

THL 372-003: CONTEMPORARY MORAL PROBLEMS

Spring 2008: TRF at 8:30 AM

Room: Harkins Hall 334

Credit Hours: 3.00



PROVIDENCE
COLLEGE

INSTRUCTOR:

Name: Fr. Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, O.P., Ph.D., S.T.L.

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I am generally in my office (Sowa 229B) or in my laboratory (Albertus Magnus 212) from 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM daily and am easily available with a prior appointment. To make an appointment, call me at 865-1823. You may also contact me via email. I will keep Tuesday afternoons from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM for drop-in appointments. Come look for me in my lab. Please feel free to talk to me about any issue relating either to the course or to your life as a student here at Providence College.

A PRAYER BEFORE STUDY St. Thomas Aquinas, O.P.

O God, Creator of all things, true source of light and wisdom, graciously let a ray of your light penetrate the darkness of my understanding. Give me a keen intellect, a retentive memory, and the ability to grasp things correctly and fundamentally. Give me the talent of being exact in my explanations and the ability to express myself with thoroughness and charm. Point out the beginning, direct the progress, and perfect my work. We ask you this through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Have you ever wondered why cloning is such a controversial issue today? Is there a gay gene? Do you know when it is morally permissible to refuse life-saving medical treatment? Do you know the difference between adult and embryonic stem cells? Why do abortion and contraception lead to much unhappiness and suffering? Can there be a just war?

This course examines a wide range of controversial moral problems raised by our contemporary culture in the areas of social, sexual, and biomedical ethics. Some of the topics we will discuss include capital punishment, contraception, in vitro fertilization

(IVF), abortion, cloning, stem cells, homosexuality, artificial hydration and nutrition (AHN), physician assisted suicide and euthanasia. We will examine and respond to these moral issues in light of fundamental Christian convictions grounded in both faith and reason regarding the dignity of the human person, the meaning of human procreation, suffering, and death, and the call to holiness in medicine and scientific research.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- David Boonin and Graham Oddie. *What's Wrong? Applied Ethicists and their Critics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Robert P. George and Christopher Tollefsen. *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life*. (New York: Doubleday, 2008).
- William W. May. *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life*. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2000).
- James W. Sire. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th edn. (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004).
- Christopher West. *Good News About Sex and Marriage*, Revised Edn. (Cincinnati: Servant Publications, 2004).

CRITICAL ESSAYS

This semester you will be required to critically respond to three target essays that address controversial moral problems in our society. These assigned essays can be found on the ANGEL website for this course.

DUE DATES FOR CRITICAL PAPERS: February 21, 2008
March 18, 2008
April 18, 2008

Each critical response paper must be at least 1,500 words in length and cannot exceed 2,000 words. Please include a word count at the end of your paper.

Each paper has to have three parts. In the first part of your paper, you will identify the presuppositions of the author's worldview. Please answer the following questions: What is the author's primary worldview? What is his or her account of the *summum bonum*? What is his or her account of the human person? Be sure to include direct quotations from the text to support your analysis.

Next, in the second part of your essay, you will identify a *single* argument in the assigned target essay to which you wish to respond. You will begin by summarizing the conclusion of the author's argument. You will then outline the argument giving the reasons used by the author to justify his argument. Be sure that your description of the author's argument is accurate. Be sure to include direct quotes taken from the assigned essay to show that you have understood the author's argument.

Finally in the third part of your paper, you will respond to the author's argument. You will begin by clearly stating your position: Do you agree or disagree with the author's argument? Do you think that the author's argument is a valid one? Is it true or false? Next, you will justify your own position by giving your own reasons for your position: Why do you agree or disagree with the author's argument? Support your argument by citing other sources from the ethical and moral literature, especially the readings from the class.

