

McMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Hybrid

Course Code: MS5YE5/6YE6

Term: Winter 2020 (online modules start Jan. 6th)

Face-to-face Dates: Feb. 21st and Feb. 22nd F/S; 1.5 days

Instructor: Dr. Jason C. Robinson, BA, BRE, MA, MTS, MA, PH.D.

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description:

Professional ethics is a branch of applied ethics. Professional ethics focuses on the behaviour expected by professionals, such as in medicine, business, education, counselling and ministry. Professional ethics raises questions about what ethical standards or rules ought to govern professionals providing specialized services to the public. This course introduces students to the general study of ethics, and to professional and applied ethics specifically. Topics include: professional duties, clients' rights, honesty, privacy and confidentiality, integrity and trust issues, social responsibility, conflicts of interest and government regulations.

Expanded Course Description:

Questions in professional ethics are based in religious, political, and cultural beliefs about how humans ought to act. The diversity of opinion on these matters makes determining professional ethics very difficult. Questions we will consider include: Do professionals—specialized people with privileged roles in society—have the same moral obligations as the layperson or are there extra moral responsibilities? Is it enough to follow the law, or should professionals have a higher moral standard beyond the letter of the law? What might that look like? What should one do if the law and one's moral beliefs conflict? Are members of one professional field morally obligated in the same way as another, e.g., medicine the same as business; counselling the same as law? In what ways does a Christian form of professional ethics create different practices, questions, and requirements that a purely secular form does not? Should professional bodies regulate their own professions, or should there be an overarching (interdisciplinary/trans-professional) standard of correct conduct? How might one develop a universal professional ethics?

Course Objectives:

Knowing

- By the end of this course students will possess greater knowledge of professional ethics in the modern world.

Being

- Through an examination of major ethical questions, students will be encouraged to develop their own ethical way of life that embodies Christian values such as honesty, integrity, respect, and accountability.

Doing

- By the end of this course students will be able to apply theologically-grounded ethical principles to life and ministry contexts across the professions.

Required Text:

- Clancy Martin, Wayne Vaught, Robert Solomon. *Ethics Across the Professions: A Reader for Professional Ethics*, 2nd Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780190298708
- Long, D. Stephen. *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN: 9780199568864

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, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

Course Requirements:

Assignments	Worth
Critical Analysis and Summary Notes/Journal	20%
Discussion Postings and Class Participation	20%
Code of Conduct (profession/ministry context specific)	20%
Major Paper	40%

(1) Critical Analysis and Summary Notes/Journal

Students will read Stephen Long's *Christian Ethics* and make notes that both summarize, critically assess, and begin to apply **any two** of the four chapters.

Instructions

- The assignment is to be 2000-3000 words (excluding references).
 - Make each of the following three categories account for roughly 1/3 of the paper each.
- Summary
Take note of major themes.
What are the main arguments/points of the chapter?
Are there controversial issues or claims made?
- Critical analysis
How are you own views being challenged or changed?
What new questions are you encountering and why are those important to you?
Do you find anything particularly difficult and/or enlightening (revealing)?
- Application
How might some of the new ideas learned apply to your own context (vocation, congregation, life circumstance) in a meaningful way?

The purpose of this assignment is to engage students in introductory matters of Christian ethics, i.e., history, vocabulary, major issues, that may then, in the larger context of the course, be applied.

(2) Code of Conduct (profession/ministry specific)

Write a 2300-3300 word (excluding references) code of conduct that address specific ethical problems you have (or are likely to) experienced in your profession. This is to be designed for an adult only audience. To help focus your work, have at least one practical application (case study) example that relates to a major problem covered in this course, e.g., privacy rights, trust, corporate responsibility. The practical example should be mostly or entirely fictional, allowing you to imagine ways in which your code of conduct might help resolve a workplace problem.

Instructions

- Examine one major ethical issue from our *Ethics Across the Professions* textbook.
- Pick a topic that you believe is particularly relevant today, i.e., trust, privacy issues, government regulations.
- Explain why it is a problem and how there are different ways of interpreting it (different theological, cultural, and biblical traditions).
 - Try to briefly present two or three alternatives (interpretations) as space allows.
- Convince your hypothetical audience (professional peers, congregation, students, etc.) that your interpretation and response is most appropriate, i.e., argue “why” they should believe your position is superior to the others.
- Ultimately you want your audience to become informed but also directed toward possible courses of action that are meaningful.

(3) Discussion Postings and Class Participation

Students are expected to provide a brief commentary on any part of the assigned reading for any five (5) online modules. Each one should be between 250-300 words. The commentary should pick one brief quote from the readings and then examine its meaning and significance. Is it interesting? Explain why? Is it important? How so? No research is expected beyond our texts. This is an opportunity to engage with the material you find most interesting.

