



# Saint Mary's College

Fall Semester, 2007  
Religious Studies 458



**Professor:** Joe Incandela  
**Office:** 147 Madeleva Hall  
**Office Hours:** By appointment  
**Phone:** 284-4584 (office); 271-0435 (home)  
**E-Mail:** *incandel@saintmarys.edu*  
**Home Page:** <http://www.saintmarys.edu/~incandel/homepage.html>  
**Course Website:** <http://www.saintmarys.edu/~incandel/TE.html>

## Course Description

How does Christianity affect thoughts and theories about what we should do and who we should be? Does the Gospel story encourage its listeners to do the greatest good for the greatest number? Or does it form a life framed by certain moral absolutes that can never be violated no matter how good the consequences may be? Why and how should Christians care about the virtues? Which virtues? What do stories have to do with how we live our lives and claim our identities? Should Christians support the values of their nation-states? Or should Christians stand apart from wider culture

either to challenge it or to prevent being corrupted by it? We will study significant contemporary Christian ethicists in order to pose possible answers to these questions. My hope is that the student will leave the course with a deeper understanding of how theology does and ought to inform the way Christians live and think about their lives.

## Course Goals and Outcomes

This is not a course in ethical issues per se. While we will make use of examples in reading and discussion, we will not engage in sustained discussion of particular hot-button moral issues. (As you'll see later on, there will be a reason for this.) Instead, we'll concentrate on what might be called moral methodology—that is, how do those who gather at the foot of the cross understand and present the moral life? What concepts do they use? Which do they avoid? As we go through the texts chosen for this course, you should be able to see how diverse presentations of how to get the Christian ethical task off the ground either do or do not contribute to a fuller understanding of the moral life.

The student who successfully completes this course, then, will be able to **navigate** major intellectual currents and recent trends affecting theological ethics; **diagnose** strengths and weaknesses of each; **demonstrate** through written and spoken words habits of critical thinking and problem solving; and **examine** your own life, hopes, and goals against the horizon formed by our readings and discussions. As you'll see, none of the people we'll read thought that theology was an inert discipline that shouldn't touch down in the lives of the people doing it or reading it. If these issues don't make a difference in how you think about your life and your future, then it's a good sign we're not doing justice to the texts we'll study this semester.

## Requirements and Grading

The grade you earn at the end of the semester will be broken down the following way:

1. Active and well-prepared individual seminar participation	25%
--	-----

2.	Corporate participation and discussion	10%
3.	Brief self-assessments of your class participation (individual and group) emailed to me after just about every class	10%
4.	Online comments to initiate discussion	10%
5.	Term paper (approximately 15-20 pages) (10% for Prospectus, 10% for Draft, 25% for Paper)	45%

① **INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION** Since this class will be run as a seminar, your primary day-to-day responsibility will be to do the readings carefully and contribute significantly to our discussions. You will assess your own participation for each class and assign yourself a grade of  $\sqrt{+}$ ,  $\sqrt{\phantom{+}}$ ,  $\sqrt{-}$ , or 0.

- $\sqrt{+}$  You made significant contributions to our conversation either by introducing new topics or questions or by requesting or offering supportive clarifications or different viewpoints to what other students say. The level of discussion and group dynamics were significantly better because of your input. Your comments tended to be illustrated through reference to the text(s) under discussion and an evidenced close reading of same. You arrived clearly prepared and ready to talk about the material. A “ $\sqrt{+}$ ” is equal to an “A” and means that we really couldn’t have had the discussion we did without you.
- $\sqrt{\phantom{+}}$  Your voice was heard more than once, but your contributions mostly echoed rather than challenged or engaged those of other students. You arrived mostly, if not fully, prepared and you may have contributed occasionally and constructively to discussion, but *not* to the extent that the class (group dynamics, level of depth in the discussion, and so on) would have been very different without you. A “ $\sqrt{\phantom{+}}$ ” corresponds to a low B.
- $\sqrt{-}$  You were largely passive in class and offered just one comment (or a couple very brief ones). Your contributions were cursory and

didn't provide any evidence of real engagement with the texts or the discussion. A "√-" corresponds to a high D.

- 0 You did not contribute at all to the discussion either because you did not attend class or because you attended class but did not speak. Note: you will be allowed 2 unexcused absences.

You are expected to attend class regularly. Your presence in class is a kind of participation. Therefore, more than 2 unexcused absences will lower your grade. All absences for which I do not receive a written excuse from Susan Vanek will be considered unexcused. More than 4 unexcused absences may result in failure of the course. In rare circumstances, even an excessive number of *excused* absences (7 or more) may not allow you to pass this course. For any absences beyond 2 (excused or unexcused), you will owe me a detailed (2-page, single-space) summary of the readings for the class you missed.) *It is the student's responsibility to inform the professor of any extenuating circumstances affecting attendance or class performance.* Coming in more than 5 minutes after the start of the period counts as one-half absence. Consistent tardiness less than 5 minutes late will also count against you.

We will have one evening meeting of the class during the semester if we can find a time where everyone is available. If we can't do that, we'll watch the DVD during a class period. This evening meeting will take place on or about Tuesday, November 6 and would take the place of our regular meeting for that day. If I ever need to cancel a class at any other time due to illness, I will email you all or make arrangements for you to be notified of the cancellation.

- ② **CORPORATE PARTICIPATION** Since more is needed for a good discussion than the same two or three people contributing, you will also be giving yourself a corporate (class) discussion grade based upon how all of us do with these readings. Since at least part of what makes a good discussion is a variety of voices and perspectives, as well as the ability of the participants to make comments or ask questions that invite the contributions of others and involve every student in the room, we will fail as a learning community if we don't approach our task communally.

