

**RSOC157: RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND CONTEMPORARY MORAL
ISSUES: (CORE: RTC: 3)
Spring: 2009
Kenna 310**

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Course Description:

The course will explore **selected** moral issues that face humanity today and **analyze critically** the responses given to these issues by the selected Religious traditions including but not limited to the Christian tradition(s). Issues to be analyzed will include those pertaining to **human life** (e.g. Euthanasia,) those pertaining to **human sexuality** (e.g. marriage, gender and human rights) and **global issues** (e.g. War, Environmental degradation, Poverty). Given the cultural and religious diversity that characterizes the contemporary world, the central approach will be to explore diverse perspectives and compare and contrast the responses to selected moral issues from the perspective of *more than one religiocultural context*. The goal is to highlight points of **difference and points of similarity and even map common grounds**. The goal is also to gain insights into the depth and complexities of the responses to the ethical issues of our time as well as gain an analytical understanding of how humanity, collectively or individually are navigating these complexities.

Specific Objectives/Learning outcomes

Students who successfully complete this class will:

1. Become familiar with the *variety of religious perspectives* on the **selected** ethical issues.
2. Be able critically to explore the *relationship between religion and morality*.
3. Gain an *analytical awareness and appreciation* of various **ethical systems/ theories applied in the navigation** of ethical decision- making surrounding the selected contemporary moral issues and dilemmas
4. Gain a *critical awareness and appreciation of the depth and complexities* regarding the selected ethical issues and how these complexities shape the responses given to the issues.
5. Be able critically to evaluate the diverse religious perspectives and responses towards selected contemporary issues.
6. Develop and sharpen *skills and tools critically to formulate and analyze their own moral* responses to contemporary moral issues.
7. *Come to an analytical understanding of the commonalities and differences in (religious) worldviews* and how these *commonalities and differences* shape the responses to contemporary moral issues.

8. xxx Students own learning outcome

Course texts:

Required

1. May Larry et al : *Applied Ethics: A Multicultural Approach*: (4th edition: Prentice Hall , 2006)
2. Hinga et Al: *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa*
3. Keeley et al: *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to critical Thinking* (9th edition)... note that this has additional chapters compared to the 8th edition and hence the pages are not the same. If you have the 8th edition, take this note into consideration
4. Stivers; et al: *Christian Ethics: Case study approach*.
5. Knitter Paul et al: *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy* (Orbis: books)
6. Smith Christopher : *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of nonviolence in Religious traditions* (Orbis books)
7. Uwem Akpan: *Say You are one of them* Little Brown and company, NY 2008

(Recommended for book review (see course requirements below...you will pick and review any one of the following. Guidelines for review will be provided by end of week 2)

1. Immaculee Ilibagiza: *Left to tell: Discovering God amidst the Rwandan Genocide*
2. Sister Helen Praejan: *Dead man Walking*
3. Nawal El Saadawi: *Woman at Point Zero* (Heinemann)
4. Ngugi Wa Thiongo: *Devil on the Cross*
5. Ngugi Wa Thiongo: *I Will Marry When I Want*
6. Alice Walker: *The Color Purple*
7. (you can also chose to review Uwem Akpan: *Say You Are One of Them* (This is the selected campus wide book of the quarter fro spring 2009 and there will be a panel discussing this on 15th April already

Course Requirements: (AKA Means of achieving goals or learning outcomes)

1. **Regular attendance of class:** This will be monitored routinely and will comprise 5% of your final grade
2. **Adequate preparation** for class by a critical and annotated reading of the required texts prior to class. Evidence of preparation should be manifested in the students' ability to respond to questions; in class or in preparation for class both oral and written. In order to monitor this preparedness, students may at **random** intervals during the session be asked to **submit written answers to specific** questions based on the readings (10%).
3. **Active participation** in class discussions both in structured group work and voluntary suggestion of ideas or voluntary answering of questions in class discussions. Participation will be evaluated for quality as well as quantity of your contribution to discussions and other class activities designed to facilitate understanding of the issues at stake. Your contributions should not only show that you understand the issues at stake, they should also manifest **your analytical/critical** skills as defined very explicitly in Keeley Asking The Right

questions. The *interventions and contributions* should be marked by a *sense of collegiality* and mutual respect for all involved in RSOC 157 as a **learning community**. Participating involves both engaged and **analytical listening to what is being said** as well as engaged and analytical speech geared towards moving (10%) (See also paragraph on class procedures below.)

