BETWEEN CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND RELIGIOUS ETHICS

How Should Graduate Students Be Trained?[1]

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ABSTRACT

By focusing on questions concerning what kind of training graduate students in theology and ethics and religious ethics should receive, I try to initiate a conversation we need to have about the kind of work the **JRE** should foster.

KEY WORDS: *theology*, *religion*, *religious ethics*, *the Niebuhrs*, *Stout*

I AM HONORED TO BE ASKED by the Editors of the **JRE** to be a Contributing Editor. I have mixed emotions, however, about their request that each of the Contributing Editors should write an essay in which we should "propose directions for research in religious ethics." I have never made up my mind whether I think religious ethics is a good idea. I obviously have never thought of myself as a "religious ethicist." Indeed I am sure some of my colleagues in the Society of Christian Ethics have wondered whether I am even a Christian ethicist. At least as far as my own views of the matter might matter, I prefer to think that if I am anything I am a Christian theologian. To so designate myself, however, is problematic because many Christian theologians do not think the kind of work I do should count as theology. I am not complaining but simply stating the facts.

Even though I do not understand myself to be a religious ethicist, I hope I have been supportive of the **JRE**. I have been so, moreover, even as the **JRE** has increasingly moved in what might be characterized as a religious studies direction. By a "religious studies" direction, I mean the essays in the **JRE** are increasingly written by and for people who think the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* sets the standard for work in "the field." I am not making this observation in a critical vein,

[1]It will quickly become apparent throughout this essay that I am not at all sure what it means to talk about religious ethics as a field or discipline. However, we have to call "it" something so I suppose the "field of religious ethics" is not all that bad.

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but rather am indicating the direction the **JRE** has taken or at least has wanted to take.[2] Moreover if I am right, it means that the **JRE** has done what it was meant to do, that is, encourage the development of a type of scholarship that simply did not exist when the **JRE** was founded. I am for interesting work and, on the whole, the **JRE** has published many serious and compelling essays including some I have written. Of course I leave it to readers whether they think any of the essays I published in the **JRE** were serious or compelling.

I do not want to be misunderstood. My problems with the attempt to develop religious ethics have never been that I think it unimportant to know about other traditions. I have, however, worried that a phrase like "know about" is not sufficient to understand the practices of another tradition. Moreover I am not completely against the attempt to do comparative religious ethics, but I am predisposed to doubt there exists any standpoint that makes such comparisons unproblematic. I worry that the attempt to develop a "method" for the study of "other religions" can and usually does reproduce MacIntyre's depiction of the cosmopolitan self (MacIntyre, 1988, 395–399), that is, the self that believes "in its ability to understand everything from human culture and history, no matter how apparently alien" it may be (MacIntyre, 1988, 385). I believe, moreover, that MacIntyre is right that the arrogance that shapes such selves is but a correlative of the economic arrangements of modernity that levels difference.

I hope my attempt, and even more important the attempts of some of my students, to learn from as well as reason with Jews makes clear that

[2] In their Editors' Note in the most recent issue of the **JRE**, John Kelsay and Sumner B. Twiss describe the contents of the issue noting, "The essays by Darlene Weaver, Geoffrey Rees, and Daniel Malotky continue the journal's tradition of publishing work in Christian theological ethics in addition to other areas of religious ethics." A perfectly innocent descriptive sentence, but one that exposes the peculiar political history of the **JRE**. The background of those who founded the journal was largely Christian and the readership of the journal was largely Christian. Those founding the journal wisely, I believe, decided they did not want to make the journal the journal for the Society of Christian Ethics. I suspect, however, that most of the early readers as well as the majority of the readers today are members of the Society of Christian Ethics. Such readers look forward to reading articles like the ones that Kelsay and Twiss point to in their Editors' Note. But the crucial question is whether the "journal's tradition" of publishing these kind of articles can be sustained while trying to create or capture readers who are on the whole not that interested in, for example, Reinhold Niebuhr. No good journal should be judged by how many actually read the journal from cover to cover. More important is the quality of readers the journal attracts. But I do worry whether the **JRE** has attracted such readers, because it is my impression that often articles in the **JRE** are not widely or closely read. The **JRE** has certainly become one of the journals of record for those seeking tenure. So it is very important for young people to have articles published in the **JRE**, but I worry that many articles so published do not have the impact they should have.

