate the success and/or failure of at least two professional referrals or human service agencies who have tried to address the particular ethical concerns of your case study.

October 25 Due: Living Laboratory Report (submit in duplicates)

Guidelines for the Living Laboratory Report

A Living Laboratory Experience is by definition occasions in which students act as responsible agents, by integrating religious studies knowledge with cultural awareness of issues, questions, and possibilities, in order to grow in understandings and communicative competencies. It is not a happening observed, but an event in which students participate. The report will reveal 1) the nature of the student's involvement; 2) the ability to gain quickly an understanding of particular challenges related to inclusive worship; and 3) an assessment of various ways that people of faith act as moral agents in a variety of religious institutions.

The Living Laboratory Report must have five parts. The five parts are to be clearly distinguished but they need not be equal in length.

- a. **Background:** Set the Living Laboratory Experience in context. What did you have in mind when you decided to visit this field site? What were your hopes or fears? When and how did you become involved in this experience? What person(s) precipitated and shaped this event?
- b. **Description:** Report the Living Laboratory Experience. Write what you have seen and heard. Include as much detail as possible in three or four paragraphs. How was the physical space arranged? What kind of attire did most people wear? What kind of atmosphere prevailed? Who were the principal actors? Was there more than one offering? How was the offering collected or did people bring their contributions to the front? Did anyone shout, speak in tongues, fall to the floor? To what extent did you participate in the worship activities? What occurred that informs your study of religion?
- c. **Analysis:** What is the story behind this Living Laboratory? Assess three ways in which this Living Lab experience relates to topics of ethical significance presented in **Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide**. What aspects of this experience tie in with information, concepts, and interpretative frameworks you have learned by analyzing case studies in Boundaries?
- d. **Evaluation:** Estimate your effectiveness in this experience. Did you do what you set out to do? If so, how? What factors or dynamics emerged which you did not anticipate? What observations can you make about your skills as an observer/participant? Include at least one new research question generated by your visit

to this Living Lab.

- e. **Integration:** Reflect on your overall learning at this Living Laboratory. Share a self-discovery concerning your own religious conscientization as a result of this living lab experience. Will you visit this field site again, why or why not?

November 1 **Nature Creates Deserts Too** in Boundaries, pp. 181 – 194; and *Liberating the Table: Theology and Praxis of Letty M. Russell* in Liberating Eschatology, pp. vii -42.

Facilitators _____

Due: Case Study Analysis #6 **and** Original-Case-Study-Progress Report: Submit draft of **Background** . With the focus of your case study in mind, describe the setting and history of an actual ethical problem. Give sufficient information so that readers can grasp an adequate feeling for the contestable dilemma.

November 8 **Improving on Natural Variation?** in Boundaries, pp. 227 – 240; and *Liberating the Future: Stories at the Table* in Liberating Eschatology, pp. 47 – 120.

Facilitators _____

Due: Case Study Analysis #7 **and** Original-Case-Study-Progress Report: Be sure to identify clearly the race, class and gender of all major characters, situations, dynamics and circumstances in your case study.

November 15 **Nature Red in Tooth, Claw and Bullet** in Boundaries, pp. 242 – 257; and *Liberating Theology: The Work of the Table* in Liberating Eschatology, pp. 123 – 171.

November 22 **NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING RECESS**

November 29 **Understanding Xenotransplants** in Boundaries, pp. 259 - 283 and *Liberating Eschatology: The Hope of the Table*, pp. 175 – 239.

December 6 Due: Final draft of an *Original Case Study*

December 13 Due: *Contract Papers*

Guidelines for Writing an Original Case Study

- I. **Case Study Conscientization:** Write an abstract that clearly defines the contestable issue of your case study. 1) What is the ethical problem? 2) How is it operative in your religious-cultural community? 3) Why do you want to focus on this particular problem or dilemma?

- II. ***Case Study Emancipatory Historiography*** -Discuss why the topic of your case study is worthy of ethical reflection and responsible action. Document the rationale for your case study by completing a scholarly review of a primary text relevant to your topic. Use the designated format in the syllabus to record your review.

- III. ***Case Study Theoethical Resources*** -Evaluate the success and/or failure of at least two professional referrals or human service agencies who have tried to address the particular ethical concerns of your case study.

- IV. ***Case Study Background*** – With the focus of your case study in mind, describe the setting and history of an actual ethical problem. Give sufficient information so that readers can grasp an adequate feeling for the contestable dilemma. Be sure to identify clearly the race, class and gender of all major characters, situations, dynamics and circumstances.

- V. ***Case Study Development*** – Develop the plot. With the case focus in mind, decide whose eyes the case will be seen through. Then, tell the story so as to flesh out a difficult problem or ethical question. Quote when possible. Use dialogue carefully. Avoid editorializing. Delineate a clear chronology. Create main characters that are believable. Reporting body language and physical setting builds readers’ interest and involvement. Do not leave any characters or circumstances so negative that readers cannot relate to the experience. Check transition points for clarity.

- VI. ***Case Study Critical Issues*** – In the last paragraph rephrase and highlight the moral problem, the ethical dilemma. Ask yourself if this is a good stopping point. End with an open-ended question.

Guidelines for a Scholarly Book Review

1. Author of the Book

2. Include one fact about the Author that might be relevant to her/his contribution to the subject matter.
3. Title of the Book

4. Publisher _____ Date of Publication _____
5. Author of the Review

6. Include one fact about the Reviewer that might be relevant to the Reviewer’s approach to the subject.
7. Review Publication

8. Volume _____ Month _____ Date _____ Page # _____

9. According to this scholarly review
 - a. What is the author's central thesis?
 - b. For whom was the book written and what is its purpose?
 - c. What new issues does this text raise?
 - d. What are the book's major weaknesses?
 - e. What are its primary strengths and contributions?

10. Summarize these findings in relations to your original case study project.