4. **One midterm/learning outcome exercise** Format TBA (15%)
5. **Group class presentation:** Topics of relevance to the course will be selected for group discussion in consultation with the instructor. The group will research the topic and present its findings in class. The mode of presentation will be optional but could be in the form of a debate and could include audio visual aids etc. Each person will receive the grade jointly earned by the group. For each of the group presentation, the presenting group will submit a **2-3 page synthesis of their topic**, how they researched it, what they found out in the process, matters arising etc) The rest of the class will act as active discussants and respondents to the presentation, asking appropriate questions and contributing to the debate in an analytical manner ... each student will submit **1 page synthetic response** to the group topics for credit towards participation **20%**
(Topics and more guidelines will be distributed and assigned on Thursday. Plan to be there !)
6. **2 Synthetic/analytical response papers** Minimum 3 Maximum 5 double spaced typewritten pages. These should reveal your critical engagement with an issues or issues (limit to 2) arising out of the readings or class discussions. This should be the opportunity to explore an issues raised through the readings that intrigues you. By analytically questioning or commenting on it (see class schedule for due dates. See also Text Book: Asking the Right questions on how to identify issues in other people's work or name and articulate issues in your own writingsQuestions to guide our reading of Keeley will be given separately and due dates if any for their submission indicated ... **20%**
7. **One final Response paper in the form of a book review:** Minimum 5 pages maximum 8 pages: see book review list above. Detailed guidelines will be provided by week 3. Chose your book early enough so that you can begin reading it alongside the texts and discussions therefore and make notes along the way so that your week 10 task (revision) will be easier. **Due date Thursday Exam week : 20%**

Total 100%

Criteria for Grading:

Please note that your **grade is cumulative and** is based on how well you do on the various course requirements. Grades will be computed as follows:

"A" Will be given for **outstanding** work both in class and written assignments. An "A" student presents his or her work coherently, clearly and *critically*. His or her Written work is systematic, relevant and well articulated addressing themselves Adequately to the issues at stake

"B" Will be given for work that is of **high quality**, which adequately addresses Itself to **the issues and** is relatively well, articulated.

"C". Will be given for work which barely **meets the minimal requirements** of the

Course.

“D”. Poorly presented work; **barely relevant**, incoherent and ill articulated.

F. Irrelevant, incoherent work that dose not meet the requirements of the course at all.

NB: A total of 100 points are possible for the course as a whole. **A final letter grade** will be assigned according to the following percentile scale:

90%-100% A
80%-89% B
70%-79% C
60%-69% D
Below 69% F

NB: The bottom 2 numbers within each grade category respectively corresponds to **plus or minus grade designations**: e.g. 80%-82% =B, 88%-89%= B+ etc

Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

Students in this course are reminded that **plagiarism**, i.e. the use of other people's ideas words and work without properly acknowledging them is a **serious offence** and stands to be penalized. If proven, charges of plagiarism could result in an **automatic F**. Consequently, students are encouraged to develop a strong sense of the need for *academic honesty* at all times, a fact *that is self-rewarding* both in the short and long run. Given the nature of the class and the rather **palpable controversies** that surround the topics we will be discussing, academic integrity demands that we approach our class with a sense of enquiry that thrives on **academic freedom** and **the responsibility that** goes with it. The class is designed as a **safe space** that allows us to explore the topics so that we understand the issues and learn how these issues **are being navigated**. Academic integrity also demands that we **respect the individuals that collectively constitute the learning community learning that is RSOC157...** basic rules of **civility, respect and even confidentiality apply...** We are all encouraged to support each other in the **journey from echo to voice** regarding the issues here.(see also the insights from Keeley: Asking the Right Questions: A guide to critical Thinking : Particularly Chapter 2.....