I think it is of utmost importance for Christians to have our convictions challenged by those who have suffered from Christian persecution but with whom we also seem to share some fundamental judgements about the way things are (Bader-Saye, 1999; Ewell-Velloso, 2003). Not only is the kind of work Peter Ochs has fostered through the Society for Scriptural Reasoning promising, but I believe it's the way forward. What I find so innovative about the work of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning is the actual engagement with texts rather than trying to compare ideas, e.g., the unproductive debates that contrast Jewish "monotheism" against Christian trinitarian thought. That some Muslims find it worthwhile to be part of an effort to test our readings in relation to one another strikes me as extremely hopeful.

My problem with religious ethics—which I assume is a subset of religious studies—is not the admirable attempts to understand other religious traditions different from those with which one may be more familiar or to foster exchange between significant religious traditions. Rather, what has worried me about the creation of a field to be called "religious ethics" is how such a field seems to produce the assumption that something called "religion" exists. In his *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (2000), Timothy Fitzgerald has made the kind of argument I have long thought needed to be made about attempts to create a nonproblematic account of religion in order to try to provide legitimacy for the academic study of religion. Fitzgerald's book will be read by some as "overstated," but I think he is essentially correct to suggest that the creation of "religion is really the basis of a modern form of theology, which I will call liberal ecumenical theology, but some attempt has been made to disguise this fact by claiming that religion is a natural and/or a supernatural reality in the nature of things that all human individuals have a capacity for, regardless of their cultural context" (Fitzgerald, 2000, 4–5).[3]

It is important to note that Fitzgerald does not deny that quite good scholarship has been done by scholars that understand themselves to be

[3] I think Fitzgerald is also right to call the development of the understanding of religion as a separate realm an ideology that masks its legitimating political and economic function. The process by which individuals, markets, and nations assume the appearance of "natural realities" was the necessary and problematic process legitimated by "the articulation of religion as a domain of ultimate values distinct and separated from secular institutions and activities, guaranteed under law as freedom of worship yet having some problematic relationship to the secular" (Fitzgerald, 2000, 29). The articles on "Religion and Empire," particularly the article by Horsley (2003, 13–44), in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2003) are important contributions for further explorations of the ideological work the description "religion" can do. I think it is a sign of the growing maturity of "religious studies" that the articles in this issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* are so searching.

scholars of religion. Moreover such work is often done in religious studies departments. Fitzgerald seems to think such work would probably best be done in anthropology or cultural studies, but I see no reason to draw that implication. It may be faint praise, but I see no reason that religious studies departments as well as the scholarship done in those departments are in any way less coherent than English departments or the work that is done in the name of English. This, of course, means on the whole I think many departments in the modern university lack strong intellectual rationale but I do not think that makes their existence questionable. What matters is that the work done in such departments is significant and important for the overall work of the university.[4]

It may be objected that my concern about "religion" fails to notice that the "religious" in the title of the *Journal of Religious Ethics* or in the description "Department of Religious Studies" is an adjective and not a noun. I do think the adjective makes a difference particularly in the title of the journal but less so when considering departments of religion or religious studies.[5] Indeed I have always thought one of the wisest discussions of these matter is in Jim McClendon's and James Smith's *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*. There they quite rightly note they have no quarrel with however someone might like to use the words "religion" or "religious," as long as it is remembered that the use should not invite

[4] Of course, part of the problem is we are increasingly unclear what the work of the university might be—which means any attempt to provide an account of the purposes of religious studies and/or theology in the modern university is made more difficult by the lack of clarity about what universities ought to be about. I have found Dennis O'Brien's reflections on where we are today in university cultures to be particularly informative. See his *All the Essential Half-Truths about Higher Education* (1998).

