

Dolores Christie, *Moral Choice: A Christian View of Ethics* (Fortress Press, 2013)

Suggestions for Instructors

General comments:

This book can be used for several audiences: 1) as a text among others in an introductory course, particularly in a Catholic context, to add the morals component; 2) in an advanced morals course; 3) in a graduate course for either moral theology or pastoral ministry. Certainly the instructor can tailor the content and add whatever is needed.

While the book is frankly from a Catholic perspective, the insights are broader. That renders the book a valuable asset in courses beyond a Catholic context. These suggestions below are meant to help instructors organize their course and establish outcomes to help guide students' study of ethics and to help instructors in assessing student comprehension and mastery of the material.

Objectives by chapter:

Chapter 1:

To become aware of his or her moral identity and its sources

To realize the influence of moral identity and personal experience in how personal moral decisions are made

To appreciate the relevance and influence of community to preserve, pass on, and test narratives and values

Tips: the instructor should avoid accepting a variety of positions on moral issues as a set of equally valid positions. Truth and value are *objective* categories. While relativism and individual insights enter in, students should be helped to see morality as objective not totally subjective or relativistic.

Chapter 2:

To examine the Christian message as rooted essentially in relationship and community

To connect the key elements of Christian teaching to universally-held values

Tips: the chapter is not meant to suggest that a warm and fuzzy relationship with Jesus is all that is needed for moral action. It does try to suggest one important starting point for morality

Chapter 3:

To become acquainted with philosophical methodologies as tools of process not content

To understand the various approaches to natural law, as used in Catholic morals

Tips: it is important to emphasize that philosophy is *not* sufficient to articulate values.

There is a chart on deontology and teleology available for use on the Fortress Press resource page.

Chapter 4:

- To identify and articulate additional sources for moral decision making
- To distinguish the various types of law
- To focus thinking, so often fuzzy in American discourse, about law
- To explore challenges from modern science that appear to undermine the existence of moral responsibility

Tips: it is essential to see objections to moral responsibility (it's my hormones; it's my culture) as *impediments* that hinder clear moral thinking rather than as excuses to abdicate moral responsibility.

Chapter 5:

- To understand fully the reality of the human person, as seen through the lens of a positive Catholic anthropology
- To grasp the human person adequately considered as an adequate norm against which to judge behavior
- To understand this norm as objective but flexible, that is it is applicable to past and future insights about the good

Tips: it is imperative that the human person as norm is *not* an endorsement of whatever-is-good-for me morality. The norm, properly understood, emphasizes that moral choice of the individual must look beyond individuality to personhood. Persons are essentially connected beings. Their moral choice must consider the impact of that choice on self, others, the world, and the human terminus in God. To make connections to the function of community in the process would be helpful.

Chapter 6:

- To explore conscience as identity, growth and development, and concrete decision making
- To understand knowledge and freedom as key faculties in decision making.
- To consider an approach to original sin that differs from traditional models
- To see Baptism as more than a magic moment: a commitment both personal and communal to the belief that God overcomes the evil that affects humanity

Tips: the instructor may want to expand the discussion of knowledge and freedom. Knowledge is comprised of both the content of the bottom section of the iceberg (which the person has before the concrete event of choice) and the morally-relevant facts that pertain to the decision at hand. Freedom includes both an essential human characteristic (see *Man's Search for Meaning*) and the concrete freedom at the time of a moral event.

Chapter 7:

- To learn a workable format for decision making
- To deepen the understanding of the format with a case study

Tips: the instructor may wish to use the cases in the Appendix to have students "practice" the steps

Chapter 8:

- To explore briefly some contemporary issues of decision making
- To articulate in general the stances that Catholic teaching has taken on these issues
- To learn some theological approaches on these issues
- To open frank discussion on the issues treated in the chapter

Tips: the instructor may elect to use chapter 8 in an extended exploration of these and other issues. Some suggestions: group (3-4 students each) projects for class presentation on an issue. I suggest that these projects have three components: 1) a meeting between the group and the instructor well before the presentations to assure that the sources are rigorous, the method of presentation is pedagogically sound, and the group is prepared and will not waste class time; 2) the actual presentations--one per class is usually good, as it leaves time for adequate exposition and student discussion; 3) follow up by the instructor at the end of each presentation. This allows--at the end of the presentation itself and/or at the start of the next class--the instructor to clear up any errors, to introduce material that the student presentation omitted, to add sources or ideas to expand what has been presented. Further resources for seeing multiple sides of a given issue are available. One good source is Shannon and Patricia Jung's 2013 edition of *Moral Issues and Christian Responses* (Fortress Press).

Some suggestions for class activities:

In an undergraduate course I usually give three tests during a semester. The purpose of the tests is not only to check the understanding of content (in objective or objective essay format) learned but to allow students to interact (essay) with some of the ideas. Sometimes, at the end of a semester, I pose cases for students to discuss and solve using what they have learned. These can be done with student pairs during the final exam time. The pair discusses the case in conjunction with the content they have learned and come to a conclusion as to how to solve the case. One grade is given to each pair, based on the demonstration of what they have learned and applied.

An alternative to the group presentations (described above), the class could discuss cases as a whole. The two sides of an issue could be brought out. Of course there are multiple resources for this kind of discussion. (Again, the Jung book would be a helpful starting place for students.)

Another assignment possible asks individual students to choose one of the following options for a term paper. It is a good idea for the instructor to request an optional first draft (give due date), which will receive comments but not a grade. Setting clear guidelines for every aspect of the assignment is essential. The annotated draft must be turned in with the final paper.

a. Use a work of fiction (see appendix or clear an optional work through instructor) to demonstrate what has been learned in the course. Some papers I have received: A tracing of the growth in freedom of conscience in *The Handmaid's Tale*; a feminist critique of *The Secret Life of Bees*; an illustration of conscience in the various characters in the movie, *Flatliners*. Some further possibilities for focus are given in the appendix. I try to be somewhat vague as to how to approach a given work, as students sometimes have much better ideas than my preconceived notions of how a particular work can demonstrate what is learned.

2. For ministry classes, analyze a church document in terms of its use of scripture, worldview, and moral method. Compare these aspects of the document to what has been the content of the class.

3. For graduate students, take the elements of the course and discuss in practical and concrete ways how you would present them in a class or use them in ministerial work.

4. Analyze in detail, using what has been learned (maybe the "Steps") one of the cases in the appendix. Use additional scholarly resources to support your analysis.