Grading Scale:

- 10 Points Exemplary Paper: The student has clearly read, understood, and thought through the content of the essay. He or she was able to *critically* respond to the material in the text and relate it to the material covered in class and to a wider philosophical or social context. The paper was organized and clearly written without any grammatical or stylistic errors.
- 9 Points Excellent Paper: The student had clearly read, understood, and thought through the content of the essay. He or she was able to critically respond to the material but was unable to relate it to the material covered in class and to a wider scientific or social context. The paper was organized and clearly written but there were several grammatical or stylistic errors.
- 8 Points Good Paper: The student had clearly read and understood the content of the essay. However, he or she was not able to critically respond to the material presented in the text. There were minor logical flaws in the argument of the paper. The paper was not well organized and there were numerous grammatical or stylistic errors.
- 7 Points Adequate Paper: The student had clearly read the essay. However, the paper suggests that he or she did not understand the content of the text. Moreover, he or she was unable to critically respond to the material – the paper remained a summary of the text. The paper was not well organized and there were numerous grammatical or stylistic errors.
- 0-6 Points Inadequate Paper: It is not clear if the student had read the assigned essay. Moreover the paper was not well written with numerous grammatical or stylistic errors.

Academic dishonesty and plagiarism (“the stealing and passing off of the ideas or words of another as one’s own without crediting the source”) is not tolerated in the professional world and will not be tolerated in this class. Plagiarism on any written submission will result in an F for that assignment. Please consult the current Providence College Undergraduate Catalogue for its statement on “Academic Honesty.”

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

This is an upper-level course in theology, and I will expect active participation from all students. Participation of each student will be evaluated in relation to other students. Please come to class ready to discuss the assigned reading assignments.

Short quizzes will be given each week to assess your comprehension of the assigned readings. Your two lowest quiz grades will be dropped at the end of the semester. There will be no make-up quizzes in this course.

Critical papers will be due on the date indicated on the syllabus. NO late papers will be accepted. No exceptions! I will permit one resubmission of each critical paper for re-grading if you address the criticisms I raise when I first evaluate your paper.

Regular attendance at each class is expected. Please email the instructor in advance if you expect to miss a class. More than three unexcused absences during the semester may lead to a final grade reduction of a full letter (e.g., B+ to C+).

GRADING POLICY

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Critical Reflection Papers (3x15%)	45%
Comprehensive Take Home Final Exam	30%
Quizzes	15%
Class Participation	10%

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

- January 15, 2008: **Introduction**
- January 17, 2008: **The Nature of Contemporary Moral Discourse I**
READING:
• Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 1-23
- January 18, 2008: **The Nature of Contemporary Moral Discourse II**
READING:
• Sire, *Universe*, Chapters 1 & 2
- January 22, 2008: **The Nature of Contemporary Moral Discourse III**
READING:
• Sire, *Universe*, Chapters 4, 5, & 9
- January 24, 2008: **The Nature of Contemporary Moral Discourse IV**
READING:
• Macintyre, "Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative and the philosophy of science," *The Monist* 60 (1977): 453-472. [ANGEL]
- January 25, 2008: **Moral Theology and the Pursuit of Happiness I**
READING:
• *The Bible*, Matt. 5:1-7:29.
• Pinckaers, *Morality*, pp. 7-17; 65-81. [ANGEL]
- January 29, 2008: **Moral Theology and the Pursuit of Happiness II**
READING:
• Pinckaers, *Morality*, pp. 82-95. [ANGEL]
- February 5, 2008: **Natural Rights and the Natural Law**
READING:
• George, *Embryo*, pp. 83-111.
- February 7, 2008: **The Dignity of the Human Person and the Sanctity of Human Life**
READING:
• John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, Encyclical on the Gospel of Life, 1995, nos. 52-57. [ANGEL]
• Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 115-135.
- February 8, 2008: **Abortion I**
READING:
• Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 65-76.
• George, *Embryo*, pp. 1-56.
- February 12, 2008: **Abortion II**
READING:
• George, *Embryo*, pp. 112-173.