[5] I think Jeff Stout's candid account of the development of the Department of Religion at Princeton in his very important article "Commitments and Traditions in the Study of Religious Ethics" (1998, 23–56) is extremely important for helping us understand the way forward. Stout observes "The rubric of *religious ethics* took its meaning from the reconfiguration of religious studies undertaken in that period. . . . For those of us working in secular colleges and universities, the **JRE** served, above all, as reassuring proof that rigorous ethical inquiry could have a place within the religion curriculum taking shape on our campuses—a place where Christian theological materials might still receive close and extensive attention, but not one where they essentially constituted the terrain itself" (26–27). Accordingly the development of the Department of Religion at Princeton rightly did not assume that constructive work in Christian, Jewish, or other religious traditions needed to be excluded from the work of the department on grounds that such work was not "objective." Of course, as Stout makes clear, Paul Ramsey was not exactly someone ready to be relegated to the sideline because some might think his work too "confessional." Yet I think the Princeton Department did not develop as it did because somehow they needed to make allowances for Ramsey, but rather because the philosophical presuppositions shaping the department were pragmatic. There is finally no substitute for people of judgement. Princeton seems to have been graced by such people not the least surely being Vic Preller.

the presumption that these words ascribe some one quality, character, or essence (McClendon and Smith, 1994, 14–15).[6]

Yet McClendon's and Smith's recommendation does not solve the problem, but rather simply shifts the issues associated with the attempt to make religion name a discipline to a different terrain—e.g., "ethics." Ethics is at least as contested a notion as religion. Indeed putting the two together to suggest a "field" only creates more trouble, if you think the description "religious ethics" in and of itself designates a clear research agenda.[7] I would not deny that some useful generalizations may be made about different ways traditions have become articulate about how they understand what it means to live well, but I think little is gained, for example, by trying to show that all ethics must be either deontological or teleological or some mixture of the two.[8]

I am not at all convinced, therefore, that those privileged to live and work in universities will help anyone by trying to defend or criticize this or that understanding of "religious ethics." I think it is a pity, however, that the essays in the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary issue of the **JRE** have not sparked a more fulsome discussion in the *Journal* itself, at the AAR, or at the SCE. How some of the younger people in "the field" negotiate the difference between Gustafson's claim that "religious ethics has never replaced Christian ethics" (Gustafson, 1998, 18), Stout's attractive defense of the normative task of religious ethics to sustain democratic communities (Stout, 1998, 38–53), and my claim that the development of Christian ethics in America has come to an end (Hauerwas, 1998, 57–76)[9] would,

[6] Paul Griffiths offers what I regard as a nonproblematic stipulative understanding of religion in his book, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (2001). Griffiths says he will take a religion "to be a form of life that seems to those who inhabit it to be comprehensive, incapable of abandonment, and of central importance" (7). Griffith's stipulative description of religion seems quite close to McClendon's and Smith's understanding of "conviction sets" (91–101).

[7] Stout (1998) observes "the moment that *religious ethics* replaced *Christian Ethics* as a curricular rubric, we ethicists became responsible, in principle, for inquiring into ethical discourse in all the religious traditions, most of which we knew nothing about" (36). I do not think such an inquiry a "bad thing" but I do not see why the description "religious ethics" necessarily requires that the ethicist look at all religious traditions. I cannot imagine such an ambition to be possible. I am also not as clear as Stout seems to be in identifying what work "we ethicists" do that would give us such a clear identity.

[8] In a yet unpublished paper Scott Davis makes the interesting suggestion that the typology of law, character, and economics is more analytically illuminating than deontology, teleology, and consequentialism inherited from Frankena. Certainly "economics" nicely suggests the character of much of the work done on "ethics" in our day in a manner that Frankena's typology fails to do. Yet, as I believe Davis would be the first to agree, no typology can ever or should ever replace the work of history.

[9] A longer version of the article "Christian Ethics in America (and the *Journal of Religious Ethics*): A Report on a Book I Will Not Write" is in my book, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (2000, 55–70).