Policy on Attendance:

Class attendance is **mandatory** except for emergencies, which should be explained to me preferably in writing a dif possible before hand. Only those students with excused absences will be allowed to do make up assignments. Please note that frequent absences (more than 2) will invite a *lowering of your grade* by at least one letter grade. **4 or more absences will invite** an F for the class.

If you need accommodation due to special circumstances (eg Sports events for those who are athletes) please request accommodation through the office of student advising and submit your paper work requesting such accommodation to me by **1st day of class in week 2**.

Class Procedures:

The course will be presented through a *combination of lectures and discussion* in order to achieve the stated goals: *Audiovisual material* where possible and applicable will also be used. Other learning activities, *including group discussions/projects designed to meet the needs of the class as these become apparent will be used*. Students are encouraged to

cultivate an inquiring mind, bold enough to raise **appropriate** questions for discussion. However, this should be done with a spirit of **sensitivity and respect** for all involved in the learning situation. To this end, students are encouraged to cultivate a **spirit of collegiality and accountability to the whole class at all times to ensure success of the class. Students' initiative** in reading around and beyond the assigned readings, sharing information pertinent to the course, and a general sense of responsibility for the success of the class over and above the minimum requirements of the class is highly encouraged and is self-rewarding. Active participation and involvement in the class is also specifically rewarded in the final grade. See grading criteria above.

Collegiality: Please Note: In the interest of *collegiality and respect to all in this learning* community, all should refrain from **disruptive behavior**. This includes but is not limited to *tardiness in arrival or abrupt premature departures from class*. It also includes *leaving cell phones on, using laptops and other electronic devices in a distracting manner* (distracting yourself and those around you), For this reason, **electronic devices including laptops are not allowed**. You may however use the latter legitimately particularly during group presentations. (See also **academic integrity above**)

Policy on Food: Please note also: That since this class happens during evening mealtime hour; it may be wise for you to budget for some time for your **snack before class**. Eating **will not be permitted during class** (Water and juices OK)... a **short stretch break will be provided** at some appropriate time during the session

Keeping connected:

Since this is a large class and very new subject matter for many of you, it is recommended that at least twice during the quarter, you touch base with me during office hours. This quarter, the office hours will be Tuesdays **3-4PM**. You can also make an appointment (individually or as a group ... perhaps to brainstorm regarding group work etc)... The goal here is to keep connected and to ensure that questions and issues related to the class that you may have along the way are *addressed in a timely manner*. Plan for such an office hour session (15minutes per session) at **least once before week 6...**

Periodically, I will let you know when I would be available for **"Extra Office hours"** "beyond the scheduled Tuesday one... ..

Connecting the dots....

As indicated in the course goals, a major objective of the course beyond introducing the students to religion and contemporary moral issues. (A complete goal itself) is to facilitate and nurture the students' capacity to *make connections* between in-class discussions and text book information with the world beyond the classroom. You are encouraged, therefore, to try and make such connections and even to find ways of sharing the connections you make. After all, it is an *applied ethics* course (as one of our textbook reminds us). While *scheduled opportunities* for such connection of dots are available through the response papers and the group project, you are not *limited to these scheduled* venues and are encouraged to find creative ways of "applying" insights gained in and through the class throughout the quarter. Some pertinent extra curricular or co-curricular activities are happening this quarter. One such pertinent event for us is professor **Abdulahi An Naim's lecture** on 22nd April (7pm more details later). He will be speaking on "*The State Islam and Human Rights*" a key theme for us this quarter. In fact, one of his articles is in our Book Applied Ethics and it is an assigned **reading for week 2**. The second event is the campus wide reading of **Uwem**