- February 14, 2008: **Abortion III**
 READING:
 • May, *Catholic Bioethics*, pp. 152-156; 182-186.
- February 15, 2008: **Human Embryo Research and Stem Cells**
 • Austriaco, *Understanding Stem Cell Research: Controversy and Promise*, 2008 [ANGEL]
- February 21, 2008: **The Meaning of Human Sexuality and Procreation**
 READING:
 • *The Bible*, Gen. 2:4-3:24
 • West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, pp. 17-30.
- FIRST CRITICAL PAPER DUE TODAY --**
- February 22, 2008: **Chastity and the Struggle for Self-Mastery**
 READING:
 • West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, pp. 65-86.
 • Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 207-238.
- March 4, 2008: **Sexual Addiction and the Question of Prostitution**
 READING:
 • Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 255-277.
- March 6, 2008: **Contraception**
 READING:
 • West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, pp. 107-133.
 • Pope Paul VI, *Humanae vitae*, Encyclical on the Regulation of Birth, 1968. [ANGEL]
- March 7, 2008: **Infertility and Artificial Reproductive Technology**
 READING:
 • West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, pp. 135-148.
 • CDF, *Donum vitae*, 1987. Section II: Interventions Upon Human Procreation. [ANGEL]
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- March 11, 2008: **Homosexuality and Same-Sex Attraction I**
 READING:
 • West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, pp. 149-162.
 • Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 167-197
- March 13, 2008: **Homosexuality and Same-Sex Attraction II**
 READING:
 • N. Austriaco, O.P., "The Myth of the Gay Gene," *Homiletics and Pastoral Review*, December 2003, pp. 28-31; 48-53. [ANGEL]
 • J.M. Bailey, "Homosexuality and Mental Illness," *Arch Gen. Psychiatry* 56 (1999): 883-884. [ANGEL]

- March 14, 2008: **Same-Sex Marriage I**
 READING:
 • Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 355-370.
- March 18, 2008: **Same-Sex Marriage II**
 READING:
 • Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, June 3, 2003. [ANGEL]
 • Stanley Kurtz, "Here Come the Brides," *The Weekly Standard* Volume 11, 15, December 26, 2005. [ANGEL]

-- SECOND CRITICAL PAPER DUE TODAY --

- March 25, 2008: **Suicide, Assisted Suicide, and Euthanasia**
 READING:
 • Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 39-55.
 • May, *Catholic Bioethics*, pp. 235-252.
 • Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Euthanasia*, 1980 [ANGEL]
- March 27, 2008: **Pain Management at the End-of-Life
 & Elective Extraordinary Means**
 READING:
 • May, *Catholic Bioethics*, pp. 252-263.
- March 28, 2008: **Informed Consent and Medical Care**
 READING:
 • May, *Catholic Bioethics*, pp. 270-273.
- April 1, 2008: **Defining Death & Brain Death**
 READING:
 • May, *Catholic Bioethics*, pp 283-306.
- April 3, 2008: **AHN and the Case of Terri Schiavo**
 READING:
 • May, *Catholic Bioethics*, pp. 263-270.
 • United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Nutrition and Hydration: Moral and Pastoral Reflections* [ANGEL]
- April 4, 2008: **Capital Punishment and the Death Penalty I**
 READING:
 • Boonin, *What's Wrong?*, pp. 590-614.
- April 8, 2008: **Capital Punishment and the Death Penalty II**
 READING:
 • Christoph Schonborn, O.P. "Brief Note on the Revision of Passages in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* Having to do with the Death Penalty," *Catholic Dossier* 4 (1998): 9-11. [ANGEL]
 • Thomas Williams, L.C., "Capital Punishment and the Just Society," *Catholic Dossier* 4 (1998): 28-36. [ANGEL]

- April 11, 2008: **The Morality of War and the Just War Tradition I**
 READING:
 • George Weigel, “Moral Clarity in a Time of War,” *First Things* 128 (2003): 20-27. [ANGEL]
 • Rowan Williams & George Weigel, “War and Statecraft: An Exchange,” *First Things* 141 (2004): 14-22. [ANGEL]
- April 15, 2008: **The Morality of War and the Just War Tradition II**
- April 17, 2008: **Christian Feminism and the Genius of Women I**
 READING:
 • John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 1995 [ANGEL]
 • Cathleen Kaveny, “What Women Want”, *Commonweal* Volume 103, Number 19, November 7, 2003 [ANGEL]
 • Jane Redmont, “Letter to Women bares John Paul’s Isolation,” *National Catholic Reporter* [ANGEL]
 • Eve Ensler, selections from *The Vagina Monologues*, [ANGEL]
- April 18, 2008: **Christian Feminism and the Genius of Women II**
- THIRD CRITICAL PAPER DUE TODAY --**
- April 22, 2008: **Organ Transplantation and Procurement I**
 READING:
 • May, *Catholic Bioethics*, pp. 306-310
 • Boonin, *What’s Wrong?*, pp. 489-513.
- April 24, 2008: **Organ Transplantation and Procurement II**
- April 25, 2008: **Special Topics in Contemporary Moral Theology I**
- April 29, 2008: **Special Topics in Contemporary Moral Theology II**