

**Approaches to Moral Decision-Making**

CHR 243

3 hours credit

MWF 9-9:50 a.m.; Jennings 325

*Dr. David P. Gushee*

*University Fellow & Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy*

**Office:** Jennings 328

**Tel:** 661-5024 (o), 668-9837 (h)

**Email:** [dgushee@uu.edu](mailto:dgushee@uu.edu)

**Website:** [www.davidgushee.com](http://www.davidgushee.com)

**Office Hours:** MW 2-5 and  
by appointment

**I. Course Description**

An introduction to Christian ethics which focuses on ethical methodology. The course begins with a survey and comparison of philosophical, secular, and theistic perspectives on the moral life, then moves on to develop a comprehensive Christian approach.

*Note: This course is the first of a two-part introductory sequence in Christian Ethics, and will be followed by CHR 244, "Contemporary Issues in Christian Ethics," in the spring. Either course can be used for the Christian studies core, and both are required for the major and minor in Christian ethics.*

**II. Course Objectives**

- A. To become familiar in an introductory way with the academic discipline of Christian ethics, its field of study, terminology, and methods.
- B. To gain an appreciative yet critical understanding of the most important historic and contemporary alternatives to Christian approaches to morality.
- C. To improve in the ability to interact with these and other pre-Christian and/or non-Christian traditions effectively from a Christian perspective in today's pluralistic moral climate.
- D. To develop the rudiments of a workable and coherent Christian approach to the moral life.

- E. To grow in the capacity to interpret Scripture responsibly for moral decision-making.
- F. To sharpen skills in critical thinking, writing, and intellectual conversation.
- G. To obtain a firm foundation for further study in Christian ethics.
- H. To integrate moral concerns into your prayer life and walk with God.
- I. To achieve personal moral growth--toward sound character, responsible decision-making, honorable personal conduct, and passion to serve Jesus Christ as Lord.

### III. Textbooks and Assigned Reading

A. Please bring a contemporary translation of the Bible for use in class.

B. The required texts are the following:

Clark, David K. and Robert V. Rakestraw, *Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol. 1. Baker, 1994.

Gushee, David P. and Glen H. Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics*. IVP, 2003.

Norman, Richard. *The Moral Philosophers*, 2nd ed. Oxford, 1998.

C. A variety of handouts and extra readings will be given throughout the course. Most of these are relatively brief primary source excerpts.

### IV. Method of Instruction

A. Class time will be spent partly in interactive lecture and partly in class conversation.

B. Exams and papers are considered part of the instructional process as well as testing measures.

### V. Course Requirements and Methods of Evaluation

A. Your grade for the term will be determined exactly as follows, with as little subjectivity as possible.

1. Midterm Exams.....	200 points
2. Insight/Question papers.....	100 points
3. Thinker/Theme papers.....	100 points
4. Final Exam.....	100 points
5. Extra Credit.....	up to 25 points

6. Attendance/Participation.....(See policy statement below)

The official Union University grading scale will be used in the course. Translated into point values for this course, it runs as follows:

475-500 A    425-474 B    375-424 C    325-374 D    000-324 F

B. Here is a description of each course requirement:

1. *Midterm Exams* (10/18, 11/20)--These two exams will cover the material discussed in the readings and in class during the preceding section of the course.

2. *Insight/Question Papers* (10 such papers will be due on most Fridays at the start of class; check course schedule for specific days)--These one- page, typed, single-spaced papers, each worth 10 points, are designed to enhance your attention to, and engagement with, the assigned reading. Each paper should have two parts: the "insight" section simply reports on something significant you have learned in the reading assigned for the week. You will report where you found this important nugget and interact briefly with it. The "question" section asks one nagging, unresolved, important question related to the reading, or perhaps in dialogue between the reading and class lectures. You will bring these to class on Fridays. They will help form the basis for our discussion on many of those days. **NOTE: TO RECEIVE CREDIT, THESE PAPERS MUST BE EMAILED BEFORE CLASS OR BROUGHT TO CLASS, WITHOUT EXCEPTION. NO PAPERS WILL BE RECEIVED AT A LATER TIME.**

*General Criteria for Evaluating Insight/Question Papers:*

10:	Form: no writing errors, well-written, proper form Content: evidence of grappling with reading; important insight; sharp and interesting question; penetrating and focused discussion; stays on an ethics-related theme		
9.9	Content: excellent Form: small error or two	9.7	Content: very good Form: a few small errors
9.5	Content: good Form: a few small errors	9.3	Content: good Form: several errors
9.0	Content: good or pretty good Form: several errors	8.5	Content: acceptable Form: several errors
8.0	Content: barely acceptable Form: several errors	7.5	Content: barely acceptable Form: multiple errors
7.0	Content: weak, below acceptable	6.5	Content: weak, below acceptable

Form: multiple errors

Form: poor, multiple errors

0-6 Content: unacceptable  
Form: unacceptable

3. *Thinker/Theme Paper* (12/6)--You will write an 8-10 page (2000-2500 words) paper focusing on either a particular thinker (from section 1 of the class) or an important theme or methodological issue in Christian ethics (from section 2). To gather information for this paper you must read closely all assigned reading on that subject, reflect on lecture notes, and integrate the insights of 3-4 other books, scholarly articles, or reputable internet sources. The paper should have the following elements, depending on which of the two paths you take:

Thinker:

- (1) basic biographical information;
- (2) most important contributions to Western moral thought;
- (3) ways in which the thinker's legacy is still with us (for good or bad);
- (4) key insights or claims made by this thinker that will remain important to you and should matter to all Christians.