I believe, not only be informative but fascinating.[10] At the very least Stout's fine article makes clear that any defense of the development of the field of religious ethics entails normative claims about the social and political context in which the modern university finds itself.[11]

I am tempted to use the rest of this article to do what I suggest it would be interesting for "younger people" to do, that is, to try to see how the agreements as well as the disagreements between Gustafson, Stout, and myself may help us better understand what it might mean to try to be either a Christian or religious ethicist. But I do not want to tell people what I think they should say. I am quite content to listen and, hopefully, even learn from those who may well think the way I think is now "history." For example Charlie Pinches (2003, 242–243) concludes his laudatory review of Brad Kallenberg's *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* by noting the only problem with Kallenberg's book is Kallenberg "does not think critically enough about Hauerwas' work." Pinches observes that Kallenberg, MacIntyre-like, tentatively suggests that Hauerwas may overcome some Wittgensteinian aporias, but that serves only to refocus attention back to Kallenberg's main project in the book, which is to characterize and explore the relation between Wittgenstein and Hauerwas. Pinches, however, says in his view such a characterization is not needed: "rather we need ourselves to go on—to climb the ladder another rung. Even if he does not himself attempt this, Kallenberg has explained the spirit of Wittgenstein's and Hauerwas' work well—the sort of spirit that should help us go on beyond both" (Pinches, 2003, 243).[12]

I am not sure what it would mean to go "beyond" Wittgenstein, but I certainly have no objection to those that would go beyond Hauerwas. Indeed, I hope that span of time called "my work" has manifested that I

[10] By calling attention to Gustafson's, Stout's, and my articles in the Anniversary Issue of the **JRE**, I do not mean to slight the other contributions to that issue of the **JRE**. I think every article in that issue is worth attention for anyone who wants to try to think about the future of the "field."

[11] The publication of Stout's *Democracy and Tradition* (2004) hopefully will help spur the kind of conversation I believe we need to have. In *Democracy and Tradition* Stout develops at length the criticisms he makes of Milbank, MacIntyre, and myself in his **JRE** article. I have responded to his criticism in the "Postscript: A Response to Jeff Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*" to my book, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (2004). I believe that Stout has written an extremely good and important book that provides for a constructive conversation between those who represent strong religious convictions and those committed to the formation of democratic practices.

[12] In truth I am humbled by Kallenberg's good book. To be compared with Wittgenstein, even a comparison so favorable as Kallenberg's account, cannot help but be embarrassing. Yet Kallenberg's command of Wittgenstein (as well as of my work) makes me hope many will read his book. I suppose I should say for anyone that may not know that Charlie Pinches is one of my former students and more important, a very good friend.

have felt the necessity that I must go beyond where I was.[13] But it is not just a question of going beyond Hauerwas, but rather what those who "go beyond" need to know if there is to exist anything recognizable as a "field." That is why I think the most important question I can raise in my role as a Contributing Editor of the **JRE** is to ask what kind of graduate training do we need to develop if we are to produce people who not only are able to talk with one another, but think it important that they be able to do so? Whether we have or we have not made the transition from Christian ethics to religious ethics, it is still the case that most people who would identify as one or the other can still talk with one another and may even believe they can learn from one another. How are we to account for the fact that we are able to do so? Is it because most people who become religious ethicists were trained in the literatures of Christian ethics? But what happens when, as I have argued, the tradition of Christian ethics no longer is sustained by the institutions that made it seem intellectually intelligible as an ongoing project? Put quite simply do people continue to need to know the work of the Niebuhrs if they are to consider themselves or be considered by others competent practitioners of a field that may bear the description religious ethics?

Bill Werpehowski's recent book, *American Protestant Ethics and the Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr* (2002), is not only a very good book, but one that I think makes very concrete the kind of questions I am raising about what kind of work needs to be done that makes conversation possible. Bill was an undergraduate at Princeton and deeply influenced, as he should have been, by the person and work of Ramsey. Werpehowski did his graduate work also at Yale which means he was also shaped by the so-called Yale school. Yet Bill is also a Roman Catholic so he does not come to his reading of the Protestants as an "insider." I would like to think his book, or books like his, might be required reading for anyone doing graduate work in Christian or religious ethics, but it is by no means clear to me that will be the case. Just as important as whether Bill's book will be widely read, however, is whether those reading the book will have the background knowledge to appreciate his reading of Ramsey, the Niebuhrs, Tanner, or me.

