

Religion, Culture and Morality: REL 3370, Spring 2010
Professor Dr. Michael Stoltzfus
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Course Description

In this class we will analyze how different religions (including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and others) respond to a variety of practical, real-life dilemmas using the medium of cross-cultural case studies. We will investigate how distinctive religious and cultural traditions address issues of marriage and family, war and peace, gender roles, poverty, child labor, and other important moral issues associated with increasing globalization. We will discover the penetrating interconnections and intricate tensions that exist between religious pluralism, cultural diversity and concrete moral problems. This course will begin by investigating how practical wisdoms and spiritual insights are routinely integrated in everyday life circumstances. We will seek to address a critical question: What is the role of religion in helping to create a more just and peaceful world?

Special Services Information: Students requesting classroom accommodations or modifications due to a documented disability must contact the Access Office for Students with Disabilities located in Farber Hall. The phone numbers are 245-2498.

Cell Phone Policy: Cell phones and other wireless distraction devices should be neither seen nor heard in the classroom setting. If I see or hear a cell phone during official class hours, then I maintain the option of confiscating the phone for a twenty-four hour period. Confiscated phones may be picked up in Ashley Hall room 109 (via departmental secretary) at the appropriate time. Please keep cell phones removed from the classroom.

Course Outcomes

1. Students will think critically about religion and culture.
2. Students will link religion with important issues in cultural development, ethical analysis and social transformation.
3. Students will be exposed to religious pluralism through cross-cultural case studies.
4. Students will learn basic themes in religious studies.
5. Students will analyze different methods for making moral choices.
6. Students will be encouraged to develop a responsible transcendence of ethnocentricity without abdicating the value of personal experience.

All of the outcomes mentioned above directly relate to departmental educational outcomes 1, 2, 3 & 4 and to VSU general education outcomes 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 & 8.

Departmental Outcomes

1. To encourage an understanding of the world's religious traditions and their influence on values, norms, and public policies.
2. To develop students' critical and analytical skills and their abilities to articulate clearly an attention to multiple religious perspectives.
3. To enable students to challenge their own ideas and to develop self-understanding

- in the context of diverse ideas that informs contemporary controversies and social conflict.
4. To enable students to engage in independent research, to increase their sense of problem and to communicate their understanding of the issues researched and developed in the context of current theories and research methods in the discipline.

Valdosta State University General Education Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate understanding of the society of the United States and its ideals.
2. Students will demonstrate cross-cultural perspectives and knowledge of other societies.
3. Students will use computer and information technology when appropriate.
4. Students will express themselves clearly, logically, and precisely in writing and in speaking, and they will demonstrate competence in reading and listening.
5. Students will demonstrate knowledge of scientific and mathematical principles and proficiency in laboratory practices.
6. Students will demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultural heritages in the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences.
7. Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze, to evaluate, and to make inferences from oral, written, and visual materials.
8. Students will demonstrate knowledge of principles of ethics and their employment in the analysis and resolution of moral problems.

Texts

1. *Ethics: A Complete Method for Moral Choice*. Daniel Maguire (**required text**).
2. *Ethics and World Religions: Cross-Cultural Case Studies*. Regina Wolfe and Christine Gudorf, eds. (**required text**).

Class Requirements and Grading

1. **Class attendance and participation** (25% of course grade). You are expected to attend class, participate in class discussions, and bring your reading reflection paper to class each Wednesday. You are permitted one unexcused absence in this course. For each additional unexcused absence two percentage points will be subtracted from your final grade. You are expected to be punctual, attentive, courteous, and involved.
2. **Reading quizzes** (25% of course grade). At the beginning of each class Wednesday (weeks 2-15) there will be short quizzes that cover the reading material for that week. If you read the assigned material, then these quizzes should not be difficult. You may not make-up these quizzes if you are late to class or miss a class session.
3. **Reading reflection papers** (25% of course grade). Each reflection should be **typed and double-spaced in 12 point font and no more than two pages in length**. You are required to write six reflection papers between weeks 2-10 of the semester. You may choose which weeks to write your papers. They are due at the end of class on

Wednesdays. No reflection papers will be accepted after week 10. You should begin each paper with **two questions** arising from the readings that you would like the class to address.

Your first four paper options (weeks 2-5) should focus on the *Ethics: A Complete Method for Moral Choice* book. Each week you will be assigned multiple chapters to read. Your papers should focus on **one** of the assigned chapters. I'm looking for **four things** in these papers: 1) Two questions arising from your reading of the chapter that you would like the class to address; 2) summarize the core argument(s) or content of the chapter; 3) articulate at least one strength and one weakness evident in the chapter from your own perspective; 4) offer at least one constructive ethical proposal regarding the problems or issues presented in the chapter from your own perspective

Your last five paper options (weeks 6-10) should be divided into **five sections** and address **one** of the assigned case studies by responding to the following five questions: 1) Two questions arising from the case that you would like the class to address 2) What are the basic ethical issues being addressed in the case study? 3) Which of the two religious and ethical responses to the case study do you like best and why? 4) Imagine yourself in the shoes of those effected by the case study, how would you respond given the context? 5) Based on our reading of *Ethics: A Complete Method for Moral Choice*, what elements of Maguire's "wheel model" are stressed in the response you liked best? Which elements of his model are ignored?