Akpan's book. *Say you are one of them* and the panel on it on **15th April**. The book also *illuminates in story form* some of the class themes and I have therefore assigned it both for in class reading and as one of the books for book review. If you attend any of the pertinent events, submitting a reflective/analytical statement (*not more than 2 pages, single space*) indicating the connection with the class will earn you points *at my discretion* towards the **participation grade (see above)**. You may also share what you consider pertinent (ie relevant for class theme etc) **newsworthy tidbits during class**. Be on the look out of pertinent goings on during class. After all this course is on **"contemporary Moral issues"**. **Make the most out** of these opportunities as you navigate your way from **"echo to voice"** regarding the *contemporary moral issues* despite the heated debates and controversies that surround the topics we will be discussing this quarter.

Please note that the schedule /and or the readings may change to reflect course demographics, or availability of resources or other contingencies. If there are changes, they will be communicated with you in good time: and ASAP (as soon as possible)

Week 1: Theoretical Background:

March 31st Mapping the Journey ahead

- (a) Introduction to the course and its requirements
- (b) Distinction of key concepts: Sinful act, Legal act, Immoral Act
- (c) The idea of critical thinking: introductory remarks

Video Excerpts: Gandhi

April 2nd Background of Choice: Some Key ideas

- (a) Ethical systems, an overview
- (b) Determining ethical accountability: Voluntariness and its modifiers
- (c) Group and individual morality: Occasion of evil & Cooperation with evil.
- (d) Making Moral choices, and responding to moral Dilemmas: The Principle of Double Effects.
- (e) Making Moral choices: The Role of the Conscience;

Readings: Larry May: Introduction: pages **1-35**,

Strivers: Case Studies: Rigor and Responsibility: Pages 15-28

Keeley: Asking the Right Questions: Chapters 1, 2, 3

Week 2: Background of Choice: continued: Gender, Religion and Human Rights in Cross-cultural perspectives:

April 7th: a) Understanding and Gendering the Human Rights discourse:

Readings: Larry May: Pages 77-100 (Essay By Bunch

Stivers: Case Study: *What God has joined (pages 21-45)*

Akan: The Xmas Feast) Video excerpts: TBA

April 9th: b) Religion and the Cross-Cultural Legitimacy of Human Rights

Larry May: Applied Ethics: Part II: Essays by Abdulahi Naim, Claude Ake, Inada and Taylor)

Professor Anil: On Buddhist ethics/Human Rights TBA)

Week 3: Issues Surrounding Human life:

14th April: Ethical issues At the Genesis of life: Case Study: The Abortion Controversy:

Readings: Larry May: *Applied Ethics: Part VIII* (essays by Noonan, Mary Warren, Overall, Jing-Boa Nie, Lafleur) (could add Substitute Haring
From Stivers: *Case Study: A Matter of Life and death*
Video: Roe V Wade or equivalent Subject to Availability

16th April: On Human Life Continued: Ethics at the End of life : The Right to Die and the *Moral evaluation of suicide and Euthanasia*

Readings: Larry May: *Part IX: Essays by Rachel's, Battin, Wolf And Becker :*
Stivers, Christian Ethics: Case study: *A Good Death for Gleason?*
Group 1 (On Issues pertaining to ethics at the end of life)
Possible video resource on the Right to Die

1st Response paper due

Week 4: Issues on Human Sexuality

21st: Religion and the search for Just sex:

- a) Defining sexual ethics and its norms : (justice, compassion , Chastity)
- b) **Human sexuality : Naming and Navigating the Ethical Dilemmas : case study : Same sex relationships**

Readings: Genovese: *Morality and Homo-sexual expression of Love*
(On E-reserve) Stivers: Case Study: "More Light":
Larry May: Pages 399- 411 (essay by Bolte) pages 413-422
Essay by Jordan

