

MCMMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE

ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE

Hybrid

Course Code: MS/TH 3YE3/5YE5/6YE6

Term: Winter 2021 (online modules start Jan. 6th, term ends April 9th)

Face-to-face Dates: March 4th and 5th; 1.5 days

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

Email: robinjc@mcmaster.ca

Please “do not” use Avenue to Learn messaging.

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description:

This course is a part of the branch of study called professional ethics. It examines the ethical principles we rely upon when relating to others in the workplace. Are your actions motivated by theological views, pop culture values, perhaps social expectations such as laws and cultural norms, or a mixture of all of these? Having an awareness of ethical prejudices (what we already believe) is important for then fashioning a more robust ethical system by which to live. Professional ethics is of immense practical (concrete) significance for achieving the good life (a life lived well). Each unit emphasizes applied ethical problems encountered in the workplace and some of the major answers to them.

Expanded Course Description:

Throughout the term we will ask very challenging questions: Do you know if your actions are good or bad? What ethical standards do you use to judge right from wrong? This course is designed to problematize our moral assumptions about how to act ethically in the workplace. Every workplace environment needs ethical guidelines that govern its practices. Sometimes these guidelines are clear and healthy (good for the community), other times they are nonexistent, inadequate, and even bad (harmful). Is there room for ethical improvement in your workplace?

Our awareness of professional ethics must address issues as diverse as racism, conflicts of interest, dishonesty, rights, privacy, trust, sexism, government regulations, integrity, and many more. Have you experienced an ethical dilemma for which there seemed to be no satisfying answer? Perhaps you have been (or will be) expected to help divorced parents fighting for custody of a child, an abused spouse leaving home, the fall-out of an adulterous relationship, or a family struggling with the medical question whether to “pull the plug” on a terminally ill family member. All these situations require ethical actions and choices we may feel unprepared to answer because we do not understand the underlying ethical problems. Throughout the course, students will explore numerous real-life topics with the goal of informing their own creation of ethical guidelines for the workplace. There is no simple “one size fits all” set of guidelines for every context. Ultimately the goal is to begin to prepare students for unpredictable ethical dilemmas.

**Please note that there is significant thematic/content overlap with Professional Ethics MS5YE5/6YE6, the required DPT version. These courses are designed to be highly selectable in nature. This means that there is a lot of content provided (more than a typical course) from which to pick like a buffet-style lunch, choosing topics most relevant to one’s context and doing assignments that are similarly relevant.

Even so, despite the broad flexibility, students should know that both courses cover the same scholarly topics (ethics in the professional arena/workplace) and should decide accordingly.

Course Objectives:

Knowing

- By the end of this course students will possess greater knowledge of ethics relevant to the workplace.

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 M9A 3C3: phone 416.620.2934; Cell to text orders: 416 668 3434; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

The new Hurlburt Family Bookstore is located beside the Chapel entrance, opposite Cullen Hall. It will be opening September 8th **by appointment only** due to new Covid19 safety measures. For students to book an appointment, they will need to text or email Bernice.

Specializations:

CC, CW, and PS: Church and Culture; Christian Worldview and History; and Pastoral Studies

Regular Course Requirements (students taking this as 3YE3 ONLY):

| Assignments | Worth | Due Date |
|---|--------------|--|
| Critical Analysis and Summary Notes/Journal | 20% | Feb. 21 st |
| Classroom Participation and Group Debates | 15% | During scheduled face-to-face classes. |
| Code of Conduct | 25% | March 7 th |
| Major Paper—Specialization Based | 40% | March 28 th |

(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 (only two chapters in total).
- If you have taken my course *Christian Ethics*, write on two previously unaddressed 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 your 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?

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

Write a 2700-3500 word (excluding references) code of conduct that addresses specific ethical problems you have (or are likely to) experienced in your profession. This is to be designed for an adult only audience (assume at least an undergraduate level of education for your 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. E.g., ministry relies upon trust, but what should you do if someone confesses something illegal or potentially harmful to others? How do you "justify" or "give reasons for why" you act a certain way. "I betrayed the person's confidence and shared the information with others because X, Y, Z."
- Research your topic in scholarly literature. How have scholars addressed this issue? How have they succeeded or failed in your reasoned judgment?
 - It is expected that you will consult a minimum of 7 sources.
 - Be sure to critically interact with sources, rather than merely state positions/ideas.
 - It is also expected that you will explore examples of professional codes of conduct to help guide your own. Please go beyond the examples provided in course notes (although those are a good starting point).
- Explain why it is a problem and how there are different ways of interpreting it (different theological, cultural, and biblical traditions).