4. Group presentation and written case study (25% of course grade). You are expected to join a working group and to function as a member in good standing of that group. As a member of that group you are responsible for both a presentation to the class and for writing a case study. These working groups will also function as small group discussion contexts throughout the class.

- **WORKING GROUPS AND TOPICS:** The exact working groups and the topics for their case study will be arranged during the first month of class.

A. Group Presentation

Each group is responsible to organize coordinated presentations and assignments for two class periods (one week) on their particular case study topics. All group presentations must include the following:

1. Reading assignments (from class texts, free articles available on-line, photocopies)—each group should pass out a sheet with the reading assignments to the class the week prior to their presentation;
2. Ten question class quiz covering the assigned reading (to be given at the beginning of the class on the Wednesday of your group presentation);
3. Group presentations covering the appropriate case study material for your topics. Your group presentation must include the following elements:
 - A) It must address some current issue that integrates religious, cultural, and moral issues;
 - B) It must provide a descriptive case study account that highlights the relevant religious, cultural and moral issues;
 - C) It must provide responses to the case study situation from two different religious perspectives which offer constructive ethical guidance based on religious teachings, cultural context and concrete examples;

- D) It must highlight the elements of Maguire's wheel model that are most relevant to the case and the religious responses;
- E) Prepare a class handout or PowerPoint outlining and summarizing the case study, religious responses, relevant elements of Maguire's wheel model, and provide a copy to the professor. **Include a brief bibliography (minimum of ten books/academic articles) of appropriate topical reference materials as part of your handout;**
- F) All members of the group must participate in the presentation;
- G) It must allow plenty of time for questions from the class and for discussion with the class as a whole;
- H) It must allow twenty minutes at the end of class on Wednesday for comments from the professor and preparation for the next week's group presentation.

B. Written Case Study

Each group is responsible for a written case study due at the beginning of class on **April 28th**. Use the case studies in your class text as a model format for writing your own case. You may be creative in the written format of your case study.

Below is one among many possible formats:

1. Creative descriptive context (5-6 pages)
2. First religious/cultural response (4-5 pages)
3. Second religious/cultural response (4-5 pages)
4. Relevance of Maguire's wheel model to the case and responses (4-5 pages)
5. Total length of paper (17-21 pages typed and double spaced in 12 point font)
6. Your group presentation and written case study grade have three components:
 - A) Group Presentation: 1/3 of grade assigned by professor to the group as a whole
 - B) Written case study: 1/3 of grade assigned by professor to the group as a whole
 - C) Group evaluations of individual members: 1/3 of grade assigned by other members of your group to you as an individual group participant.
7. Your group grade as assigned by other members in your group will be based on the following criteria:
 - A) Attendance at group meetings in and out of class;
 - B) Contributions to the planning, collegiality, and coherence of the group;
 - C) Promptness and quality of research and other group work;
 - D) Quality of presentation;
 - E) Quality of written work
 - F) 95% is highest grade you can give to any one group member;
 - G) Grades are strictly confidential between individual group members and the teacher. **Do not discuss grades with other group members;**
 - H) Present your grades to the teacher in written form with a brief explanation for each grade on **April 28th**.

Course Schedule

Week 1. Introduction to Course:

Read: Maguire, preface & 3-62.

Week 2. Moral Questioning, Thinking and Probing

Read: Maguire, 65-124.

Week 3. Moral Action: Feelings, Creativity, Principles

Read: Maguire, 126-182.

Week 4. Moral Action: Reason, Experience, Comedy, and Conscience

Read: Maguire, 183-243.

Week 5. Hazards of Moral Discourse

Read: Maguire, 247-289.

Week 6. Children, Parenting, Overpopulation and Technology

Read: *Case Studies*, pp. 172-197; 321-339.

Week 7: Domestic Violence, Child Welfare and Global Dynamics

Read: *Case Studies*, pp. 108-124; 298-318.

Week 8: Religion, Violence, Sex and Culture

Read: *Case Studies*, pp. 23-62

Week 9: Religion, Economics and Cross-Cultural Understanding

Read: *Case Studies*, pp. 260-278; 356-374

FALL BREAK!!

Week 10: Children and the Economy of Care

Read: *Case Studies*, pp. 375-399.

Week 11: Group Presentations: March 29, 31

Week 12: Group Presentations: April 5, 7

Week 13: Group Presentations: April 12, 14

Week 14: Group Presentations: April 19, 21

Week 15: Group Presentations: April 26, 28