



**BRISBANE COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY  
UNIT OUTLINE**

**MASTER OF THEOLOGY  
MASTER OF MINISTRY**

UNIT TITLE	THE CRITICISM OF HEAVEN: ECONOMICS, POLITICS, ETHICS
UNIT CODE	C74051
UNIT STATUS	Elective
HOST FIELD	C
PREREQUISITE/S	-
INCOMPATIBLES	-
CREDIT POINTS	10cp
REQUIREMENTS	Attendance at week-long intensive (30 hours in attendance) plus 7 hours per week of study over the 13 week semester. The intensive will consist of 24 hours of lecturing, 3 hours reading and three hours of seminar presentations. A series of post-intensive seminars will be organised in consultation with the students.
FREQUENCY OF OFFERING	Odd years
PREPARED BY	Scott Stephens
UNIT COORDINATOR	Rev Dr Geoff Thompson
TEACHING STAFF	Scott Stephens
DATE PREPARED	14 September 2006

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**Rationale**

At the beginning of the 21st century, Western society is confronted by a form of ethical paralysis: the process of moral decision making has been reduced to a matter of conscience or private belief over against the all-powerful political and scientific machinery that envelopes life and death itself. This sense of powerlessness has, in turn, produced two complementary forms of public response: on the one hand, ethics committees entrusted with the task of determining the moral value of a particular issue are proliferating; on the other hand, more and more people are returning the safe-houses of moral fundamentalism. Effectively, both responses enable people to preserve a vague sense of morality while alleviating the need for ethical agency. In the latter instance, we also find the clearest example of the supplementary role played by religion, or 'belief' generally, in late-capitalism. Against these trends, this unit will be guided by following propositions:

- a) that a theological challenge to our current situation must match the situation in its scope (it cannot simply be a fragmentary set of critiques or 'minority reports') and address the situation at its foundation;

- b) that properly *theological* ethics is grounded in the disruption of the natural order by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and therefore resists both ancient and contemporary appeals to natural law;
- c) that theological ethics must articulate itself in terms of Christian subjectivity or ethical agency as a response to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ;
- d) that our current situation must be thought of systematically – not holistically – and against the inescapable horizon of economics;
- e) that one of the objects of theological intervention today must be the supplementary role played by ‘religion’ in capitalism, the way that ‘belief’ sustains our economic and political debauchery – as Marx put it, ‘The criticism of earth begins with the criticism of heaven’.

**Relation to the Program**

This unit contributes to the postgraduate program by broadening students’ exposure to the distinctive contribution of the Western philosophical tradition to the present task of theological ethics, and by deepening their knowledge of the way that many of the distinctive concepts of Cartesian philosophy assist us in thinking our current situation in late-capitalism. It therefore enhances students’ understanding of the background of modern theology and ability to engage meaningfully with contemporary discourses.

**Aims**

This unit aims to mark out the methodology and content of theological ethics, defined both historically and in specific relation to the unique logic of this current situation. It thus aims to equip students with the conceptual tools necessary to think and act ‘Christianly’ in our time.

<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	
At the end of this unit the students should be able to:	
1.	Identify those theological and philosophical concepts that constitute the substance of ethics.
2.	Analyse the vital interaction between the underlying economic drives and the varieties of belief within late-capitalism
3.	Evaluate those responses to our contemporary situation that simply reinforce its political and economic assumptions, and those that call into question such assumptions.
4.	Formulate coherent analyses of, and positions on, two of the principal ethical issues of our time, including a demonstration of the ability to relate ethics back to their conception of what is distinct in and of Christian theology.