Possible guest speaker TBA

Video Excerpts; **If these Walls Could Talk (2)** Subject to availability

23rd April: Human Sexuality: Naming and navigating the ethical Dilemmas: Case **Study 2: The AIDS Epidemic**

Readings: Larry May *Apply Ethics: (Excerpts on the AIDS Epidemic*
From 2nd edition: to be posted on -e reserve) Pages TBA

Stivers Case Study: *Dan's Little Bomb*

Hinga et al: *Women, Religion and HIV AIDS IN Africa:*

Introduction, and Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6,

Group 2: Presenting: One Religion, Ethics and HIV/AIDS Pandemic.

Week 5: Global issues: The Scandal of Extreme Poverty and the Quest for Just Economics

April 28th **Mapping the Scandal of Poverty and Its feminization**

(Readings) Essay By Hinga: *Becoming Better Samaritans* (to be put on - Reserve) Larry May: part IV: (essays by Hardin, Singer, Filipe and Wan-Ho) Uwem Akpan Akpan: *The Xmas Feast*
Stivers: Case Study: *The Agenda: Preference for the Poorest*

April 28th: *Subverting Greed, Making Poverty History:*

Readings: Knitter: *Subverting Greed: Excerpts and pages TBA*

Video: Excerpts: *To be A Woman* (or equivalent: Subject to availability)

(Possible group 3 here) on Quest fro Economic Justice

Week 6: Religion and Just Peace: The Challenge of Non –Violence in Today’s Globalized World

May 5th: The Morality of war? : The Just war Tradition and its alternatives:
Readings; Larry May: (Part V) Essays by Lackey, and Kavka
Stivers: Case Study: Vietnam and Iraq;
(Video: The Making of a soldier : Subject to Availability)

May 7th: Subverting Hatred: Religions and the Nonviolent Path to Peace:
Readings: Larry May: (essay entitled: *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*
Smith Christopher: Subverting Hatred: Chapters TBA
Excerpts from Uwem Akpan: Luxurious Hearses

Video: Gandhi
(Leaning Outcome exercise due)

Week 7: Concluding The Theme of War and Peace: Introducing: Ecology and Ethics:

May 12th: a) Group 4: **On Morality of War**

Part 21 Introducing Issues Pertaining to Ecological Crisis:: Ecology and Ethics; Mapping the issues:

May 14th : Ecology and Ethics: Human Responsibility to the Non Human World

- a) Ethics and sustainability : Readings Larry May: Part III: Essay By Leopold: The Land
 - b) Ethic, Vandana Shiva, and Sheri Collins
- Stivers Case study : *Oil and The Caribou People*
Video: Inconvenient truth or Taking Root (Wangari Maathai’s Story (Subject to availability

Week 8: Human Responsibility to the Non Human World:

May 19th: Responsibility to the None Human World: The issue of Animal Rights
Readings; Larry May Part II: *Essay by Dale Jamieson*
Excerpts From Wassestrom: Today’s Moral Problems: On Ethic Vegetarianism (To be placed on E-reserve)

May 21st **Group 5 Presenting On Ethics Religion and The Environmental Crisis**

Second Response paper Due

Week 9: Towards a Global Ethic: The Challenge and Promise of Religion

May 26th Case Study: The Parliament of World Religions and Its Commitment to a Global Ethic
Readings; Excerpts from A Declaration of a Global Ethic (Online or to be placed on E:-reserve)
Video: Parliament of World Religions: Subject to Availability
Possible Guests Speaker: On Parliament of World Religions and the Global Ethic

May 28th **Course Synthesis: Readings and Reflections:**
Modalities: TBA All as resources persons

(Tentative) Students reports/reflections based on chosen book for review

Week 10: June : Conclusions course wrap up:

June 2nd: a) Any Unfinished Business from week 9

b) Reviews and Revisions: Preparing The Final paper

June 4th: Last day of Class:

a) Students' Questions b) Course Wrap up