Over the years that I have trained graduate students in theology and ethics I have taught a course called "Christian Ethics in America" in which Rauschenbusch, the Niebuhrs, Ramsey, Gustafson, and Yoder

[13] Some of my current graduate students worry that I have recently begun to write in a far too self-referential mode. Indeed this essay may represent another example of that tendency. For someone as influenced by Iris Murdoch as I have been, I am aware that narcissism is always right around the corner. Of course the only remedy for narcissism is friendship and my life has been graced by many friends including graduate students who worry about my tendency to assume a self-referential mode.

were read.[14] I have often read Catholics such as Murray and Cahill in the course. Sometimes I even try to slip in Martin Luther King Jr. or Dorothy Day in an effort to raise the question why such figures are not considered ethically important for helping us understand what the discipline of ethics should be about. It has been several years since I taught the course. The graduate students who assisted me the last time I taught the course told me I should never teach the course again. In the past they had the course but they were no longer convinced, given the work they now thought needed to be done, that such a course is necessary. To be sure the figures treated in the course probably needed to be on most preliminary exam bibliographies, but they no longer believed you need to know as much as I was taught you needed to know about Reinhold Niebuhr to do the work of theology and ethics.

So I now have students beginning their exams who have not read extensively in the work of H. Richard or Reinhold Niebuhr. I am, moreover, not sure they are at any disadvantage for not knowing the Niebuhrs' work as well as those in my generation thought we needed to know the Niebuhrs. Of course it is not just a matter of knowing the work of the Niebuhrs, but whether the knowing is part of an intellectual agenda. We knew the Niebuhrs well because we thought to do the work of Christian ethics it was not enough to know what the Niebuhrs thought. You had to know how to think with the Niebuhrs. I hope it is obvious that my critiques of how the Niebuhrs taught us to think about Christian ethics have been possible because of how I was taught by them to think.

But do the graduate students I now teach need to travel the same intellectual path my generation traveled in order to do the kind of work they associate with Christian or religious ethics? I think about these matters every year when I have to list my courses for the next year. For example, every other year I teach a graduate seminar in Catholic Moral Theology not only because there are always some Roman Catholic graduate students, but also because so many of the positions for which my Protestant as well as Catholic students apply are in Roman Catholic institutions. But how such a course works to help students think about the kind of constructive work that needs to be done in theology and ethics is not always clear to them or me.[15] I recently, however, taught Catholic

[14] I have long been a declared enemy of the "and" in theology *and* ethics, but I prefer the conjunction as an alternative to Christian ethics. Too often I fear Christian ethics is a term used by some people that want to leave theology behind.

[15] It has been my privilege to teach a number of Roman Catholic students. Some have even become Roman Catholic while they were doing their doctoral work. I certainly hope to continue to attract Catholic students, but I cannot deny that there is a problem with Catholic students studying in Protestant contexts. The problem is more acute when the Catholic student does not come from a Catholic school where they have gained a background in Catholic moral theology. No matter how hard I try to give such students adequate

Moral Theology in the same semester I taught a course on the virtues. Students who were in both seminars began to see how questions in moral psychology were of central importance in both courses; or put differently, they begin to appreciate why all wisdom begins with Aristotle.

I think it important that the kind of work important for graduate students happens not only in graduate seminars. Having the opportunity to teach the core course in Christian Ethics in the Divinity School at Duke has been one of the most intellectually fruitful courses not only for me but I hope also for the graduate students that assist me in the course. Indeed I find the course the most important resource I have for helping me do the kind of constructive theological work I think so necessary for those of us determined to remain Christian theologians. The soon to be published *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (2003), edited by Sam Wells and me, is organized around the liturgy. It is so organized because of what I learned by teaching Christian Ethics in the core course. I hope the book will be interesting not only for Christians but for anyone interested in exploring how material practices can and should shape lives.

I continue to think that anyone who would pretend to work in ethics in the "West" (a description I profoundly dislike but I know of no good alternative) needs to know what I can only call fundamental benchmarks.[16] Everyone needs to know Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, and Barth. I have often taught graduate seminars in which we read Aristotle and Aquinas one semester and Kant and Barth the next. One of my favorite preliminary exam questions (though I no longer use it) is: Comment on the claim that Aquinas is to Aristotle as Kant is to Barth. From my

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training in Catholic theology and ethics they may not be recognized by Catholics as moral theologians after they finish their Ph.D. I think, however, that developments in Catholic moral theology may tend to mitigate this problem. For example a book like Livio Melina's *Sharing in Christ's Virtues* (2001) is a hopeful sign that Protestants and Catholics are beginning to use what we learn from one another for our constructive work. I should also say that I am quite proud of the dissertations written by my Catholic students that I think are clearly identifiable as work in Catholic theology and ethics.

