

## Ethics and Agency of Children and Youth

Dr. Kate Ott

Sem Hall 214

Thursday 1:15-3:45

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Ethical questions relating to moral agency, theological anthropology, and community obligation will be re-evaluated from the perspective of children and youth. Christian ethics has most often focused on adult subjects, thus missing critical insights about moral character and action. Similar to adults, children and youth engage current moral issues including the use of technology, poverty, consumerism, sexuality, racism, and so on. This course asks how children exercise moral agency and grow in their moral capacity, as well as, how adults help or hinder child/youth development as they become capable, well-informed, and confident moral agents. While the course resources are multidisciplinary, the core methodologies and questions are situated in Christian social ethics.

### Learning Objectives

During the course, the student will:

1. Examine the biblical and theological influences on writings about children.
2. Study a range of theories on moral/ethical development.
3. Understand the thought of major, contemporary scholars of childhood studies and religion.
4. Explore current socio-political issues related to children and ethics from a critically engaged theological perspective.

### Learning Outcomes

Through assignments and class participation, students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Compare and assess biblical and theological claims related to personhood and agency of children and youth in the Christian tradition.
2. Identify various theories of moral development operating in academic essays as well as popular/traditional children's literature.
3. Present an ethical argument on children's and/or youth's moral agency that considers notions of personhood, rights, and community.
4. Articulate how issues of race, sexuality, economics, etc. interact with moral development and ethical choice in children and youth.

\*Reflective of overall degree program learning outcomes listed under <http://www.drew.edu/theological/academics>.

### Required Texts

- John Wall, Ethics in Light of Childhood, Georgetown University Press (2010), ISBN-13: 978-1589016927
- Mercer, Joyce, Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood, Chalice Press (2005), ISBN-13: 978-0827242517
- Bunge, Marcia J, Ed., The Child in Christian Thought, Eerdmans (2001), ISBN-13: 978-0802846938
- Ott, Kate, Sex + Faith: Talking with your Child from Birth to Adolescence (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013) 978-0664237998

- Flory, Richard, Korie Edwards, Brad Christerson, Growing Up in America: The Power of Race in the Lives of Teens, (Stanford University Press, 2010), ISBN-13: 978-0804760522

\*Students will also be required to read two selections from children/youth literature from diverse age groups including early reader, elementary level chapter book or teen novels.

### **Attendance and Deadline Policy**

Active and responsible participation in class discussions is an essential component of this course. You may miss one class in the semester with no grade penalty. Two missed classes (excused or not) will affect your grade. If you miss 3 or more classes you must drop the class.

Complete assigned reading and written work on time. If you cannot meet course deadlines, you may request an extension before the due date. If that deadline is not met or you do not renegotiate the due date, your assignment will not be accepted. No extensions will be given on the day an assignment is due. If assignment feedback indicates that you need assistance with writing, we will discuss resources for writing assistance before submitting subsequent assignments.

### **Class Policies**

Electronics: All electronic devices must be turned off during class. With one exception, laptop computers can be used to take notes. I expect all students to put their laptops away when asked, for the benefit of discussions. I reserve the right to ask any student to put a laptop away without explanation.

Snow policy: If class is officially cancelled because of the Seminary closing due to snow, you are expected to check your email for an alternate assignment to be completed by the following class period.

Break: Due to the length of the class period, a break will be taken during the second hour. Please do not leave the building grounds during this break.

### **Seminary Policies**

See Seminary Policies in your handbook regarding:

Academic Integrity - <http://www.drew.edu/theological/academics/policies-regulations/academic-integrity>

Inclusive Language - <https://uknow.drew.edu/confluence/display/Handbook/Inclusive+Language>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities -

"Academic Accommodations: Should you require academic accommodations, you must file a request with the Office of Disability Services (BC 119, extension 3327). It is your responsibility to self-identify with the Office of Disability Services and to provide faculty with the appropriate documentation from that office at least one week prior to any request for specific course accommodations. There are no retroactive accommodations." <http://www.drew.edu/academicservices/disabilityservices>

### **Grading Rubrics**

Grading for this course will be the average of all of the requirements and expectations weighted by their percentage noted below. The grading system is:

Excellent (A -,+) = outstanding to exemplary work, that demonstrates a command and clarity of argument. Excels beyond learning outcomes.

Good (B, -,+) = good to very good work, that demonstrates understanding and grasp of issues presented and evaluated. Exceeds learning outcomes.

Satisfactory (C, -,+) = accurate and acceptable work, that demonstrates completion of the assignment(s) without any additional effort. Meets learning outcomes.

Poor (D, -,+) = scant and generally insufficient work, in addition to tardiness in attendance and/or assignments. Meets over half of learning outcomes.

Failure (F) = inadequate work and participation, not meeting course requirements or learning outcomes.

**Course Requirements/Expectations**

Participation	10%
Wiki Chapter Summary	10%
Blogs	40%
Final Project	40%

## Course Calendar

### Introduction to Ethics and Children in the U.S. - February 6

#### Readings

- Edelman, The State of America's Children - read Overview and Key Facts (at beginning of doc and each section), browse the other sections.
- Wall, Ethics in Light of Childhood, Section I

### FEB 20 Ethical Foundations - February 13

#### Readings

- Cristina L.H. Traina, "Children and Moral Agency" in the Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics Vol. 29 no. 2 (2009), 19-37. [Download from ATLA via the Drew Electronic Library Journals]
- Wall, Ethics in Light of Childhood, Section II
- Bloom, "The Moral Life of Babies," NYTimes Magazine article and podcast. Listen to first half 0:00-34:00 minutes.