- Posts are graded on whether you have engaged meaningfully/thoughtfully (rather than flippantly or irrelevantly) with course material. Each is graded as a pass or fail.
- Commentaries are worth 2% each for a total of 10% of the course.
- Each post must be uploaded to the relevant dropbox by 11:59pm on the last day of each relevant module. Students cannot post to module dropboxes retroactively.
- Late posts cannot be accepted without medical/crisis-type justification.

Class Participation

Active participation during our face-to-face classes is worth 10% of the course. Students will engage in controversial debates during class meetings. Students will be randomly divided into groups and each group will be assigned a side to defend on a specific debate. Students will be graded on contributions provided, rather than by physical attendance to class.

(4) Major Paper (4000-5000 words excluding references)

This is both a research and argumentation paper. It is expected that students will go beyond the lectures/notes by researching topics through scholarly materials. Each student will argue for a position (for or against something). In other words, merely describing an eco-theological problem as one might for an encyclopedia is insufficient. It is expected that students will fight for a position by being as persuasive as possible (i.e., giving reasons for “why” one should believe the author).

Instructions

- Your project must identify one major issue. Students are given broad discretion on this matter.
- In the paper you will argue:
 - (1) Why that issue is a problem?
 - How, specifically, is “good” being challenged?
 - (2) Why is it difficult to resolve?
 - Are there historical, social, political, religious, theological reasons the problem remains unresolved?
 - (3) How might we begin to solve it?
 - Offer suggestions in terms of practical strategies toward resolution, e.g., education, funding, challenging social norms/stigmas, political lobbying.
- Be sure to write a paper on an issue that you “have not” previously worked upon.
- Avoid quotes unless essential to your argument, and then only if thoroughly examined and critiqued.

Essential elements that should be present in all papers:

(a) a sustained treatment of the major issues (rather than sporadic comments on minor issues),

(b) an argument for or against a specific view (including a counterargument to whatever position is taken),

(c) clear evidence of research (e.g., peer-reviewed books, journal articles, book reviews),

How much research? You need however much it takes to be thorough, i.e., deep/complete/meaningful. I would recommend a minimum of 6-8 academic sources just to get you thinking on a topic. You shouldn't be quoting from these (avoid quotes!) but there will be some great ideas you might use (paraphrase and then cited as sources used).

(d) some connection between the material researched and a contemporary problem or issue it addresses (e.g., potentially solves) within your specialization/profession, and

(e) clear evidence of your own views and opinions being challenged (i.e., stating what you think, and then producing questions that challenge your views—in short, show that you are interacting with and thinking about the material sincerely).

- **Avoid most “common” online materials** (e.g., blogs, non-academic sites, anonymous websites). Good online material will be found, first and foremost, through a library's subscription to online content. There is a lot of good material online but you need to be discerning. Is it peer-reviewed? Is it written by an academic? Is it accepted by other academics?
- **Avoid using lecture notes.**

Avenue to Learn

This course is a hybrid course with two days of face to face meetings (1 full day; 1 half day). The course modules can be accessed by registered students through McMaster University's Avenue to Learn. Please sign up early and purchase the textbooks as soon as possible. For information on Avenue to Learn: http://avenue.mcmaster.ca/help/manuals/A_Quick_Guide_to_Avenue.pdf

Policy Statements:

Late Penalties

Late assignments will receive 2% per day deductions.

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>

Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a violation of the integrity of persons in the form of unsolicited, unwelcome, verbal or physical behaviour, which discriminates on the basis of gender about a person's body, attire, gender, marital status or economic status. Among faculty, staff, and students, sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.

College Style for Submission of Written Work

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 <https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>
Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Disclaimer

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up until the first day of class.

Mini Biography

Jason C. Robinson, BA, BRE, MA, MA, MTS, Ph.D. (Guelph-McMaster-Laurier joint Ph.D. Programme)

Dr. Robinson has taught at a several universities including Wilfrid Laurier University and York University. Robinson specializes in hermeneutics (theories of interpretation), 20th-century continental philosophy, philosophical theology, philosophy of religion, social and political thought, and ethics. His most recent book is in the philosophy of education, *Foundations of Education: A Social, Political, and Philosophical Approach*. Other areas of research interest include interdisciplinary studies, the nature of time, and aesthetics. His current project, a co-authored book with Stanley Porter, is forthcoming through Routledge, *Active Hermeneutics: Situating an Interdisciplinary Account of Understanding*.