

Christian Ethics
TH 4313 (Online, long semester)
Austin Graduate School of Theology
Fall 2020

Course Description (from catalog):

An introductory course in Christian ethics. Relevant biblical and historical resources are examined and fundamental themes identified and traced through the Christian moral tradition. The Christian witness on selected issues such as war, racism, and abortion is considered.

Course Objectives:

1. Gain a biblical, foundational understanding of ethics from both philosophical and theological perspectives.
2. Know the scope and force of each of the Ten Commandments.
3. Students can make responsible moral decisions in difficult situations and counsel others through similar processes.
4. Be able to evaluate contemporary social issues.
5. Use moral vocabulary with precision.

Required Course Textbooks:

Rae, Scott B. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.

A Bible will also be helpful for consultation.

Academic Honesty:

AGST places a high priority on honesty and a biblical commitment to truth. Incidents of **cheating**, **plagiarism**, or any other activities deemed dishonest will result in penalties. These penalties may range from receiving a zero (0%) on the assignment to failing the course or dismissal from the school. (According to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, to "plagiarize" is to steal and use as one's own the ideas, words, etc., of another. Copying content from the internet without citation, as well as turning in work done for another class, would fall under this category of dishonesty.)

Course Requirements:

The course requirements will be fulfilled as one progresses through the 15 modules of the course. Each module begins on Monday. Specifically, the following exercises will be required of each student:

1. Reading, viewing, and preparation. You are responsible for completing all the readings assigned for each module. The textbook readings (“Rae”) for each module are indicated by chapter numbers in the syllabus. Note important vocabulary words and the reading questions at the beginning and end of each chapter. Supplemental readings and online videos will be provided by the instructor through the course platform. Some of these readings and videos will be the basis for discussion forums and quizzes. The instructor will also provide notes and brief handouts on important topics that will supplement the textbook material.

Lecture videos with power points will accompany some of these handouts. These lectures, which will not recapitulate the textbook, will assume that you have read the assignments and know the material. Supplemental videos will occasionally be required as well. Be prepared to take notes on the readings and the lectures.

Participation. Although there will be discussion questions to answer and engage (see 2. below), students may wish to raise other questions and make additional comments based on the course material. The best place to do this is through a “conversation,” accessed through “Inbox.” As with all interaction in this course, comments must be thoughtful and respectful.

2. Online discussion. The class will engage in ongoing dialogue about the material. Eleven modules (1-4, 6-9, 12-13, 15) are accompanied by a question for discussion. After completing the respective readings and lecture, you are *required* to post an answer to each question. Your post should be thoughtful and substantive, interacting with the readings and lecture. Your post must be at least 200 words. You will not be able to read other replies until you have posted your own original and unique answer.

After you have posted your own response, then you are free to read other students’ responses. You are free to comment on as many as you like, but you are *required* to offer thoughtful and substantive comments on at least one other post. The comments must be at least 100 words.

The forum discussion is a means for “classroom” peer interaction, and it may carry on into the next week. In order to receive full credit, responses to the initial question and to one another must be thoughtful, substantive, and grammatically and stylistically proper. (These are not text messages to your loved one.) You may have one week off, or do all eleven for extra credit. (10 at 10 pts. each = **100 pts.**)

In addition to the designated discussion questions, students may initiate a “conversation” for any kind of questions and comments on the readings and lectures. As noted in 1. above, you may participate in this ongoing discussion as frequently as you like.

3. Eight quizzes will be given throughout the course that assess your grasp of the module lecture and course handouts. **Your notes** on lectures and readings may be used. The time limit for each quiz is 10 minutes. (**54 pts. total**) There will be no make-up quizzes, so make sure each is completed before the deadline.

4. There will be two unit exams and a comprehensive final exam. Exams will normally consist of objective questions, vocabulary definitions (especially the italicized words from the Rae textbook), and a few short answer questions. Study reading questions and lecture notes. **No aids (books, notes, etc.) may be used on the exams.** (Exam 1 = **65 pts.**; Exam 2 = **52 pts.**; Final exam = **50 pts.**) Exams must be completed before the deadline. In certain emergency cases, though, I reserve the right to allow make-ups, but only with a significant deduction of points.

N.B.: The time limit for each exam is two hours. Also, any answer that must be written out is classified as an “essay” question in Canvas. If it’s only worth two points, then only a short answer is required. If it’s worth more, then a correspondingly longer answer may be in order.

5. Paper on Decalogue. Each student will be assigned a commandment from the Decalogue in Exodus 20. A two-page handout should be prepared that teaches the basics of the commandment. At least the following issues should be addressed:

- a) Exegesis that situates the text in its original historical context and discusses key terms;
- b) the scope of the commandment;
- c) a broad, positive statement of the commandment;
- d) the best biblical texts for preaching this commandment;
- e) modern application, including at least one example of how the commandment is commonly (and perhaps unknowingly) broken by Christians.