In his book *The Catholic University as Promise and Project*, Fr. Michael Buckley states, "Discussion' indicates a collaborative inquiry, either by the mutually supportive labor of human beings concentrated upon a single problem, exchange, or project, or by their mutually critical debate in the

testing and verification of variant positions and resolutions” (p. 136). This course aims for such collaboration and will be conducted as a seminar in which my main responsibility is to steer the discussion in productive ways and assist you in the process of discovering your own theological insights and ideas. Certainly I will also be on hand to try to explain especially complicated ideas and to prompt you to make connections between seemingly disparate points that come up in your readings. But my hope is that most of what gets said during class will be said by you. It may take awhile to reach that goal, but that’s where we want to get to by the end of the semester.

Early in the semester, we will, as a class, come up with the criteria that constitute a productive seminar discussion. These will be what you’ll use to assign the class a grade.

- ③ **SELF-ASSESSMENTS OF PARTICIPATION** After each class on the syllabus marked with a \* next to the date, I would like you to submit a self-assessment to me by **midnight** of *the day of the class we just had*. You’ll be evaluating both your own individual participation as well as how you thought the group as a whole did. The point of having the assessment come in the day of class is to have that day’s seminar still somewhat fresh in your mind. You’ll find an online form to fill out at the class website listed below on p. 9.

There are two points possible for each one of these self-assessments:

1. Your self-assessment is in by 12:00 AM.
2. You fill in the entire form.

I do reserve the right to modify either up or down the actual grade you gave yourself. If I do that, I would tell you on an email. If you don’t hear anything from me, assume that that meant I agreed with what you gave yourself. What I’ll do with these grades is average them out at the end of the semester after dropping the two lowest classes.

For the class grade, give an A, A-, B+ B, B- (and so on) on the basis of the rubrics we’ll come up with at the start of the semester for what makes for a good discussion. Write a sentence or two to explain the reason why you gave the grade you did to the group. I’ll average these grades after dropping the high and low results, and that’s what the class will get for that day.

- ④ **ONLINE CONTRIBUTION TO START DISCUSSION** You will each take turns (probably about two) during the semester to post a question and some comments on the course blog that the seminar will use to begin discussion at the following class. You can access the course blog through the website listed below on p. 10, or you can go directly to <http://theoethics.blogspot.com>

The following will give you information on how to begin blogging. Additional directions are available by clicking on “Blog Instructions” on the course website. You will receive an email from me inviting you to join the blog. There will be a link in the email for you to click on to go to the blog. If you already have a Blogger account, you will be asked whether you want to accept or decline the invitation. If you don’t have a Blogger account, you’ll first be asked to sign up for one (this takes about a minute to do). You can do this by clicking the link to “Create an account.”

This is what I want you to do when it’s your turn to do the posting: Begin with a summary of the reading (**note:** on days in which there is more than one reading listed for a particular class, the “main” reading will appear first on the syllabus. While you’re welcome to bring in the other readings, you should concentrate on the first one for that class.) Your summary should be in the form of a numbered list with 3-5 items on it that represent your attempt to capture the main points of that day’s reading in complete, single sentences. After the summary, you will do a Q—H—Q presentation. That stands for Question, Hypothesis, Question. **[Q]** So, after your summary, you pose an “issue question” (not a question of fact or anything susceptible to a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response) based one or more of the main points which you will have just identified in the reading(s) for that day. **[H]** Then you write a brief essay (around 500 words, or about the amount of a single-spaced typed page) in which you support a hypothesis in response to your own question. Try to be very textual in your response by referring to particular passages in the reading (page numbers would be helpful for the rest of us). It’s okay if you come up with a couple different answers to your question and explain why each one makes some sense. That is, take seriously the *hypothesis* part. You’re not necessarily trying to find *the* answer as much as you’re trying to make sense of a text for the rest of us, and there might be more than one possible way to do this. **[Q]** Finally, reread what you just wrote and then present another question that comes out of your hypothesis/response .

Your posting will be due by **8:00 PM** on the night before class (either Monday or Wednesday). Earlier is obviously better, because I want everyone else to review what you’ve written and think about it prior to our discussion the next day.

Each of these has a possibility of 4 points:

1. Your posting is in by 8:00 PM.
2. You follow the proper format (Summary + QHQ) and length.
3. You support the claims in your hypothesis/hypotheses with textual evidence (including page numbers) and sound reasoning.
4. Your blog posting and the questions you ask really help us organize class discussion the next day by giving us an issue that we spend some time on, rather than begin with it and quickly move on to something else.

A class blog enables us to extend our face-to-face discussions into an arena not bound by time constraints. Therefore, you should also feel free to make additional postings even when it's not your turn to do so. I will count these as extra credit. And certainly don't hesitate to carry over ideas into the blog when you think more needs to be said about them than we managed to say during class time.

- ⑤ **TERM PAPER** Each student will be required to submit a 15-20 page (12 pt. font, double-spaced) term paper during finals week. You will pick a topic and engage in independent research about it. Early in the semester, we will have a class session in the library where you will learn about some of the tools and research strategies you'll need to complete this assignment. You'll also learn about picking a topic and about narrowing it down appropriately. Academic citation in either the Chicago or MLA style will be required (which one you use is up to you as long as you're consistent). You'll see a link on the course website about citing your sources with plenty of examples. The MLA style uses parentheses in the text and a full bibliography at the end. The Chicago style employs concise footnotes at the bottom of pages and a full bibliography at the end (use "Option 1" on the website link to the Chicago style).