[16] Departments of Philosophy seem to me to be one of the most coherent disciplines in the modern university. All I mean by "coherent" is that no matter how specialized philosophers may become, they can still talk to one another. There may be a number of explanations for their ability to do so, but I suspect the reason they are able to have some understanding of what they are each doing is because they all have read at one time or another Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Descartes, and Kant. So they always share something in common. That seems to me the good news about Departments of Philosophy. The bad news is too often Departments of Philosophy have become so professionalized they are no longer able to attract undergraduate majors. To major in philosophy in many of our universities must seem to some undergraduates as if they are becoming part of a cult. That might be seen as a very good thing to the extent it harkens back to the ancient practice of learning philosophy through apprenticeship.

perspective this question should expose all the fundamental issues for anyone who wants to be a theologian and ethicist.

However, just as many younger people no longer think it necessary to know the Niebuhrs well, I am sure many who currently claim to be ethicists might think my list of "must read thinkers" to be questionable. But if that is the case, we continue to have the problem of whether we share enough in common to claim that "religious ethics" is a field or, more important, whether we can have a good argument. Please note it is not a question of enriching the tradition by suggesting figures that have been ignored or whose importance has not been seen. For example, I do not particularly like it, but I think Stout's argument on behalf of Emerson's importance for constructive reflection in Christian and non-Christian ethics in America is quite persuasive.[17] Moreover, I assume that theology and ethics names the ongoing argument about who is to be read, and in relation to whom. The very development of Christian ethics was in many ways an attempt to open the theologians' canon.[18] The problem is not arguments about who one is to read, but rather whether there is a tradition of reading that makes questions of who else needs to be read or read differently worthwhile.[19]

Given these challenges, I think much of the work in "applied ethics" has been a distraction from the substantive issues confronting those that

[17] Peter Dula, one of the current graduate students at Duke, has long taken Stout's side on this question. What has finally made me less obstinate about Emerson is Dula is writing his dissertation on the work of Stanley Cavell. So I have learned to read Emerson through the eyes of Cavell. That has to leave a mark on you.

[18] A few years ago I asked a well known moral theologian from England, who had come to a meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics, whether he thought anything was at stake by trying to maintain Christian ethics as a distinct discipline in theology. He replied in the affirmative, noting that Christian ethics is a necessity to force theologians to acknowledge theology is largely a practical discipline. I think that is certainly right, but it means that how Christian ethics is conceived will depend on the forms theology takes at different times. In an "Introduction" to a collection of essays prepared for a conference sponsored by The Project on Lived Theology at the University of Virginia, Charles Marsh observes "as it developed in breadth, detail and complexity, the Project discovered that its task is not necessarily that of transforming theology into a practical discipline but of understanding the diverse ways theological convictions and commitments in their inner logic aspire toward lived expression and to bringing historical and sociological knowledge of communities into this task" (2003, 2). That is one of the best short accounts I have ever read of what I take to be the task of Christian ethics.

[19] The contribution of liberation theologies has been invaluable in this process. They have not only enriched the more formal theological sources, but also helped all of us see how other forms of literature and practices are crucial for the work of ethics. For example I have long thought novels to be particularly important, but I do not find discussions of ethics and literature very helpful. We have to learn to think through literature and the arts rather than to "use" them. I think Fritz Oehlschlaeger's book, *Love and Good Reasons: Postliberal Approaches to Christian Ethics and Literature* (2003), is a model for helping us see how thinking with literature should be done.

would write for the **JRE** or other journals in theology and ethics or as religious ethicists. I am not in any way denigrating the work done in bioethics, business ethics, environmental ethics, or other applied areas. I continue to have problems with the very notion "applied," but my primary difficulty with these fields is they seem more intelligible than in fact they are. They gain their intelligibility from the obvious need people feel for knowing how to deal with challenges before this or that profession. As a result those who work in the various areas do not feel themselves challenged to explore questions about whether the "ethics" they practice makes any sense.