The finished handout should be posted privately to the instructor. **Due before the end of Module 7. 75 pts.**

6. Topical paper. Write a paper on a topic of your choice that takes a stand on an ethical position. You will select some ethical issue and do independent reflection concerning it during the course. You will write a **6 to 8 page** paper. Topics that arise from the readings will be appropriate, or you may suggest your own topic of interest. Topics must be submitted in advance, and the instructor will have the final right of approval. **Topics are due to the instructor, in writing, before the end of Module 3.**

The content must be based on an ethical claim over which there may be some reasoned disagreement, and you must defend a particular viewpoint. For example, “A discussion of abortion” would be an unacceptable thesis, but “I oppose abortion for the following reasons...” would be acceptable. The thesis should be stated in the opening paragraph in one sentence and include at least one of the following words: support, oppose, permissible, impermissible, obligatory.

The paper should be divided into two main sections. **In the first section, you will make your positive case in favor of your viewpoint. In the second, you will raise and refute the strongest objections to your claim.** N.B.: Do not short-change the second section. You must

convince me that you have read deeply and thought seriously about your **opponents' points of view**, and that you can credibly refute their best objections.

You should explore your topic fairly deeply—consulting a variety of reputable sources would be appropriate. **Due before the end of Module 13.**

Additional guidelines:

- a. 6-8 pages (Times New Roman, double-spaced, not including cover page and bibliography).
- b. Use Turabian style footnotes and proper, academic English style.
- c. Assessment criteria will include such things as: clearly stated purpose, logical organization, faultless style, evidence of research, and interaction with sources.
- d. At least five scholarly sources should be consulted. These sources may include relevant surveys, special monographs, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Do not cite unsigned articles (whether online or in print). Do not cite sources in your bibliography unless they are used in the paper.
- e. Papers are due by 11:59 pm (Central Time), Sunday night, before the end of Module 13. A penalty of 10% every three days will be assessed to late papers. Papers will not be accepted after Module 15 has ended.

100 pts.

7. Reflection Paper. Each student must write a paper that consists of two parts. a) The first part is a personal code of ethics. It should include principles by which you live your life and the reasons for them. It should also be specific to your chosen vocation, enumerating practices that are obligatory and others that are prohibited. This first part of the paper should be at least two pages (“page” means double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman).

b) The second part of the paper is a response to a case study to be selected by the teacher. In light of your personal code of ethics, how would you address the situation? How does your response differ now from when the course began? This part of the paper must be at least two pages in length. **Due before the end of Module 15. 75 pts.**

8. **Extra Credit:** Write a careful review essay of an approved book from the bibliography. Points earned will be commensurate with the length of the book and the depth of the review. Due before the end of Module 15. Late work will not be accepted for extra credit. (up to **20** pts. on final exam)

Grading Scale: 571 points total

90-100% = A 80-89 = B (“Good”) 70-79 = C (“Average”) 60-69 = D 0-59 = F

Course Schedule:

As you can see on the course homepage, this course has 16 modules. Each module includes reading activities, and most modules include handouts, a brief video lecture or clip, as well as an assessment (quiz or exam). The textbook readings are noted in this schedule, but the videos and outside readings are all available on Canvas, the course platform. Most of the modules have forum

questions. In addition, there are occasional writing assignments. Each module corresponds to a week; the course lasts for 16 weeks. A “week” will be considered Monday through Sunday. In order to count for credit, all content for each module must be completed by the end of the respective week, that is, before midnight (Central Time) each Sunday night. For example, all content for Module 1, including your initial Forum response and your assessment, should be completed by Sunday night, 11:59 p.m. It is important to keep up with the course; late work will not be accepted.

<u>Module 1</u>	Course Introduction; Basic Terms
<u>Module 2</u>	History of Moral Philosophy; Relativism and Popular Ethics Rae ch. 1
<u>Module 3</u>	Goal of Christian Ethics Rae 3
<u>Module 4</u>	Ethical Systems; Ethics beyond Rules
<u>Module 5</u>	Moral Decision Making and the Use of the Bible; Biblical Ethics Rae 4
	Exam 1
<u>Module 6</u>	Old Testament Ethics: Decalogue Rae 2
<u>Module 7</u>	New Testament Ethics: Sermon on the Mount and Love Commands Paper on Decalogue due
<u>Module 8</u>	What Does Love Require?; Medical Oaths
<u>Module 9</u>	Abortion Rae 5
<u>Module 10</u>	Artificial Reproductive Technology; Sickness, Suffering, and Death Rae 6
	Exam 2
<u>Module 11</u>	Euthanasia Rae 8

Module 12

Sexual Ethics

Rae 11

Module 13

Homosexuality

Topical paper due

Module 14

Divorce; Just War and Pacifism

Rae 10

Module 15

Wealth and Economics

Rae 13

Reflection paper due

Module 16

Final Exam

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