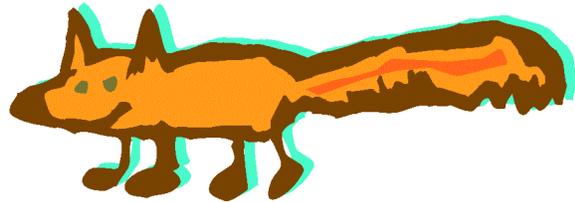
The entire assignment is worth 45% of your grade, but this will be broken down into more manageable chunks due throughout the semester. On the course website, you'll find a grading rubric for the completed term paper and individual rubrics for its different components.

For whatever topic you pick I want you to defend a thesis that your research and our discussion have suggested to you. I will be happy to help you think through a topic to pursue. Your thesis should encapsulate what you will argue in your paper and provide your main reasons for so arguing. Try to be original. Don't just repeat what we've said in class. Obviously, by

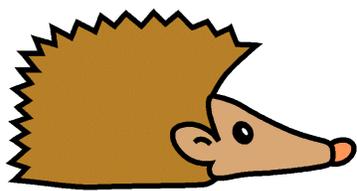
the time you select your topic about a month into the class, we will not have encountered all of the issues or authors which we will study by the end of the semester. So I'm really asking you to make a good choice on the basis of limited information. What I'd ask that you do, however, is to look ahead on the syllabus. By reading the background notes that I include for the various readings, you should be able to get an idea of what issues and authors lie down the road. If something sparks your interest that we haven't come to yet in class, that's perfectly fine. You'll just be ahead of the game when we actually get to that subject or author later on. Your only real constraint in the actual topic you choose for your term paper is that it has to be connected in some way with authors or issues we study in this class. That cuts the field pretty widely.

Here are some very general suggestions about arriving at a topic: The Greek poet Archilochus penned a famous statement which reads, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Namely, you can *either* explore (with cunning!) several different ideas to assess their relationship, *or* you can burrow deeply into one of them. Those are your basic choices when writing a term paper.

*For the former*, you might try to put two authors or positions into conversation. Out of that conversation should come a perspective on the material that is (a) new, and (b) uniquely your own. I should be able to hear your voice in this paper as one who stands above a disagreement and arbitrates who is ultimately right about the side she or he is taking on it; or as one who brings together previously unacquainted perspectives and helpfully introduces what they have in common. To generate a foxy paper, you might pay attention to footnotes or endnotes in the readings we'll do, since those also might give you some interesting leads on issues or authors to pursue that are related to those of the text(s) we're reading at the time.



*For the latter choice*, you get to explore one big thing by presenting it in a new way, shining a light on less obvious corners where interesting things are hiding, or exposing a criticism that was latent in a text. To descend to hedgehogginess, you might find other texts by the same author or examine other sections of readings that are assigned for this class to dig more deeply into one person. Or you might attempt a critical treatment of



one of the major issues we'll discuss in this class and provide nuances and extended explanations that time won't allow us to get into in class.

***Prospectus:*** You'll first have to submit a prospectus to me about your project choice by October 5<sup>th</sup>. This prospectus (worth 10% of your final grade) will include the title of your paper, the thesis you wish to defend (that is, what answer will your paper give to whatever *problem* or *question* on which you're working?), reasons why you think that problem or question is important enough to write about for an entire semester, a summary of how you plan to support or give evidence for your thesis, and an initial bibliography. You will find a form for your prospectus on the course website which you will download and fill in, and this is what you will turn in to me. You will also find on the website a grading rubric for the prospectus.

***Draft:*** Next, you'll need to submit a 5-6 page summary draft (worth 10% of the final grade) of what you will be showing in the longer paper. I'll be reading and commenting on both the prospectus and the draft, and so we'll be working together along the way so that you can turn in your best work at the end. I'll also be willing to read and comment upon drafts of the final paper before the due date. A grading rubric for the draft is available on the course website.

#### Course Texts

The following texts are available for purchase in the bookstore. They are listed in the order in which they will be assigned:

- ➔ Alban McCoy, OFM Conv,—*An Intelligent Person's Guide to Christian Ethics*
- ➔ Herbert McCabe, OP—*The Good Life: Ethics and the Pursuit of Happiness*
- ➔ Anne Patrick, SNJM—*Liberating Conscience: Feminist Explorations in Catholic Moral Theology*
- ➔ Paul J. Wadell—*Friendship and the Moral Life*

The last two books are also on reserve in the library. You will find a link to another reading, *Deus Caritas Est* by Pope Benedict XVI, on the course website. You are expected to print that reading out for class.

We will also make use of a plethora of xeroxed handouts which I will distribute in class. If you ever want to read ahead, or if you ever miss picking

up a reading, a copy of all of the handouts is on electronic reserve through Blackboard (which you can access through the course website—see below). Once you click on the course website link to “Blackboard Reserve Articles,” and log into Blackboard with your Saint Mary’s username and password, just click on “Course Documents” on the left and go to the date for which the reading is assigned.)

## Course Website

<http://www.saintmarys.edu/~incandel/TE.html>

You need to type this address *exactly* as shown—note that “TE” is in all capitals. You’ll find all of the following through the course website:

- ➔ Online Course Texts
  - Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*
  - Course Syllabus (PDF)
  - Blackboard Reserve Articles
  
- ➔ E-Mail & Contact Info
  - E-Mail the Class
  - Instructor’s Home Page
  - Instructor’s Office Hours
  - Self-Assessment Form for Discussion (email form)
  - Course Blog
  - Instructions to the Course Blog
  - Course Wiki
  
- ➔ Term Paper links
  - Form for submitting your Prospectus (WORD .doc)
  - Rubric for your Prospectus
  - Rubric for the Draft of your Term Paper
  - Rubric for your Term Paper final submission
  - Citation Information, with direct links to Chicago and MLA fomats

