



Ph.D./M.A. Seminar
Old Testament Ethics
McMaster Divinity College
PhD - CHTH G105—C01
MA - OT 6ZH6

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Mondays, 3:30-5:20 p.m.

I. Description

This course will investigate the field of Old Testament ethics, exploring the ethical content and resources found in the Old Testament, the use of the Old Testament for Christian ethics, and the ethical character of the Old Testament.

II. Purpose

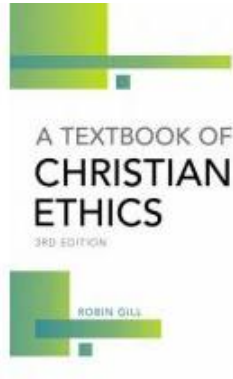
A. Knowing: To know the history of the discipline of Old Testament ethics. To know the variety of ways the Old Testament contributes to ethical reflection within a Christian framework. To know the various ethical dilemmas evident within the Old Testament, especially for modern audiences. To have a basic grasp of the history of the discipline of ethics in general and how this discipline relates to the study of the Old Testament.

B. Being: To embrace the resources of the Old Testament for ethical reflection today. To catch a vision for Christian ethical reflection.

C. Doing: To sharpen one's skills in interpreting the Old Testament especially as an ethical resource for Christian life and community. To develop a hermeneutic for Christian ethical reflection on and through the Old Testament. To construct a resource base for teaching moral dilemmas raised by the Old Testament text.

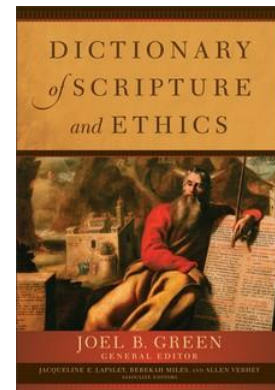


III. Reading Resources



Gill, Robin. *A Textbook of Christian Ethics*. 3rd ed. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2006.

Green, Joel B., Jacqueline E. Lapsley, Rebekah Miles, and Allen Verhey. *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.



Podcast: Marianne Talbot's "Romp through Ethics" from Oxford:

<http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/romp-through-ethics-complete-beginners>

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

IV. Schedule

8 Sept: Orientation

15 Sept: Orientation to Christian Ethics

Reading: Gill textbook, pp. 1-105

22 Sept: Orientation to Old Testament Ethics

Reading:

Green et al. textbook, pp. 5-34.

Carroll R., M. Daniel. "Old Testament Ethics." Pages 561-5 in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*. Edited by Joel Green, Jacqueline Lapsley, R. Miles and Alan Verhey. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

Carroll R., M. Daniel. "Ethics and Old Testament Interpretation." In *Hearing the Old Testament*. Edited by Craig Bartholomew and David Beldman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, 204-27.

In addition:

Kaiser, Walter C. "New Approaches to Old Testament Ethics." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35.3 (September 1992): 289-297.

Wilson, Robert R. "Sources and Methods in the Study of Ancient Israelite Ethics." *Semeia* 66 (1994): 55-63.

Wright, Christopher J. H. "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament: A Survey of Approaches." *Tyndale Bulletin* 43 (1992): 101-120, 203-231.



29 Sept: Orientation to Old Testament Ethics

Muilenberg (*Way of Israel*: 13-30; "Old Testament Ethics [DCE]," 235-7)
Barton (*Understanding OT Ethics*, 1-74 or "Understanding OT Ethics," 44-64; "The Basis of Ethics in the Hebrew Bible," 11-22; "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the OT," 1-14; Ethics in Isaiah of Jerusalem, 1-18)
Kaiser (*Towards*: 1-78, NT: 306-14)
Janzen (*Old Testament Ethics*: 1-25, NT: 187-216)
Wright (*An Eye for an Eye*: 12-64 or *OT Ethics for the People of God*: 17-99)
Birch (*Let Justice Roll Down*: 17-68, NT: 355-7)
Hempel ("Ethics in the Old Testament," 153-61)
Eichrodt ("The Effect of Piety on Conduct [Old Testament morality]," 2:316-379).

6 Oct: Orientation to Old Testament Ethics

Childs (*Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*: 673-85; *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*: 204-21).
Rogerson (*Theory and Practice*: 13-39, NT: 144-147)
Wenham (*Story as Torah*: 1-15, 73-107, NT: 129-55; *Psalms as Torah*: 1-9, 57-76, NT: 181-207)
Goldingay (*OT Theology 3: Israel's Life*: 13-50, "Old Testament as a way of life," 38-65)
Otto ("Of Aims and Methods," 161-72; "Hebrew Ethics in OT Scholarship," 3-13)
Brueggemann? Rodd? Parry? Sloane?

