

UCU 2018. MA JMS – FS 2102
Understanding Ethics: A Christian Perspective

Syllabus

MA JMS / FS 2102 Understanding Ethics

Uganda Christian University
February 2018

Course code: MA JMS / FS 2102
Course type: Core
Course credit: 4 CU
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Introduction

Understanding Ethics is intended to produce graduates who have up-to-date ethical knowledge and who can ably apply ethical reasoning to both theoretical and practical issues in their societies, professions, and personal lives. It seeks to take students through the traditional ethicists' views to the contemporary ones; from the former, which focused ethics simply on humans, to the current variations, that raise non-traditional issues such as animal ethics, environmental ethics, etc. From ancient times, ethical challenges have always existed in human society. Studies in ethics were the focus of ancient philosophers and theologians. Today, traditional sources of moral training (such as families, religions, cultures, etc.) are increasingly being challenged by alternative ethical sources and complex contemporary ethical issues.

Rationale

Ethics provides an interdisciplinary perspective that affords us a platform for exploring the ethical values and motives behind our own conduct and our social institutions, aspects of reality that many academic disciplines are not equipped to handle. The course presupposes that all human activity connotes and raises moral questions that require ethical guidelines without which there would be moral chaos and resulting personal and public problems.

All humans operate from explicit and implicit worldview perspectives, which inform our ethical thinking and moral practices. Christians are also confronted with complex contemporary challenges, thus needing to be ethically equipped to handle such challenges. This course introduces students to fundamental ethical questions and issues, with a particular focus on *a classical Christian ethical perspective*, as presented in the context of Christian teachings. As they engage in the course, students are encouraged to relate the topics of the course to their own cultural, professional and personal context, especially as situated in contemporary Africa.

Whether being primarily modern or postmodern in their thinking, many influential opinion-makers would argue that a classical Christian perspective is not relevant for informing our ethical decisions and lifestyle. This course is tailor-made to challenge such perceptions. The course aims at contributing to the overall life of the students, offering resources for further worldview thinking, ethical reflection and character development. As such, the course is designed for and accessible to students from various disciplines, professions, worldviews or religious affiliations.

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Justification

Many discipline-specific experts argue that studying ethics is a waste of time distracting professionals from their core jobs. For example, the economist Milton Friedman argued that business people and economic strategists should only concern themselves with maximizing profit under the law; that they should not concern themselves with social-ethical issues. However, Friedman forgot that business people do their activities within a human society, and there is nothing like an ethical vacuum or an ethically neutral activity. Such arguments forget that every human activity brings about ethical impact.

The same applies to technology experts or scientific researchers who may tend to think that they should not care about ethics; they make a similar error because technology is not developed or applied in a vacuum. It takes place within human societies and therefore brings about ethical implications. Professionals need not only to be concerned with the ethical impact of their activities but also with how they carry out those activities. This means that “the means” are as important as “the ends”, because in the process of achieving technological, developmental or scientific progress, key worldview, ethical or moral dimensions are often neglected.

One of the things that those who disregard ethics seem to forget is that all their activities are carried out with certain ethical assumptions, which they do not openly acknowledge or are not properly aware of. For example, a technology professor assumes that his or her students will not steal the laboratory equipment during a practical session.

This course seeks to help participants appreciate and link ethics with their worldview assumptions, lifestyles and professional fields of choice. This is especially necessary in developing countries like Uganda where many graduates of the university will most likely work in the areas of development policy and practice. We are persuaded that the sustainability of any human project is dependent on the proper incorporation of ethics. Ethical sustainability means that both the aims, activities and outcomes of a project need to be ethically justifiable and morally relevant.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- appreciate the necessity of ethical thinking and moral practice in contemporary life
- gain an understanding of a classical Christian ethical perspective
- gain skills of applying this knowledge to key current global, social and personal issues
- gain knowledge of selected theoretical foundations for ethical thinking that are influential and relevant today
- attain particular ability to apply ethical thinking to contemporary African challenges

Reading list (updated February 2018)

Required reading (*Scope: Approx. 500 pages*)

- David Gooding and John Lennox, *The Bible and Ethics. A Handbook for Students and Teachers* (Coleraine: Myrtlefield House, 2015). [325 pp.] [Available online: https://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com/cmsfiles/collections/encounters/bible-and-ethics/TheBibleAndEthics_9781874584582.pdf]
- John Stott and Roy McCloughry, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2006; 4th ed.); pp. 23-95, three selected chapters (i.e. one chapter from each of the sections “global issues”, “social issues”, “personal issues”), and pp. 485-501. [approx. 175 -200 pp.]