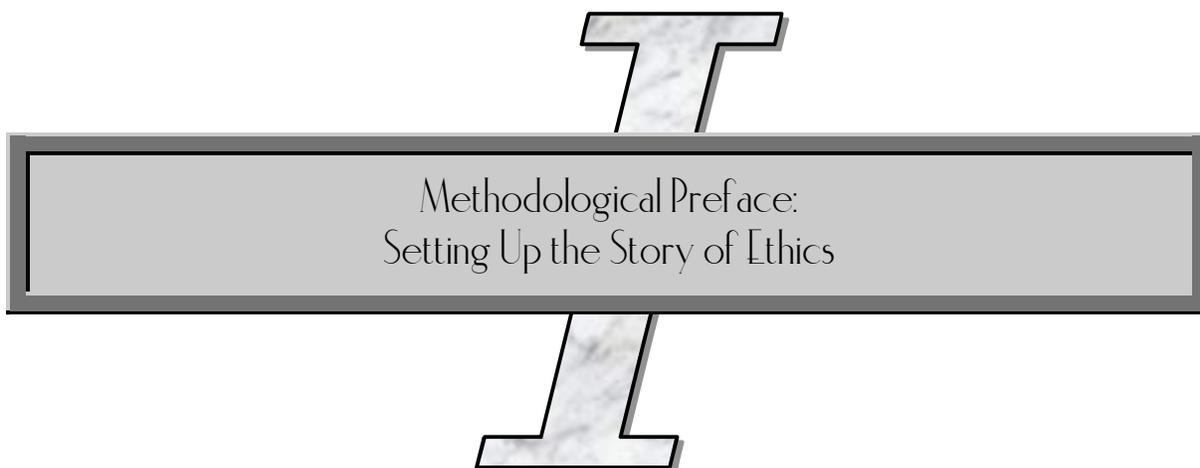
## Academic Honesty

You are responsible for knowing and adhering to the College's standards of academic honesty. Any documented cases of plagiarism will receive an automatic F for the assignment. *Please do not miss the irony of cheating in an ethics class!*

## Course Outline

**Aug 28**

**Syllabus and Introduction to the Course**



**Aug 30 \***

**What is Ethics?**

- ❖ Alban McCoy, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Christian Ethics*, pp. 1-7, 11-33, 54-77

Reading Background: As the chapter headings in these readings suggest, these pages will provide a very basic introduction to what morality is and how it can be studied. They'll also speak to the role of religion in morality. McCoy tries to show how moral judgments are like other forms of judgments in some ways, but also unique in others. Think in particular about how morality relates to human identity and to who we are as persons. Consider, in relation to this, what it would mean to be completely outside of morality (amoralism) or to surrender any notion of objectivity (subjectivism or ethical relativism) in relation to morality.

**Reminder:**

**By today's class, visit the Course Wiki and contribute your ideas to the criteria for our discussions. When you log in, the password is "Belles."**

**Sept 4 \*****[ethics and Post-Modernism]**

- ❖ Hugo Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, pp. 17-59, 187-210  
[handout]
- ❖ Alban McCoy, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Christian Ethics*, pp. 81-95

Reading Background: It's very important as we get going in this class to understand the philosophical background against which modern Christian ethics has been done. Just as one cannot do physics or chemistry without knowing the math behind it, so too one cannot do theological ethics without understanding both history and philosophy. You should already see connections between what we spoke about last class and what you'll read for today. Your first basic goal for today's reading is to try to get clear on the distinction between premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism. The latter term is probably one you have heard in other classes, since the postmodern turn affects all disciplines in one way or another. Hugo Groothuis, as the title of the book from which these chapters are taken, is very concerned about how truth as a category has decayed; and much of today's reading is his attempt to chart the negative consequences of the loss of a notion of truth. Chapter 8, "Ethics Without Reality, Postmodernist Style," is where he really gets to his concerns for the main subject matter of our course. He'll be discussing in some detail the writings of contemporary philosophers Michael Foucault (1926-1984) and Richard Rorty (1931-2007). Groothuis analyzes their writings with an eye to their effect on thought about morality. The McCoy chapter on Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) gives you background on the central philosopher of the Enlightenment ("the beachhead of modernism" in Groothuis's words). Try to figure out what about Kant's method makes him so symbolic of modernism. He's someone who, two hundred years after his death, remains absolutely crucial to understanding contemporary ethics.

**Sept 6 \*****All You Need is Love?**

- ❖ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, pp. 69-86, 95-99, 114-133
- ❖ Alban McCoy, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Christian Ethics*, pp. 96-106
- ❖ Herbert McCabe, "Ethics as Love" (only pp. 1-23)

Reading Background: Joseph Fletcher was an Episcopalian priest who died in 1991. His statement of Christian consequentialism remains the classic contemporary presentation of this position. So much of modern theological ethics goes back to it in one way or another. With the help of McCoy's chapter on utilitarianism (which was largely another project of the Enlightenment) try to understand the "New Morality" that Fletcher proposes and why he thinks we need a new one. In these chapters, Fletcher is elaborating on what love is and how it functions in his ethics. He says love 'use[s] its head,' joins forces with John Stuart Mill, and comes closest to the ethics of Jesus. Fr. McCabe will be very critical of Fletcher's perspective. He draws an analogy between the rules of morality and the rules of art. Going 'against the rules' in art might be a mark of greatness. Maybe the same is true in morality? At the same time, McCabe is trying to guard assiduously against love becoming hopelessly vague or "completely vacuous" even if love itself is a word that is constantly changing and developing. This is the essence of his critique against Fletcher. I want you to read only up to the top of p. 23 for today. We'll continue with the rest of this essay on Tuesday.

