

1-1-2003

CS 654 Morality at the End of Modernity

James R. Thobaben

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MORALITY AT THE END OF MODERNITY
CS 654
Fall 2003

Asbury Theological Seminary

MONDAY 6:15 – 9:00 pm Room to be determined

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Office Hours: T, W, Th 1:30 - 3:30 & by appointment

PURPOSE:

The course examines different perspectives on the meaning of “modern” and the implications for the culture by analyzing fictional portrayals of society, especially utopias and dystopias. The moral implications of various conceptualizations of freedom, free-will, personal identity, etc. are considered in light of changing technologies and forms of social organization. Special emphasis is placed on the implications for Christian social ethics by examining Christian and non-Christian authors.

Students will develop methods for understanding narratives as moral presentations in both fiction and “real life.” Students will examine how stories reinforce or challenge social views. Students will consider how stories impact the understanding of Christianity in the broader society and how Christians can tell the Gospel story in light of significant social change. The course will provide students with knowledge of literature commonly used among non-Christians as a means of framing moral conversation. The course will model another means for Christian ministries to present moral issues and ethical analysis in congregations.

OBJECTIVES:

- To introduce students to tools of cultural analysis;
- To introduce students to content analysis and related literature techniques of sociology;
- To help students consider how literature is an argument with unstated assumptions and intended moral conclusions;
- To familiarize students with literature used in secular discussions of secular social ethics (in particular in medical ethics, political ethics, & technology ethics);
- To introduce students to Christian responses to non-Christian understandings of social order;
- To help students develop ways of responding to non-Christian responses to social (especially technological and organizational) change;
- To provide students with a different way of teaching/preaching.

TEXTS:

See Schedule.

WRITTEN WORK:

- ALL: One hour examination on materials covered in class (Assigned time for finals week)
- OPTION 1: One 5 – 10 page work of fiction (or a ‘fictionalized’ incident) that portrays cultural and interpretive complexity of the late 20th century (DUE November 16, 2003); *AND*, One 10 – 15 page social analysis of your earlier work of fiction. The fictional piece can be revised for the final analysis (DUE December 8, 2003).
- OPTION 2: One 20 - 25 page paper on issue of social ethics covered in course (the paper should include research on topic and how it appears in literature) (DUE December 8, 2003).

Analyses should use cultural, social, and theological tools (psychological, if appropriate).

EVALUATION:

Option 1:	20%	Work of Fiction
	50%	Analysis
Option 2:	70%	Analysis
Examination:	30%	
Class Participation:		Deduction if lacking
Reading:		Deduction if lacking

All paper are to be typed with one inch margins (top, sides, bottom) using 12 point print.

There will be a penalty for late papers commensurate with the degree of lateness and the adequacy of the excuse.

All written work must use inclusive language when reference is made to human beings (male and female). This provides for both greater inclusion and greater precision. For more information on this topic see ‘Suggestions for Using Inclusive Language’, available in the Dean of Student’s Office. Exceptions may be made for the fictional piece if the theme warrants such.

Class participation will be evaluated on the basis of attendance and participation in full class discussions.

Grade Range: Work for CS 740 will be evaluated at a graduate/professional school level.

Grade Range: Work for CS 601 will be evaluated at a graduate/professional school level.

A	=	Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objective
A-	=	
B+	=	
B	=	Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives
B-	=	
C+	=	
C	=	Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives
C-	=	
D+	=	
D	=	Marginal work: inadequate, minimal achievement of course objectives
D-	=	
F	=	Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives

<u>Week 1</u>	<i>Introduction & Basic Concepts in Ethics</i> The use of “story” as a moral tool in the Scripture and in literature	
<u>Week 2</u>	<i>Pre-Modern Use of Literature in Times of Social Change</i> <u>Beowulf</u>	ALL
<u>Week 3</u>	<i>Having An Ideal: Early Modern Images</i> More, Thomas <u>Utopia</u> OR Bunyan, John <u>A Pilgrim’s Progress</u>	PICK
<u>Week 4</u>	<i>Enlightenment & Romanticism as Purity & Cynicism</i> Voltaire, <u>Candide</u> OR Shelley, Mary <u>Frankenstein</u>	PICK
<u>Week 5</u>	<i>The Modern Use of Untethered Power</i> Sinclair, Upton <u>The Jungle</u> OR Orwell, George <u>Animal Farm</u>	PICK
<u>Week 6</u>	<i>The Optimistic Moral Anthropology of Modernity</i> Orwell, George <u>Nineteen Eighty-four</u> OR Golding, William <u>Lord of the Flies</u>	PICK
<u>Week 7</u>	<i>The Modern Denial of Sin & the Reality of Evil</i> Stevenson, R.L. <u>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</u> OR Conrad, J. <u>The Heart of Darkness</u> OR Bradbury, Ray <u>Something Wicked This Way Comes</u>	PICK
<u>Week 8</u>	<i>Who Counts: Identity & “Usefulness”</i> Capek, Karel <u>R.U.R.</u> OR Huxley, Aldous <u>Brave New World</u>	PICK
<u>Week 9</u>	<i>(cont.)</i> Kafka, Franz “Metamorphosis” OR Steinbeck, John <u>Of Mice & Men</u>	PICK
<u>Week 10</u>	<i>Who Counts: Identity & Ethnicity</i> Baldwin, James <u>Go Tell It on the Mountain</u> Speare, Elizabeth George <u>The Witch of Blackbird Pond</u>	ALL OPTIONAL
<u>Week 11</u>	<i>The Modern Avoidance of Death</i> MacDonald, G. “Gifts of the Child Christ” OR Tolstoy, L. <u>The Death of Ivan Ilych</u>	PICK
<u>Week 12</u>	<i>Challenges to Modernity</i> Abbott, Edwin A. <u>Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions</u> OR Dostoyevski, Fyodor <u>Notes From Underground</u> OR Lewis, C.S. <u>The Great Divorce</u>	PICK
<u>Week 13</u>	<i>Is the Modern World Past (what is “post-modernity”)?</i> Miller, Walter <u>A Canticle for Leibowitz</u>	ALL

ALL = everyone in class is to read this work.

PICK = students may select one of the readings for so designated for that week

Fiction reading is much easier (for the most part) than non-fiction philosophical and theological writing and you may flow rather quickly through the pieces, but do try to read the works with an analytical mind.

Please pick books you have not read previously.