One of the things that makes "applied ethics" so attractive, I believe, is not only that you seem able to actually be of use, but you also have confidence (a confidence I think is an illusion) that you know what you are doing. There is a body of literature you can control. That simply does not seem to be the case for training graduate students in theology and ethics or religious ethics. There is just too much that needs to be known. If we are a discipline, we are one that depends on the work done in other disciplines. Any graduate student in theology and ethics not only needs to know the Christian theological tradition but also the philosophical sources that tradition has thought crucial for doing the work of theology. Then there is all that work in Scripture, to say nothing of the importance of political theory and the social sciences. Moreover, who could have anticipated Michel Foucault's work or the long process it has taken to appreciate the challenge Nietzsche represents.

That there is so much that there is to know, of course, is not unique to the field of theology and ethics or religious ethics, but any field of interest in the modern university.[20] Graduate students in religious ethics will do what graduate students do in any field, that is, concentrate their work in a manner that will allow them to write their dissertations. But there remains the question, at least for those in religious ethics, whether a graduate student's concentration can be located within a wider set of intellectual agendas. For example should we be able to expect that any student graduating with a Ph.D. in some form of Christian or religious ethics be able to read Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

[20] As someone who served on the Duke University's Appointments and Tenure Committee for seven years I think I have a good idea of the variety of disciplines that make up the modern university. For example, I became well acquainted with the distinction in the sciences between mature and immature science. People working in mature sciences often have a leg-up getting tenure because what counts as "important work" is more easily recognized. Yet all mature sciences were at one time immature. For scientists who serve on the committee the humanities appear to be at best in a perpetual state of immaturity. It is a wonderful intellectual challenge for those from the humanities on such committees to try to give the intellectual background necessary to contextualize the work done in the various divisions and subdivisions of the humanities.

I am not suggesting that every graduate program that produces people in theology and ethics or religious ethics should look like every other program. All good graduate programs find ways to make use of the usually happy accidents that this or that person happens to be on the faculty either in the department or elsewhere in the university. For example, at Duke we have been very fortunate to have Ken Surin in Literature, Rom Coles in Political Theory, and David Aers in Late Medieval (English) to enrich the intellectual horizon of our students. We have found one of the most valuable aspects of our Ph.D is the requirement that our students have an external minor outside the Graduate Program in Religion. This has not only immensely benefited our students, but helped those of us on the Graduate faculty in Religion get to know other members of the faculty in other departments in the university as well as their getting to know us. It takes years to develop the interconnections between people representing different fields, but at Duke we have found nothing is quite as important for the education of our students.

Of course all this becomes even more complicated when scholars from religious traditions other than Christianity are taken into account.[21] I have no idea what it might mean to train someone in Islam to be a "religious ethicist." I do not even know if, from the perspective of Islam, that would make sense or be thought to be a good thing. I should like to know more about Judaism, Islam, or Hinduism,[22] but I know so little about Christianity I spend most of my time catching up in an attempt to understand the complexity and diversity that Christianity names. I suspect any other significant tradition presents the same kind of challenge not only for those external to the tradition, but also for those who think of themselves as practitioners.

I doubt this essay adds up to anything so grand as suggestions about the directions research in religious ethics might or should take. By focusing on graduate education, I have tried to make concrete the kinds of questions we need to address if we have any hope we might actually learn something from one another. If we are lucky, the students we are educating today will be formed just well enough to do work that not only

[21] I am well aware that the grammar of this sentence presupposes that Christians are Christians and "other religions," therefore, bear the burden of proof. Yet the grammar reflects the reality that we still live in a generalized Christian culture. That we do, as I have tried to suggest, is not necessarily a good thing for Christians. I think some that criticize my work for "being too Christian" fail to understand I presume that it will be a good thing for Christians when we finally have to see ourselves through the eyes of "other religions." For example I think it would be a welcome development if "Christian studies" became an area in Religious Studies Departments on a par with Jewish Studies.

[22] Of course, if Fitzgerald (2000, 134–155) is right, Hinduism does not exist as a religion. It seems the British assumed the diverse forms of life they found in India must represent something like the Church of England. Thus the necessity of India having "a religion."

will enlarge how we think about our work but will genuinely surprise us. If the **JRE** can help develop the conversation necessary to produce such students it will have done good work.

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