**Sept 11 \*****Rules and Moral Absolutes (and do they ever change?)**

- ❖ Fr. John Kavanaugh, "Torturous Thoughts" [handout]
- ❖ John Perry, *Torture: Religious Ethics and National Security*, pp. 46-50, 52-58 [handout]
- ❖ Herbert McCabe, "Ethics as Love" (only pp. 23-33) [handout]

Reading Background: This is the other side of the issue opened up by Fletcher's situation ethics. Fr. Kavanaugh will argue that there simply are things one could *never* morally do, no matter what the consequences. He gives torture as an example of this. The actual example is less relevant than the point he's making with it about what morality really means. So: are there moral absolutes? And if so, can they ever change? The other two readings for today pick up on these questions. John Perry recounts some of the Catholic Church's teachings over the years about whether torture is ever morally permissible. Fr. Herbert McCabe picks up on issues we saw him raise last time about love and whether there just are some things that love can *never* mean (call those 'moral absolutes'). On the matter of whether and how our understanding of ethics changes, he will speak specifically about ethical revolutions. The crucial statement here is on p. 24: "It is one thing to say that love may in a new situation make demands which could not be anticipated within our system of rules, and quite another to say that love is something separate from such rules." McCabe says the former, Fletcher the latter.

### **Sept 13**

#### **Term Paper Research Help Session**

Class will meet in the Library today (1st Floor by the Reference Desk).

### **Sept 18 \***

#### **Lessons from the Morally Abominable**

- ❖ Jeffrey Stout, "Moral Abominations" [handout]
- ❖ Timothy Renick: "A Cabbit in Sheep's Clothing: Exploring the Sources of Our Moral Disquiet About Cloning" [handout]

Reading Background: Today you get to read about such pleasantries as cannibalism, bestiality, and necrophilia. Think about doing these readings *after* you eat. Stout will explain the category of the morally abominable and why we *feel* differently about acts like cannibalism than we feel about even very serious and hateful acts such as murder. Why do we regard certain acts as

morally abominable? That is, why do some possibilities fill us with revulsion? Stout will then draw out some implications for ethical theory and return to some of the history we've covered so far to explain "why the notion of abomination came to be neglected in ethical theory." Kant will be "the great transitional figure" here as elsewhere. If you understand the history Stout is narrating here, you'll be in good position to understand some significant ideas coming up in the course, particularly from figures like Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. Renick's essay will very much echo Stout's, though he will apply Stout's ideas to the topic of cloning. Again, the actual issue is less important than the way they are considered. You could probably get by today just reading Stout. I assigned Renick because his essay is pretty funny in parts (and when you're talking about cannibalism, bestiality, and necrophilia, that's a sign of a real talent). Ultimately, I want you to take what both of these writers are saying about the morally abominable and think back to someone like Fletcher and his account of morality. It seems as though Stout and Renick are, in their own way, pointing out some real deficiencies in thinking about morality either as doing the most loving thing or as following universal rules.

## Sept 20 \*

### The Virtues

- ❖ Herbert McCabe, *The Good Life*, pp. 3-14, 79-94
- ❖ Alban McCoy, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Christian Ethics*, pp. 107-113

Reading Background: The McCoy reading provides background on a very ancient way to understand the moral life that focuses not on accumulating good consequences or following moral absolutes that tell us what to *do*. Rather, the virtues don't really tell us what to *do* as much as they tell us what to *be*. This is really suggesting a paradigm shift *away from* thinking about ethics as moral dilemmas (see the Pincoffs essay for three classes from now) *to* thinking about ethics as helping one to build and inhabit a good moral character within a good life as a whole. This was a fundamental concern of Aristotle. So Herbert McCabe's book *The Good Life*, takes "the tradition of Aristotle" as its orienting

focus. Moreover, the life of virtue requires training and an education of a particular sort. This is why the community (viz., the context in which that education occurs) is important for Aristotle and for any who follow his lead. In “Virtue and Truth,” McCabe talks about playing a game well, and says that there’s a place within an ethics of virtue for absolute prohibitions just as there’s a place in football for a referee’s whistle.

**Sept 25 \***

**Religious Ethics**

- ❖ Herbert McCabe, *The Good Life*, pp. 15-57

Reading Background: Here McCabe gets into an extended discussion of community and its importance for the moral life. He also comes up with this example based upon ice skating, and from there he manages to bring God in to ethics.

**Sept 27 \***

**Human Freedom**

- ❖ Fr. Herbert McCabe, *The Good Life*, pp. 58-78
- ❖ Alban McCoy, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Christian Ethics*, pp. 34-53

Reading Background: Unless we are free, there really is no sense in which we could talk about ethics, much less be ethical beings. That is, it makes no sense to talk about being praised or blamed for any particular activity if there’s a legitimate sense in which we couldn’t have done anything *other* than that particular activity. McCoy first takes up determinism and tries to show how it’s self-contradictory. In the next chapter, he raises questions about what freedom actually means. Ultimately, he wants to say that freedom is a *capacity*. McCabe, building on the previous day’s readings, shows how being free means being part of a story; and the kind of freedom that’s important in *theological* ethics is the freedom to be part of *God’s* story. This will set up some important concepts in the next section of the course.



**Oct 2 \***

**The Problem with Ethics-as-Moral-Dilemmas**

- ❖ Edmund Pincoffs, “Quandary Ethics” [handout]
- ❖ Stanley Hauerwas, “Schooling the Heart in the Heart of Texas” (Section 2: “Why Ethics Malforms the Heart”) [handout]

Reading Background: In this very famous essay, Pincoffs lays out why he thinks it’s wrong for ethics to concentrate on moral dilemmas (or *quandaries*). He argues that quandarists (that is, those who view ethics as primarily about difficult cases and knotty dilemmas) overlook some important things. Some of Pincoffs’s points should seem somewhat familiar to you, because we have been scaffolding them in the first part of the course. This will also be your first exposure to Stanley Hauerwas of Duke University, who has been called “the most prolific and influential theologian now working in the United States.” You’ll be reading quite a bit of him in this course, and this brief excerpt will be your first taste. In this reading, he describes what he terms “the standard course in ethics” and says of such a course, “it would be better that [it] not be taught.” Ultimately, this criticism goes back to Enlightenment standards of ahistorical neutrality, and to the resulting “fragmentary and compartmentalized character of modern life.”