Theme:

- (1) basic outlining of this theme or methodological issue;
- (2) why the theme or issue matters to Christian ethics and the church;
- (3) major competing positions taken on this theme/issue;
- (4) what you think about the theme or issue at this point and what you have learned through closer study of it.

*Criteria for Evaluating Thinker/Theme Papers*

- (1) Quality of writing and presentation
- (2) Quality of research
- (3) Quality of content—thoughtfulness, analysis, originality
- (4) Quality of critical thinking

Note: The most common problem with these papers is when they function as an internet dump. Do NOT rely on a summary of an internet source for these papers.

4. *Final Exam* (12/13)--This exam will likely employ a similar format to the other exams, though the essay component will have a comprehensive dimension.

5. *Extra Credit*--A variety of extra credit opportunities will be presented this term. I am usually open to offering credit for attendance/papers related to major guest speakers and events on campus, such as guest lectures. I will also offer a movie night at the Gushee home. You may do one extra credit project only, with a value of up to 25 points. *All extra credit papers must be*

received by December 8, the last regular day of class, at 5 p.m. Such papers should be 3-4 pages in length, offering a summary of the event's content, major issues raised and new learning experienced, and, if possible, critical interaction with the material in light of the issues raised in our course. Other than this final deadline, there is no deadline for extra credit papers.

6. *Attendance/Participation*—I assume that you will attend class unless illness or other emergency prevents your attendance, and that you will participate attentively and vigorously. Very poor attendance can result in automatic failure of the class. See below for my official statement of attendance policies.

## **ACADEMIC POLICY STATEMENTS**

*On Papers and Their Presentation:* I prefer to receive papers in 12-point Times New Roman font, printed on a well-functioning printer, stapled in the upper left-hand corner, no plastic covers needed. Term papers should be double-spaced, follow the Chicago Manual of Style (Turabian) or MLA style, with a full bibliography including all works cited. While small variations in referencing style are common, be consistent with whatever form you employ throughout the paper. Paper grades include consideration of both literary/presentation quality and substantive content. Use inclusive language with reference to human beings.

*On Plagiarism:* Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft in which a writer passes off someone else's words as his or her own, either intentionally or unintentionally (through inadequate quotation use and footnoting). While intention is sometimes hard to judge, intentional plagiarism is expressly forbidden and will result in automatic failure, as discussed in the Union catalog. All other forms of cheating are, of course, forbidden as well.

*On Late Work:* All papers and assignments are due at the start of class on the date assigned. Papers lose 5 points credit for every day that they are late, excluding Sundays. Papers turned in after the start of class are treated as if turned in the next day. If you turn in a late paper, be sure to note on the paper the date and time it was turned in. The *only* exceptions to this policy include family emergencies and bereavement. Absence from class due to official college functions does not constitute grounds for a no-penalty extension on a paper, nor do computer problems, relationship hassles, or other common stresses of university life. Remember that insight papers cannot be turned in after the start of class on the days they are due. **NO PAPERS OF ANY TYPE WILL BE RECEIVED AFTER 5 p.m. ON THE DAY OF THE FINAL EXAM.**

*On Lost Papers:* Students are wise to keep both a hard copy and a computer version of every paper they write. If a paper turns up missing in this class, you are responsible for turning in a replacement version as soon as we discover the paper is missing.

*On Attendance and Participation:*

A. Regular class attendance is required for the successful completion of this course. The student is expected to attend classes regularly in accordance with Union's attendance policies. See catalog for official policy statement.

B. Class absences will be considered in two categories: excused and unexcused.

C. Excused absences include the following: emergencies, bereavement, or official college functions approved by the Academic Affairs Office. The professor reserves the right to determine the validity of all absences.

D. Request for an absence to be excused must be made *in writing* either in advance of the absence or at the next class attended after the absence. Verbal communication of the absence or its reasons is insufficient. Remember that even if an absence is excused due to illness, a pattern of absences will certainly be problematic for success in this class, or any class—or life.

E. If an exam is missed because of an excused absence, it may be made up. If the absence is unexcused, the student receives a 0 on that exam. This includes exams missed due to oversleeping. Whenever a student has advance knowledge that an exam must be missed due to an excused absence, the professor should be informed so that arrangements can be made.

