

## **PH 231: Christian Ethics**

Fall 2025, 3 credit hours

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Office Hours by Appointment Only

*\*Tentative Syllabus - Subject to change\**

### Course Description

How should Christians live? How does the gospel impact ethics? How should Christians think about the hot ethical topics of our day? This course tackles these questions as an introduction to ethics within a Christian framework. In addition to surveying existing non-Christian ethical theories, this course explores distinctly Christian accounts of ethics and how differing accounts respond to various challenges in contemporary ethics.

### Required Texts

- *Moral Formation and the Virtuous Life*, Paul Blowers (Fortress Press)
- *Behaving in Public*, Nigel Biggar (Eerdmans)
- Other readings supplied by the professor

### Course Format & Reading

This course meets twice per week, two hours per week. That is more in-class time per week than a typical UK Course, but this class ends a month earlier than your UK Courses will—it ends early November instead of early December. Because the class is condensed into three months, it might *feel* like the reading load is a little heavier than other humanities courses you take but it should be similar.

## Classroom Policies

**Be respectful** | At some point in the semester, you'll likely disagree with a classmate (or me) during this course. Hopefully, you will! That's okay. Welcome to academic discourse. Do it respectfully. Don't be distracting. Don't interrupt. Don't yell. Don't be insulting. Failure to follow these guidelines might result in you being asked to leave the classroom and being marked absent for the day. If the behavior continues after an initial warning, further action will be taken at my discretion.

**No plagiarism** | Ignorance is not an acceptable defense for plagiarism. Submitting work written by AI, such as ChatGPT, counts as plagiarism. The University takes plagiarism very seriously.

Video and audio recordings are not permitted during the class unless the student has received prior permission.

## Grading

Students' grades will be determined by accruing points out of 1,000 possible points. Grading scale: 900-1,000 points =A; 800-89 =B; 700-799=C; 600-699=D, 599 or below=E.

*In-class Participation:* 200 points

*Position & Reflection Assignments:* 200 points (2 papers, 100 points each)

*In-Class Written Exams:* 300 points (2 exams, 150 points each)

*Final Paper:* 300 points

*Participation:* Because learning philosophy requires dialogue, attendance and participation in this class are vital. Participation points are awarded based (1) attendance and (2) quality of participation. *Attendance* is defined as showing up on time and staying until the end of class. You are allowed **up to six unexcused absences without**

**penalty.** For your seventh unexcused absence and every additional absence, 50 points will be deducted from your final grade. *Quality of participation* is defined as consistent participation in class discussions: asking or answering questions, talking in small groups, etc. And: Introverts who are terrified to speak in front of a class can receive participation points in other ways, including emailing or meeting with the professor, or speaking in small groups. Grading breakdown: 100 points for attendance and 100 points for quality of participation = total of **200 points.**

*Position & Reflection Assignment:* Two Position & Reflection assignments track the development in your thinking about a particular issue. Each assignment has two parts.

- Part I is a short reflection (about 300 words) about an ethical topic or issue *before* we read or discuss it. I present a scenario or question and you respond to it, saying what you believe and why you believe it.
- Part II is a short reflection (about 400 words) about the same ethical topic or issue as in Part I, but *after* we read and discuss it. You should critically engage the readings and our in-class discussion, but specifically answer: did you change your position? If so, why? If not, why?

It is entirely appropriate to take a range of views in response to these questions, so there is no “right answer.” Instead, you will be judged on the quality of reflection and engagement with sources and prior reflection. **200 points.**

*Written Exams:* There will be two in-class, handwritten exams, worth 150 points each. They are open book, open notes. The prompt will be provided on the day of class. **300 points (150/exam).**

*Final Paper:* In 1,600-2,000, you will write your final paper on one of the Hot Topics. You will expand on our discussion in class and find further sources **300 points.**

Other important notes:

- I usually check emails Monday - Friday from 9 AM - 5 PM. Expect responses only within those times. Even within those times, I may not respond immediately. Expect a reply within 48 hours.
- Students who regularly come to class late will receive a lowered participation grade.
- **Use Chicago Manual Style for papers.** Papers should conform to academic standards. It usually helps to read the paper aloud, too.

**Tentative Schedule** (A \* on the schedule below denotes PDF readings on Canvas.)

## **Unit 1: Christian Thinking**

How should Christians think through ethical issues?

Week 1 | An Introduction to Intellectual Virtues

*Reading:* Blowers, “Introduction” (pg 1-11); Nathan King\*

Week 2 | *Hot Topic:* Church & State

*Reading:* Biggar, “Chapter 2”; Augustine on Two Cities\*: Richard Hooker\*

## **Unit 2 - What’s Beyond Good & Evil?**

What are good and evil?

Week 3 | On Good & Evil: Who determines what is good?

*Reading:* Blowers, “The Quest for Moral Wisdom” (pg 69-98); Biggar, “Chapter 2”; Plato\*; James Rachels\*

Week 4 | *Hot Topic:* Christians and Consuming Media

*Reading:* Blowers, “Resisting Worldly Powers” (pg 35-48)

## **Unit 3 - Approaches of Ethics**

How should we think about ethics?

Week 5 | Theories of Ethics: Utilitarianism & Deontology

*Reading:* Biggar, “Chapter 3”; Immanuel Kant\*; John Stuart Mill\*

Week 6 | Virtue Ethics & Christian Ethics

*Reading:* Biggar, “Chapter 4”; Aristotle\*; Apostle Paul

Week 7 | *Hot Topic*: Rolling the Dice: The ethics of gambling

Week 8 | *Hot Topic*: Love Your Enemies?: War & Pacifism

*Reading*: Thomas Aquinas\*

## **Unit 4 - The Good Life**

How should Christians behave?

Week 9 | The *Christian* Virtues

*Reading*: Blowers, “Christianity as a Rule of Life” (pg 49-67); Aristotle on Moral Virtues\*

Week 10 | *Hot Topic*: Playing God?: IVF, Embryos, and Reproduction

*Reading*: Blowers, “Habituating Virtues and Eradicating Vices” (pg 137-154); Robert George\*

Week 11 | *Hot Topic*: “I am who I am”: Personal Identity

*Reading*: Blowers, “Love: Beginning and End of the Christian Virtues” (pg 155-181);