**Oct 4 \*****The Importance of Narrative in *After Virtue***

- ❖ Alasdair MacIntyre, Selections from *After Virtue* (“A Disquieting Suggestion,” “The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today,” and “Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality Had to Fail”) [handout]
- ❖ Dennis Hollinger, “Alasdair MacIntyre” from *Choosing the Good* [handout]
- ❖ Paul Nelson, “Virtue and Narrative: A Philosophical Proposal” [handout]
- ❖ Joe Incandela, “Fragmentation of the Frontal Lobe: Trying to Make Sense of MacIntyre” [handout]

Reading Background: *After Virtue*, by Alasdair MacIntyre (now at Notre Dame), is widely considered one of the most important books on ethics written in the last thirty years for renewing interest in the moral virtues. The excerpt I’ve assigned will be a bit more difficult than some of our other readings. The brief readings from Hollinger and Nelson intended only as background on MacIntyre (The material by Hollinger will give you some background on MacIntyre as well as Hauerwas. These two are together because MacIntyre has had a profound influence on Hauerwas on issues relating to virtue and narrative.) You might also be helped by the outline I drew up on these readings. You should probably look at all of these before taking on MacIntyre directly. MacIntyre believes that modern moral philosophy is essentially bankrupt and that modern moral disagreements are incommensurable and hence, irresolvable on their own terms. Therefore, he will try to rehabilitate the tradition of the virtues (following Aristotle, but also Aquinas). Attention to virtue will lead to attention to practices and then to narrative or story. One of the key things in the MacIntyre reading is his description of an action. If the most basic description of an action is a narrative, then that means something about how we come to understand *anything*, including ethics itself. Thus he says, Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions.”

**Reminder:** **The prospectus for your term paper is due by noon today, Monday, October 8 <sup>th</sup> at my office (147 Madeleva) by noon.**

**Oct 9 \***

### **Ethics and Skills**

- ❖ Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Recovery of Moral Agency?”  
[handout]

Reading Background: This reading follows up many of the themes you saw last time in *After Virtue*, and especially the notion of a practice. MacIntyre will begin by laying out two different kinds of moral statements which are in some important ways mirror images of each other. Ultimately, MacIntyre thinks that both of these peculiarly modern kinds of moral utterance have problems that can be explained by the kind of history he narrated in the reading from last time. This history made it more difficult to think of morality as a kind of training and discipline. MacIntyre presents some contemporary examples of just this sort of training and discipline: being in the marines and being a tuna fisherman. He will then use these examples to draw some conclusions about the study and practice of ethics.

**Oct 11 \***

### **The Narrative of Scripture (Part I)**

- ❖ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture”  
[handout]

Reading Background: This is somewhat of a dense essay, and so we’ll spend two days on it. It really gets to the heart of many of the issues that are central to Hauerwas’s theology and his theological ethics. It will also pick up on the importance we’ve recently seen of narrative and the role of community (recall that Hauerwas has been substantially influenced by MacIntyre). Hauerwas will develop very carefully what he means (and doesn’t mean) by the moral authority of Scripture.

**Oct 16 \*****The Narrative of Scripture (Part I)**

- ❖ Stanley Hauerwas, “Story and Theology” [handout]
- ❖ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture” (continued) [handout]

Reading Background: In the new reading for today, Hauerwas explains the difference between a story and a theory. He wants to say that *we* are stories and that the self is best construed as a story. This point then leads him to theology (literally: God-talk). He then introduces the concept of a “true” story and describes what it means for a story to be true (Douglas Groothuis would be proud!). This in turn leads him to the importance of the saints for learning and living out the Christian story.

**Oct 18 \*****Christian Ethics and the Church**

- ❖ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Church as God’s New Language” [handout]

Reading Background: The community where Scripture is read and which is charged with passing on the Christian story and the skills needed to read and live it well is called the Church. This essay by Hauerwas begins, interestingly enough, with a sermon on Pentecost. For Hauerwas, Pentecost reversed Babel. Common understanding (Acts 2:1-21) replaced a confusion of languages. In this way, the Christian Church becomes “God’s New Language” for and in the world.



**Oct 30 \*****Discipleship**

- ❖ Stanley Hauerwas, “Carving Stone or Learning to Speak Christian” [handout]
- ❖ Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Christian Contrarian” [handout]

Reading Background: Hauerwas used to be a bricklayer (the Elshtain piece is a popular introduction to his life and thought written in 2001 when *Time* Magazine named him “Theologian of the Year”) In this essay, Hauerwas begins with an extended meditation about a trade related to brick laying: stone carving. He tells you more about becoming a stone carver than you probably want to know, but he does all this for a point that’s related to understanding what it means to be a *disciple*. For example, just as stone carvers have their own language, so do Christians. This leads him to the importance of prayer and liturgy.