F. Excessive absences by a student will be reported to the appropriate officials for counsel with the student.

G. Attendance and participation generally will be evaluated as follows:

0-1 absences—great job	2 absences -- -10 points
3 absences -- -15 points	4 absences -- -20 points
5 absences -- -25 points	6 absences -- -30 points
7+ absences—automatic F	

*The professor reserves the right to adjust these attendance grades based on the quality of class participation.*

H. Tardiness--arrival in class at any point after it starts--will be counted against the attendance grade.  
*Three tardies=one absence.*

I. Participation--The criteria of quality participation include the following: obvious completion of reading prior to coming to class, intelligent, alert, and informed participation in classroom discussion and any assigned projects or tasks, evidence of note-taking and active listening, and general quality of demeanor, engagement, and enthusiasm for course activities.

## VI. Tentative Course Schedule, Fall 2006

Key: N=Norman, C/R=Clark/Rakestraw, G/S=Gushee/Stassen  
Numbers are page numbers unless otherwise noted.

### INTRODUCTION: GETTING OUR BEARINGS

- 8/30 Syllabus and organization
- 9/1 The ethical task and why it matters (G/S, preface; C/R, 9-11)
- 9/4 *Labor Day--no class*
- 9/6 Key terminology in ethics (C/R, 17-22; N, ch.1; key terms handout)
- 9/8 Ethics and the Kingdom of God (G/S, ch. 1; C/R, 32-40)

### SECTION ONE: TRADITIONS IN WESTERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

- 9/11 The Greek moral philosophers  
Socrates and Plato (N, ch. 2)
- 9/13-15 Aristotle (N, ch. 3)  
**Insight/Question 1 due (9/15)**
- 9/18 Epicurus and the Stoics (rdg: handouts)
- 9/20 Legacies of the Greek moral philosophical tradition (N, ch. 4)  
Transition to modern moral philosophy
- 9/22 David Hume (N, ch. 5)  
**Insight/Question 2 due**
- 9/25 Kant and Deontological ethics (N, ch. 6)
- 9/27 Bentham, Mill, and Utilitarianism (N, ch. 7)
- 9/29 Legacies of the modern moral philosophers  
The radical turn: introduction  
**Insight/Question 3 due**
- 10/2 Marx (rdg: handout)

- 10/4 Nietzsche (N, ch. 9)
- 10/6 class cancelled—professor at Hamline University
- 10/9 Freud (rdg: handout)
- 10/11 Legacies of the radical moral philosophers  
The postmodern turn
- 10/13 British analytic philosophy (N, ch. 10)  
**Insight/Question 4 due**
- 10/16 The contemporary landscape in moral philosophy (N, ch.11)
- 10/18 **Midterm Exam I**
- 10/20 Fall Break

## SECTION TWO: TOWARD AN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO ETHICS

*Constructing a Christian Ethic: Epistemology and sources*  
(“How do we know moral truth?”)

- 10/23 "Divine Command" Ethics (C/R, 50-61)
- 10/25 Sources of authority for Christian Ethics (G/S, 81-91; C/R, 67-100)
- 10/27 Scripture and Ethics (G/S, 91-98)  
**Insight/Question 5 due**
- 10/30 OT and NT Distinctives in Christian Ethics (C/R, 185-206)
- 11/1 Tradition and Christian Ethics
- 11/3 Reason, Natural Law, and Experience (C/R, 41-49)  
**Insight/Question 6 due**
- 11/6 Facts, Data, and Science in Christian Ethics
- 11/8 class cancelled--Day of Remembrance (serve our community today!)
- 11/10 Prayer and the Moral Life (G/S, ch. 22)  
**Insight/Question 7 due**

*Constructing a Christian Ethic: Central Norms and Keynote Themes*  
(“What are the central moral truths of the Christian faith?”)

11/13 Love (G/S, ch. 16; C/R, 211-224)

11/15 Justice (G/S, ch. 17; C/R, 225-246)

11/17 The Sacredness of Life (G/S, section III, skim)  
**Insight/Question 8 due**

11/20 **Midterm Exam II**

11/22-26 Thanksgiving Holidays

*Constructing a Christian Ethic: Arenas of Application*  
(“How and where do we live out Christian moral truth?”)

11/27 Character and Virtue Ethics (G/S, ch. 2; C/R, 247-274)

11/29 Character and Virtue, continued (G/S, ch. 3)

12/1 Moral decision-making I: moral dilemmas (G/S, ch. 5; C/R, 113-137)  
**Insight/Question 9 due**

12/4 Moral decision making II: situations, principles, and contexts (C/R, 143-173)

12/6 Moral decision making III: decision making models (C/R, 279-306)  
**Thinker/Theme paper due**

12/8 Moral decision making IV: engaging a half-pagan culture (G/S, ch. 23-24)  
**Insight/Question 10 due**

12/13 **Final Exam, 8 a.m.**