### FEB27 Children and Congregations - February 20

#### Readings

- Mercer, Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood , Preface, 1, 2, 4

*DUE MARCH 3 \*\*Wiki Project Submission Due on Moodle Monday February 24, noon.*

### MARCH 6 Biblical and Historical Views on children - February 27

#### Readings

- Bunge, The Child in Christian Thought, Intro, Class round robin read, Everyone submits a synopsis of their chapter to the forum and prepares a 5 minute presentation. This will take two class periods to complete. You should read the entire text so that you can be conversant with other students presentations.

#### SPRING BREAK

### MARCH 20 (Con't) Biblical and Historical Views on Children - March 6

### MARCH 27 Family Context - March 20

#### Readings

- Wall, Ethics in Light of Childhood, Section III, Chapter 6
- Mercer, Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood , 5
- Flory, Richard, et al, Growing Up in America: The Power of Race in the Lives of Teens, Chap 2

**APRIL 3          Gender and Sexuality - March 27**

Readings

- Ott, Kate Faith + Sex: Talking with Your Child from Birth to Adolescence (entire text, it's a quick read)
- Reid, Kathryn Goering. Ken Hawkey, Children together : teaching girls and boys to value themselves and each other [POSTED, Excerpts]

**APRIL 10          Racism and Whiteness - April 3**

Readings

- Flory, Richard, et al, Growing Up in America: The Power of Race in the Lives of Teens, Full Text
- Debra Van Ausdale and Joe R. Feagin, The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism [POSTED, Excerpts ONLY READ CHAP 1]
- Ott, Kate "I-ing An/other Subject: Redefining Moral Agency for Children in a Postcolonial Context" submitted for publication in Journal of Childhood and Religion

*DUE APRIL 24 \*\*Blog submissions due to Moodle Forum, April 10*

EASTER BREAK

**APRIL 24          Human Rights and Political Economies - April 10**

Readings

- Wall, Ethics in Light of Childhood, Section III, Chapter 5
- Mercer, Welcoming Children, Chapter 3
- Lift Every Voice: The Humanizing Work of Children's Testimony in Response to the Effects of Parental Incarceration, by Derek Elkins, Journal of Childhood and Religion, Volume 3, Issue 1 (August 2012)
- Theologies of Childhood and the Children of War, by Mark Douglas Journal of Childhood and Religion, Volume 3, Issue 2 (September 2012)

**MAY 1              Dealing with Difference - -April 24**

Readings

- Watch Podcast on bullying and Student produced video by 8th graders.
- Attending to Children, Attending to God: Children with ADHD and Christian Spirituality, by Joyce Ann Mercer Journal of Childhood and Religion, Volume 2, Issue 7 (November 2011)

**MAY 8              Theologies for Tomorrow - May 1**

Readings

- Wall, Ethics in Light of Childhood, Chap 7
- Mercer, Welcoming Children, Chap 7

*\*\*Final project materials and analysis due May 8.*

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS DESCRIPTIONS

### The Child in Christian Thought

Due Date: Upload to Moodle on February 27 to class forum

Each student will pick a chapter of the assigned round-robin reading and provide the class with a summary of the chapter via the Moodle forum page. Entries are to include relevant information about the major thinker's

1. Context (e.g. relevant influences on thought)
2. Notion of child/childhood (e.g. potentiality, irrational, corrupted, innocent)
3. Theological and Ethical commitments
4. Responsibility of parents, church and state
5. Insights for contemporary ethics and children

Postings are to be written in full sentences and provide citations where appropriate.

Presentations will be 5-10 minutes and are to highlight your research, not read your synopsis.

### Blogs

Length – about 1000 words

Due by – April 10 (can be posted prior to due date)

How to – Add your blog post to the Moodle “forum” listed in the upper most topic box for our class page. \*\*Please review Mary Hunt's post on “Falling off a Blog” a how-to blog for academics.

**Two blogs** must be posted that provide a theo-ethical analysis of socio-cultural issues facing youth. For one, you must engage children/youth literature (story books, novels, etc.) and for the other take a current event news story that relates to “children/youth.”

For each blog post, you need to:

- clearly naming the moral issue/decision-making that is the focus of the example;
- address how children/youth are depicted
- discuss how the issue reflects points from course readings.

### Final Projects

There are three final project formats:

#### **Worship (group project with individual papers)**

Worship will take place on TBD and the group will work directly with Tanya Bennett to develop the communion service. The service will be open to all Drew community children. The group will submit all the worship materials in hardcopy format (hymns, prayers, sermon, communion liturgy, etc). As individuals, the group members will also submit paper that identifies how the worship content and design reflect theo-ethical issues raised over the course of the semester related to children and youth. The paper is due May 8. It should be a 5-7 pages in length, double spaced, 12 pt font, and contain Chicago style citation.

#### **Religious Education Lesson Plan (group projects with individual papers)**

The lesson plan can be organized for a Sunday School class, youth meeting, or retreat setting. Drawing upon insights from the course lectures, readings, presentations, and outside resources, members of the

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group will work together to develop a 90-minute teaching/learning experience. The lesson must address a current social issue and develop an ethical response in light of children's moral agency and development. The group will submit one lesson plan with all accompanying materials and directions. Individual group members will submit a 5-7 page paper, double spaced, 12 pt font, with Chicago style citation, that identifies how the content and design of the educational plan reflect theo-ethical issues raised over the course of the semester related to children and youth. The paper is due May 8.

### **Journal Article**

\*Note: PhD students in the course must complete this assignment for the final project.

The journal article is to be just that – an article one could submit for publication in a current peer reviewed journal. The article should focus on an ethical argument that deals with issues related to social ethics and is in conversation with authors read throughout the course. Students need to submit a proposed article topic description **by April 3**. The final article should be 5000-6500 words in length with a 150 word abstract. It is to be 12 pt font, double spaced, and use Chicago style citation. The full article is due May 8.