**Content**

- 1 Theology and Economics
  - Lecture 1 Vanity of Vanities  
*Qoheleth as the first Economist*
  - Lecture 2 Theological Subtleties, Metaphysical Niceties  
*On the Philosophy of Money*
  - Lecture 3 Serving God and Mammon  
*What Marcion Can Tell Us About Economics*
- 2 Theology and Politics
  - Lecture 4 Jesus is Lord  
*Christology between Jerusalem and Rome*
  - Lecture 5 Leviathan  
*On the Theology of State*
  - Lecture 6 Revolution without Resentment  
*Karl Barth reads Lenin*

- 3 Theology and the Ethics of Life and Death
- Lecture 7 Flesh versus Spirit  
*A Fresh Take on an Aristotelian Problem*
- Lecture 8 The Stuff of Me  
*Subjectivity between the Soul and the Genome*
- Lecture 9 Sex Cells:  
*On Love and Nature*
- Lecture 10 Regime of Change?  
*War and the Question of Agency*

### Organisation and Teaching Strategies

This intensive will consist of 10 sessions over 5 days. There will be a mixture of lectures, seminars and guided discussion. To facilitate student familiarity with the relevant texts in such a short time, portions of sessions will also be dedicated to reading and reflection.

### Assessment

The forms of assessment for this unit have been chosen in order to maximize the student's learning experience and to achieve the above outcomes.

	Type of assessment	No of words	Weighting %	Due date	Learning Outcomes covered
1	A book review of one of the most substantial contributions to modern ethics. A list of appropriate titles, both theological and non-theological, will be provided, ranging from, for example, Oliver O'Donovan's <i>Resurrection and Moral Order</i> , Jean Porter's <i>Natural and Divine Law</i> , Peter Singer's <i>How Are We To Live?</i> and Alasdair McIntyre's <i>After Virtue</i> . The review should focus on the distinctive contribution of the particular book to contemporary ethics.	1500	25%	20 April 2007	1 & 3
2	Major essay which tests the student's ability to negotiate the interrelations between Christian theology and ethical inquiry.	4000	50%	1 June 2007	2 & 5
3	Brief engagement	750	25%	16 Feb 2007	4
	Brief engagement	750		16 March 2007	4

### Texts

#### a) Required

A compilation of readings (available from the College) comprised both of primary philosophical/theological texts, and more recent ethical interventions.

#### b) Recommended

Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* London: Verso, 2001.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd ed, 1984.

John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* New York: Routledge, 2003.

## Academic and General References

### a) Books

- Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956-75.
- Nigel Biggar, *Aiming to Kill: The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia* London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005.
- Dietrich Bonhöffer, *Act and Being* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.
- Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* London: Penguin, 2005.
- Jeffrey D. Frieden, *Global Capitalism: Its Fall and Rise in the Twenty-first Century* New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.
- Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Philip Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety* New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* London: Penguin, 2004.
- Stanley Hauerwas and C. Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.
- David A. Jones, *The Soul of the Embryo: An Enquiry into the Status of the Human Embryo in the Christian Tradition* London: Continuum, 2005.
- Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* Cambridge: MIT, 2004.
- Wayne A Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- John Milbank, Creston Davis and Slavoj Žižek, eds, *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* Leicester: Apollos, 2nd ed, 1994.
- Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985.
- Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* New York: Routledge, 2nd ed, 1990.
- Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- John B Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

### b) Articles

- AD Baker, "Theology and the Crisis in Darwinism," *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 183-215.
- N Ferguson, "Economics, Religion and the Decline of Europe," *Economic Affairs* (December 2004): 37-40.
- FR Jameson, "Morality versus Ethical Substance; or, Aristotelian Marxism in Alasdair MacIntyre," in *The Ideologies of Theory* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, 181-85.
- JD Loike and MD Tandler, "Revisiting the Definition of *Homo Sapiens*," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 12 (2002): 343-50.
- CM Messikomer, RC Fox, and JP Swazey, "The Presence and Influence of Religion in American Bioethics," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 44 (2001): 485-508.
- D Novak, "Karl Barth on Divine Command: A Jewish Response," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 463-83.
- J Porter, "What the Wise Person Knows: Natural Law and Virtue in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 12 (1999): 57-69.
- JB Schneewind, "Kant and Natural Law Ethics," *Ethics* 104 (1993): 53-74.
- P Singer, "Ethics and Sociobiology," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11 (1982): 40-64.
- J Zizioulas "On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood," in *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. C. Schwöbel and C.E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 33-46.
- L Zoloth, "Jordan's Banks: A View from the First Years of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research," *American Journal of Bioethics* 2 (2002): 3-11.
- \_\_\_\_\_ "Reasonable Magic and the Nature of Alchemy: Jewish Reflections on Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 12 (2002): 65-93.