**Nov 1 \*****Sin**

- ❖ Stanley Hauerwas, “Narrative as a Reality-Making Claim” & “On Learning to Be a Sinner” (from *The Peaceable Kingdom*) [handout]
- ❖ Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Relevance of an Impossible Ethical Ideal” [handout]
- ❖ Stanley Hauerwas, “Salvation Even in Sin? Learning to Speak Truthfully about Ourselves” [handout]

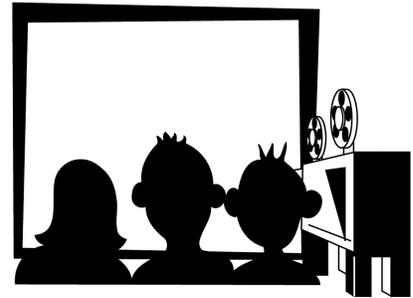
Reading Background: In these essays, Hauerwas is arguing that the narrative character of our knowledge of God is a “reality-making claim.” For this reason, Christians have to *learn* to be sinners. This is distinguished from the view of human finitude in Reinhold Niebuhr’s writings, which present sin as a universal human condition. Niebuhr (1892-1971) was an American theologian and perhaps the most well known Christian ethicist of the middle part of the twentieth century. Hauerwas will be very critical of Niebuhr here because Niebuhr’s categories don’t presuppose the acquisition of particular skills that allow a particular story to be told truthfully.

**Nov 6****The Hauerwas Film Festival**

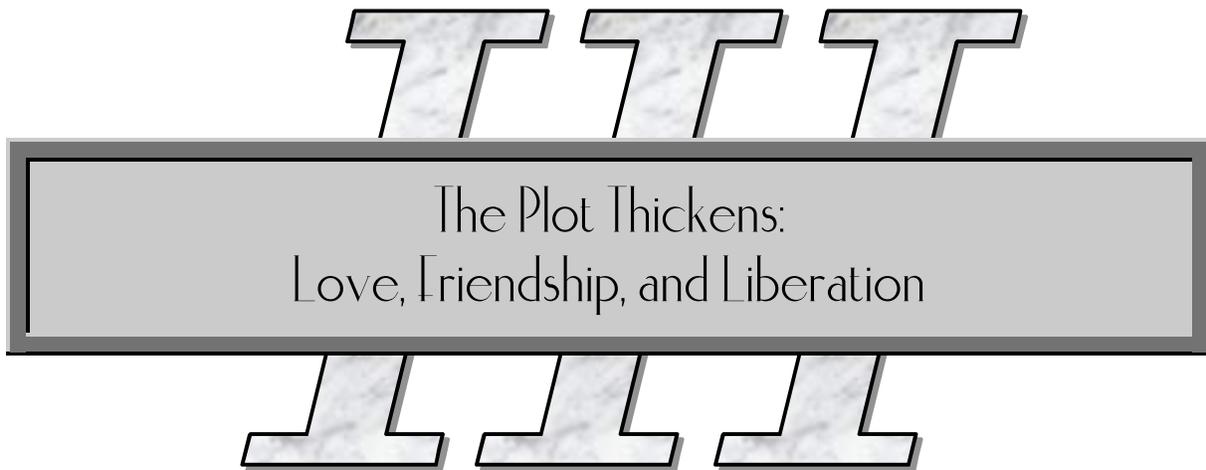
Hauerwas Lecture on DVD: “A Narratable World: Theological Implications of Story”

- ❖ Hauerwas & Wells, “God’s Advocates,” pp. 175-193
- ❖ Jeffrey Stout, “Not of This World” [handout]

Reading Background: This is the class you’ve all been waiting for. Bring your munchies and bring your earplugs. It’s the Stanley Hauerwas film festival! Actually, it’s just a DVD of a lecture Hauerwas gave in 2003 at Seattle Pacific University. Lots of familiar themes will come in here, and you should be able to understand how they assemble in his theology. I included a reading which contains an interview with Hauerwas that you might find interesting. I also wanted you to read Jeffrey Stout’s criticism of Hauerwas, and think about it as you watch this lecture. Basically, Stout worries that Hauerwas’s rather sharp distinction between the Church and the world encourages Christians to marginalize themselves and abdicate their responsibility as citizens of a democracy. There’s also a very good summary in Stout of the development of Hauerwas’s writing over the years.



**Reminder:** *The 5-6 page draft of your term paper is due at the class in which we watch this DVD.*



**Nov 8 \***

**The Christian Story in a Different Voice**

- ❖ Anne Patrick, *Liberating Conscience*, pp. 1-17, 72-101

Reading Background: Chapter 1 of Sr. Anne's book begins by speaking about moral conscience's *social* dimension in the context of a discussion of contemporary Catholic moral theology. As you'll see, she calls for a "profound conversion, a shift of attention, a turning from certain questions and preoccupations to new topics and new ways of regarding old ones." In chapter 3, "Changing Paradigms of Virtue: The Good Life Reconsidered," she brings in Stanley Hauerwas and narrative. But the question I think Patrick's feminist perspective adds to Hauerwas is whether it matters who's telling the story or who controls the narrative. You'll see her asking quite deliberately in that chapter whether a commitment to egalitarianism between the sexes affects what one thinks is virtuous. She uses that point to ask about contemporary debates within Catholicism.

**Nov 13 \***

**Love and the Theology of the Body**

- ❖ Christopher West, "What is the Theology of the Body?" and "Christian Marriage: Imaging Christ's Union with the Church" (from *Theology of the Body for Beginners*)  
[handout]

Reading Background: The Theology of the Body is one of Pope John Paul II's lasting theological contributions to Catholic theology. It is a rich way of understanding both God's love and human sexuality. The latter comes out most clearly in West's chapter on marriage. I thought it would be interesting to read this material *after* reading Anne Patrick's own discussion about the moral import of gender and *before* reading Pope Benedict's encyclical on love.