- How are people possibly acting unethically? What should one do instead? Explain why.
 - 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) Classroom Participation and Group Debates

Active participation (in class and debates) during our face-to-face classes is worth 15% 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 (3200-4000 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 ethical 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 ethical issue, preferably **in relation to your (possible) workplace context “and” your academic specialization**. Students are given broad discretion on this matter.

Christian History and Worldview

- The research for this specialization should focus on developing critical knowledge of Baptist history, or a deeper awareness of Baptist theology/worldview.

Church and Culture

- Research for this specialization should relate to some aspect of Baptists and cultural engagement.

Pastoral Studies

- Research for this specialization can go in a number of direction. It can focus on a theological construction of one’s theological position in regards to an issue related to Baptist history and polity. It can deal with developing a strategy for dealing with issues related to Baptist history and polity. It can deal with Baptist resources for pastoral ministry, etc.

- In the paper you will argue:

(1) Why that issue is an ethical problem in your (possible) specialization?

- 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, 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.**

DPT Course Requirements (students taking this as 5YE5 ONLY):

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| <p>DPT: Doctor of Practical Theology students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with the Program Director of the DPT and the course instructor in order to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the DPT program. Once the elements of the Advanced Elective have been agreed upon by the student, the Program Director, and the instructor, a formal application can be made for an Advanced Elective in connection with this course. Once the application is accepted, DPT students can proceed with the course as part of their degree program.</p> | |
| Assignments | Worth |
| Literature Review 2000 words (approximate) | 25% |

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|---|-----|
| Minimal expectations for reading 4000 pages. | |
| Literature Review Summary 3000 words (approximate) | 25% |
| Major Paper Approximately 8000 words (approximate) | 40% |
| Class Participation | 10% |
| <p>*It is expected that students will contact (email) the instructor at the beginning of the term to discuss strategies for completing assignments, research areas, feasible due dates, etc.</p> <p>Details on these assignments are located below the regular course assignment requirements.</p> | |

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| Advanced Elective Course Assignment Details | |
| <p>I. Literature Review:</p> <p>a. The student will develop an annotated bibliography of approximately 15-20 resources (4000 pages) related to <i>the topic of the course</i> and write a 100-150 word annotation for each one. The required texts for the course can be included as part of the book list. The literature review will be approximately 2,000 words. This assignment is due (to be determined in consultation with student) and will constitute 25% of the course grade.</p> <p>b. A paper will also be prepared that summarizes the key learnings from the annotated bibliography and provides a cogent foundation for a theology and practice of <i>the topic of the course</i>. The paper will be approximately 3,000 words. It is due (to be determined in consultation with student) and will constitute 25% of the course grade.</p> <p>II. Major Paper: <i>Develop a suitable title for the paper according to the topic of the course</i></p> <p>The paper should include four key sections. First a brief, but clear explanation of how the paper is rooted in a Practice Led-research approach, second an exploration of the challenges and problems that provoke this study (i.e. why does this ministry practice need to be addressed? What are the problems that you want to identify?) Third, a consideration of a foundational theology of the practice of ministry under consideration in this course and a deep consideration of how new approaches to this practice can be employed in helping to address and improve ministry practice in this area. Fourth some reflection on the application of these ideas to the students own ministry context (both in terms of the local church and also their ministry beyond the local church).</p> <p>The essay will follow the same guidelines for essays posted above.</p> <p>The paper should be approximately 8,000 words. It is due (to be determined in consultation with student) and will constitute 40% of the course grade.</p> <p>a. Class Participation 10%</p> | |

Course Requirements (students taking this as 6YE6 ONLY):

- For the major paper write 7000-8000 words.
- Other assignments remain the same as the “regular” requirements, including the word count as given above.

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*