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Recommended reading

- Atkinson, David et al (eds.), *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1995)
- www.EngagingMedia.info / <https://www.lausanne.org/all-issue-networks>
- <http://www.johnlennox.org/>

Additional resources

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Barnes, Jonathan, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984)
- Baier, Kurt, *The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis of Ethics* (Cornell University Press, 1958)
- Bali D. R., *Introduction to Philosophy* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1997)
- Bentham, Jeremy, (1789) "Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation", in John Bowring, ed., *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (London, 1789)
- Clark, David K. and Robert V. Rakestraw, eds., *Readings in Christian Ethics: Issues and Applications*, Vol 2. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996)
- Gonslaves Milton, *Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice*, (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1989)
- Gyekye, K., *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- Habermas, J., "Modernity: An Incomplete Project", in Foster, H. (ed.) *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. (Port Townsend, Washington, 1983)
- Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, ed., E. Curley, (Chicago, IL: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994).
- Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), eds. David Fate Norton, Mary J. Norton (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Huntington S., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1998).
- Kant, Immanuel, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, transl., James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985).
- Locke, John, *Two Treatises*, ed., Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).
- Mbiti J. S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, (East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1969).
- Mill, John Stuart, "Utilitarianism," in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed., J.M. Robson (London: Routledge and Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
- Norma Richard, *The Moral Philosopher: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1983).
- Plato, *Republic*, 6:510-511, in Cooper, John M., ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).
- UCU Work book, *Understanding Ethics from a Christian Perspective* (UCU, 2004).
- Warburton Nigel, *Philosophy: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Mode of delivery

The course will be delivered through lectures and interactive plenary / group sessions.

Mode of assessment

1. 4000 words essay on a selected ethical issue (60 % of final grade) – **Friday 25th May 2018**.
2. Final 3 hour written exam (40 % of final grade) – **Friday 10th August 2018 (to be confirmed)**.

Detailed teaching schedule (February 2018)

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The class will meet daily at these times:
 09.00–11.00: Lectures / interactive sessions
 11.30–12.30: Lectures / Interactive sessions

Date	Topic and reading
Mon 12 th Feb	<u>I. Introduction</u> -Understanding Ethics: Introducing the Course <u>II. Ethical foundations</u> -Introducing A Christian Ethical Perspective (Lennox / Gooding, 247-325)
Tue 13 th Feb	-The Moral and Ethical Teaching of the Old Testament (Lennox / Gooding, 3-112)
Wed 14 th Feb	-The Moral and Ethical Teaching of Jesus Christ (Lennox / Gooding, 115-244)
Thu 15 th Feb	-Christian Ethics (Lennox / Gooding, 247-325)
Fri 16 th Feb	<u>III. Global Issues</u> (Stott / McCloughry, 97-213; Lennox / Gooding) -Four issues: a) War and Peace, b) Caring for Creation, c) Living with Global Poverty, and d) Human Rights -Focus: Caring for Creation
Mon 19 th Feb	-Focus: Human Rights
Tue 20 th Feb	<u>IV. Social Issues</u> (Stott / McCloughry, 217-321; Lennox / Gooding) -Four issues: a) The World of Work, b) Business Relationships, c) Celebrating Ethnic Diversity, and d) Simplicity, Generosity and Contentment -Focus: Celebrating Ethnic Diversity
Wed 21 st Feb	<u>V. Personal Issues</u> (Stott / McCloughry, 325-482; Lennox / Gooding) -Five issues: a) Women, Men and God, b) Marriage, Cohabitation and Divorce, c) Same-Sex Relationship, d) Abortion and Euthanasia, and e) Biotechnology -Focus: Sexual issues
Thu 22 nd Feb	-Focus: Life and Death Issues
Fri 23 rd Feb	<u>VI. Contextual Issues</u> (Stott / McCloughry, 23-94; Lennox / Gooding) -Our Changing World: Is Christian Involvement Necessary? -Our Complex World: Is Christian Thinking Distinctive? -Our Plural World: Is Christian Witness Influential? <u>VII. Concluding session</u> (Lennox / Gooding, 274-325, Stott /McCloughry, 488-502) - <i>Understanding Ethics: A Christian Perspective</i> <i>Conclusions, Reflections, Implications</i>