13 Oct: No class (Thanksgiving)

20 Oct: Presentations on OT corpora in Groups: Law (Exodus-Deuteronomy), Narrative (Genesis, Joshua-Esther), Wisdom and Psalms (Job-Song of Songs), Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Book of the Twelve)

27 Oct: Jewish Ethics

3 Nov: Reflections on OT Ethics/OT in NT Ethics

10 Nov: Presentations on OT ethical issues

17 Nov: Presentations on OT ethical issues

24 Nov: No class (SBL)

1 Dec: Presentations on OT ethical issues

8 Dec: Reflection on Ethics in Biblical Interpretation



V. Learning Experiences

A. Class Experiences

This is a graduate seminar style class of collaborative learning in which professor and students are engaged in active learning together. Learning to critically (in its positive sense) engage material is essential to functioning in a graduate program and is expected of all students in our MA/PhD. It is expected that all students will not only attend these sessions, but also that they will assume responsibility for contributing to and learning from the experience. This means that readings will be completed prior to arrival in class and that student and presenter alike will pursue the acquisition of knowledge in the learning environment. It is expected that ALL members of the class will ask questions and contribute insights whenever opportunity is given, during and following presentations by professor or student alike. Students are graded on their level of preparation and contribution.

Value: 10%

B. Paper #1: This first research paper (20 pages) will provide an opportunity for the student to identify the way a particular Old Testament corpus functions as an ethical resource for Christian ethics. The corpora in view include: Law, Narrative, Psalms and Wisdom Literature, and Prophecy and Apocalyptic. The articulation of the student's approach must be done in conversation with past approaches. Issues to be dealt with include the relationship between this corpora and the NT, the social and cultural contexts of the ancient texts and their relationship to social and cultural contexts today, as well as the unique features related to ethical reflection on and from this corpus. The paper should begin by dealing with broader issues related to ethical reflection, including some of the key challenges that arise from this corpus for application to Christian ethics, but should also include a significant section which showcases the approach to this corpora by revealing how a specific ethical issue is informed by a specific text or texts from this corpus.

For orientation to the ethical dimension of these various corpora see the "Ethics" articles in the various editions of the *Dictionary of the Old Testament* (IVP), articles on various corpora in the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, and various articles and books provided in the bibliography below (contact Professor for Bibliography arranged by corpus)

Helpful recent books include:

Copan, Paul. *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.

Rodd, Cyril S. *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001.

Seibert, Eric A. *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.

Sloane, Andrew. *At Home in a Strange Land: Using the Old Testament in Christian ethics*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008.



The papers will be taken up and discussed within groups with critical review by group members.

Value: 40%

Due: Wednesday prior to presentation in class at 11:59 pm (October 15)

Submission: minimum 20 pages .pdf digital format to Course Dropbox

3. Paper #2: The second paper will provide an opportunity for the student to work through a major ethical issue raised by the OT. This minimum 20 page research paper, which will be submitted for review by the class, will begin with an articulation of the student's approach to Old Testament ethics (3-5 pages) before presenting a research paper on a specific issue related to Old Testament ethics. This issue should fall into the general areas found in Gill's textbook:

Politics, Economics, and Justice

War and Peace

The Environment

Human Life and Interpersonal Relationships

While the focus of the section dealing with a specific issue related to Old Testament ethics needs to be on the Old Testament text, the paper must show some interaction with the ethical reflections provided by Christian ethicists in Gill's textbook and beyond.

Value: 40%

Due: Wednesday prior to presentation in class at 11:59 p.m.

Submission: Minimum 20 pages .pdf digital format to Course Dropbox

4. Final reflection: At the final class of the semester each person will provide an oral testimony as to what has been learned from this course, especially how it has shaped your interpretation of the Old Testament and its use for Christian Ethics. Insights gained from the podcast by Marianne Talbot, including helpful connections for the discipline of OT Ethics, must be included here. This oral presentation will be followed by a written form which must be handed in after the final class of the semester (by the Thursday 11:59 following the last class).

Value: 10%

Due: 11 December, 11:59 p.m.