**Nov 15 \***

### God is Love (Part I)

- ❖ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §§1-18: Part I—"The Unity of Love in Creation and in Salvation History" [ONLINE]

Reading Background: Many said that Benedict wrote his first encyclical about the love of God in the context of an age in which many view religion as a source of violence and ignorance and where some claim divine sanction for what looks to the rest of us like hurtful, hateful acts. This extended statement on God as love became in the eyes of many a badly needed corrective theological vision of the divine, and in some ways a kind of 'back-to-basics' presentation of the Christian faith. A recurring theme of this encyclical is meditation on the pierced side of Christ (John 19:34-37). Indeed, Benedict calls this "the starting-point of this Encyclical letter" (§12). In the first part of the encyclical, Benedict contrasts *eros* and *agape*. (Briefly put, *eros*, whence we get 'erotic,' is a love that is satisfied by possession, by taking, by having; whereas *agape* is a love satisfied by giving.) Many have previously commented about the difference between erotic love and agapeic love, and indeed from my brief description of them in the previous sentence, they seem pretty opposed. But Benedict ultimately wants to heal that division; and he sees their ultimate reconciliation in the blood of Christ poured forth for us from the cross. This same love is available to us today through the Eucharist (§13). In the Eucharist, as in the crucifixion, love of God is united with love of neighbor.

**Nov 20 \*****God is Love (Part II)**

- ❖ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §§19-42: Part II—“Caritas, the Practice of Love by the Church as a ‘Community of Love’” [\[ONLINE\]](#)

Reading Background: In this second part of the encyclical, Benedict draws out the implications of God’s love for how human beings should live. He also considers the role of the Church in the world in light of this. If in the previous part of *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict sought to show that there is no ultimate distinction between *eros* and *agape*; in this second part, he seeks to show that there’s no ultimate distinction between love and justice. They need each other to be what each truly is. Even in a perfectly just society, love would still be needed (§28). In §39, the pope returns to “the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross.” The conclusion of the encyclical discusses Mary (§41) and the saints (§42) as significant exemplars of the love Benedict has been discussing all along.

**GRATEFULIVING****Nov 27 \*****Mary and Liberation**

- ❖ Ivone Gebara and Mary Clara Bingemer, “Mary and God’s Wonders Among the Poor” [\[handout\]](#)
- ❖ Anne Patrick, *Liberating Conscience*, (pp. 170-199, 226-229)

Reading Background: The ending of *Deus Caritas Est* speaks of Mary as “a woman who loves” and adds, “She is lowly” (§41). Mary is a source of “motherly kindness” and “virginal purity and grace” (§42). As you’ll see, Gebara and Bingemer have a rather different take from Benedict on the person after whom your college and the university across the street are named. Gebara

is a Brazilian Sister of Our Lady and writes about Mary from within a context where liberation theology has a strong following. Mary's words in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) have a particular meaning for those working for justice and an end to oppression. That leads to Anne Patrick's chapter on justice and to a final note on Sr. Ivone and Vatican disciplinary action against her (pp. 226-229).

**Nov 29 \***

### Can Christians have Friends?

- ❖ Gilbert Meilaender, "Friendship as Preferential Love" and "Friendship as a Reciprocal Love"

*Reading Background:* It might seem like a very strange question to ask whether Christians can have friends. But it's the burden of Gilbert Meilaender's writings for today to argue that there may indeed be a tension between the universal, nonreciprocal nature of Christian love and the preferential, reciprocal nature of friendship. One of the most fascinating parts of this reading is Meilaender's discussion of St. Augustine's views of God's role in human friendships.

**Dec 4 \***

### The Function of Friendship

- ❖ Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, pp. ix-xviii, 1-69 (Forward, Preface, and Chapters 1-3)

*Reading Background:* Paul Wadell was a student of Stanley Hauerwas, and you will definitely see the impact of Hauerwas on Wadell (and vice versa: see Hauerwas's preface). This allows us both to pick up on the theme of friendship as well as bring the course to a close by looking at this topic in a context faithful to previous material we've studied. Wadell thinks that a new model for the moral life is needed and suggests that the moral life is somehow not complete or full if considered in isolation from those closest to us. Even stronger than this, Wadell largely follows Aristotle and argues that we need our friends to be good. Part of this case goes back to MacIntyre's view that the world is in moral disarray. It also has echoes of Anne Patrick's view that moral conscience has a social dimension.

**Dec 6 \*****Friendship as a Form of *Christian Love***

- ❖ Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, pp. 120-148, 166-167 (Chapter 5 & part of Chapter 6)

Reading Background: Wadell appeals to St. Thomas Aquinas here to ask whether friendship with *God* is possible. How do the three marks of friendship (which ultimately come from Aristotle) fare when the friend in question is God? Wadell says that such a friendship may be our only hope for true and lasting happiness. What Wadell has been defending all along is the claim, as he puts it on the first page of chapter 6, that “The moral life is what happens to us in relationship with others.” If that’s true, it establishes a fuller, more robust view of the moral life than anything seen with Fletcher or Kant; because part of what it means is that who we are is in part constituted by the person others have loved us into being. That’s why the question of whether friendship with God is possible has immense theological significance.

**Dec 11****The End of the Story**

**Reminder:** **Your term paper is due on Monday, December 17<sup>th</sup>. You should submit your paper at my office (147 Madeleva) by 3:00 on that day.**



- ❖ Do you have any regular evening obligations (class or work) during this semester? If so, which days and times?
  
- ❖ Have you ever studied ethics before? If so, where and how?
  
- ❖ *Unless this is a requirement for you, why did you select this particular course? How do you see it relating to past or upcoming studies?*
  
- ❖ What do you hope to get out of "Theological Ethics"? More specifically, fill in the blank: "I'll consider this course a big success if \_\_\_\_\_."
  
- ❖ Is there anything else that you think I should know about you or your background that would help me teach you better in this class? Also, it might help me in my teaching if I had a sense of the way in which you learn best. Any ideas or help on this one?
  
- ❖ Do you have any other questions/comments/concerns about this course or its content? I'll get back to you as soon as possible either in person or via e-mail.