Submission: .pdf digital format to Course Dropbox



VII. Format and Evaluation

So I can properly evaluate your work the following style guide is to be used for papers in this class.

- **Medium for Submission:** All material in this class is to be submitted in digital format to me via email. Please use .pdf format and ensure that what you send is what you want me to read. If you need a program for creating .pdfs go to <http://primopdf.com> for a free .pdf maker.
- **Style:** All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/MDCStyleGuide.pdf>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions. Title page, footnoting where appropriate and bibliography are not included in the length required. Material should be written in excellent modern literary English with proper grammar, spelling, punctuation and rhetoric (including an introduction, conclusion and logical flow of argument). If it helps an outline may accompany the “paper” but this is not included in the length of the “paper.” Secondary and Primary sources should be used, cited and footnoted appropriately.
- **Gender Inclusive Language:** McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.
- **Citations:** You must cite the source of your material very carefully using a consistent system, not only when quoting from a section, but also when drawing from it as resource. Quotations should be kept to a minimum as I favour integration of secondary literature (footnoted).
- **Statement on Academic Honesty:** Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one’s academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

***this is a special issue for those pursuing second and third degrees in theology. It is understood that students will be building on earlier ideas and work, but it is expected that students will not hand in material that is merely “warmed over” previous work. If there is reason for concern speak with the professor about this.



So I can properly evaluate your work and help you grow in your biblical and writing skills the following evaluation guide should be kept in mind as you write:

- **Presentation:** Is the spelling correct? Does the grammar/syntax reflect proper English? Is the paper laid out properly?
- **Argumentation:** Is there a good introduction and conclusion? Does the argument flow with ample support? Is the question answered
- **Content:** Are all the points considered? Is there proper documentation of sources used?

VII. Dropbox

We'll be using Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) this semester for sharing resources for reading as well as distributing papers for evaluation. You will receive an invitation to Dropbox early in the semester which will lead you through the process for signing up and gaining access to our shared Dropbox.

VI. Accountability

Note on Timeliness of Submissions: Since this is a seminar style course all participants must be timely in their submission of material. People will need to read the various submissions and once the schedule is set there is no room to switch dates. For that reason there are considerable penalties for late materials in this course. Each **DAY** a paper is late will mean the loss of half a letter grade (5%). Take this into account when planning out your semester.

Rule of the Timbits (הלכה התמבתיים): To ensure a timely start to class we will be observing the Timbit Redemption Rule for this course. Because “tardies” raise the ire of the covenant community (bound by this covenantal syllabus document delivered here at the foot of the “Mountain”), those who are late for class must have a means by which to atone for such “accidental sins” (בְּשִׁגְגָה, if they are defiant sins, בְּיַד רָמָה, then the offender will be “cut off” from the community, see Num 15:27-31).¹ which means anyone late for class will need to bring Timbits for the entire class (מִנְחָה) no later than the next class meeting plus a Tim Hortons coffee (נֶסֶךְ) for the professor (cream, no sugar). This מִנְחָה and נֶסֶךְ will function simultaneously as both a sin offering (חֲטָאתָ, Leviticus 4) atoning for the accidental sin of the offender and a peace offering (שְׁלָמִים, Leviticus 3) enhancing the fellowship of the covenant community. See the high professor for further details and any torah-rulings (see Haggai 2:10-14) regarding specific situations.

¹ See the “definitive” work on this: Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament* (Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 1. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 53-54. For specific torah ruling also see the fuller הלכה התמבתיים in our Dropbox.



Especially important is to take seriously the cry of Joel of old in 1:13:

חַגְרוּ וּסְפְדוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים	Gird yourselves <i>with sackcloth</i>
וְהִלְלוּ מִשְׁרְתֵי מִזְבֵּחַ	And lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar!
בָּאוּ לֵינוּ בַשָּׁקִים מִשְׁרְתֵי אֱלֹהֵי	Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God,
כִּי נִמְנַע מִבַּיִת אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִנְחָה וְנִסְדָּ:	For <u>the grain offering and the drink offering</u> Are withheld from the house of your God.

And note his promise of a reward to those repent in 2:14:

מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחַם	Who knows whether He will turn and relent
וְהִשָּׂאִיר אַחֲרָיו בְּרָכָה	And leave a blessing behind Him,
מִנְחָה וְנִסְדָּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	<u>Even a grain offering and a drink offering</u> For the LORD your God?

IX. Bibliography

With thanks also to:

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Online: http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/ethics_ot.php

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