

SYLLABUS
**Seeking the Welfare of the City:
Urban Altruism and Loving Our Neighbor(hood)s**
[PHIL 375: Philosophical Anthropology]

COURSE DESCRIPTION

When Jesus summarizes the “greatest commandment,” it is a two-fold obligation that hinges on *love*: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39; Luke 10:27 echoing Leviticus 19:18). It is intriguing to note that when Jesus points to the centrality of *love*, he also invokes a metaphor which is not familial (e.g., “brother” or “friend”) or ethnic (e.g., “your people”), but almost *geographical*: we are to love *the neighbor*.

What would it mean to take seriously Jesus’ injunction to love our *neighbors*? How could we recover a sense of the *proximity* of love? And how could we take seriously the *geography* of this ethical vision? If Jesus’ vision of *agapic* love hinges on love of the neighbor, then shouldn’t we think seriously about how this plays itself out in the very real, incarnate, concrete proximity of our *neighborhoods*? How could we connect Jesus’ commandment to love our neighbor with Jeremiah’s prophetic vision of “seeking the welfare of the city” (Jer. 29:7)? Could we cultivate a sense of *urban altruism*?

The goal of this course is to introduce students to an engagement between science and theology focused on the *spaces of altruism* or what we might describe as the geographical and architectural conditions of possibility for fostering communities of other-regarding behavior and practice. We will be grappling with both social scientific literature (geography, sociology, urban studies) as well as high-level philosophical and theological texts from across the Christian tradition. Our theoretical and empirical analyses, however, are aimed at concrete practice. As such, the course will also involve empirical observation of our community, including engagement with local neighborhoods, a tour emphasizing urban/suburban development, and involvement with urban churches and outreach ministries.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To consider the nature, extent, possibilities, and limits of altruistic or “agapic” love as expressed in both the theological tradition and contemporary scientific analysis
- To challenge the often individualistic paradigm of social scientific research on altruism by focusing on the kinds of communities that nourish “other-regarding” behavior
- To think carefully about the implications of the biblical injunction to “love our neighbor” and to “seek the welfare of the city”
- To advance new social scientific thinking about the material conditions of altruism with a specific focus on the *spatial* conditions of (and obstacles to) building other-regarding communities
- To consider the negative effects of suburban sprawl on sociality and community

- To appreciate the positive possibilities for community and ethical intersubjectivity in urban environments, while also noting challenges
- To engage in empirical analysis, informed by social science methodologies, of local neighborhoods and communities, developing an “altruism audit” of Grand Rapids neighborhoods and/or suburbs
- To think theologically about the possibilities and limits of altruism, informed by the depth and breadth of the Christian theological tradition
- To think creatively about new modes of community activism that will foster urban altruism, including urban planning policies, local economics initiatives, neighborhood association projects, community church programs, the creation of “urban sanctuaries,” and innovative “everyday” practices
- To foster undergraduate research on altruism at the intersection of philosophy, theology, and social science
- To develop a website that will include literature reviews and a mode of dissemination for student research

REQUIRED TEXTS

Augustine, *City of God*, trans. H. Bettenson (Penguin, 1984).

Jonathan Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (Yale University Press, 1995).

Eric Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith* (Brazos, 2003).

James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-made Landscape* (Touchstone, 1993).

Stephen G. Post, Lynn G. Underwood, Jeffrey S. Schloss, and William B. Hurlbutt, eds., *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Dialogue* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (Routledge, 2000).

There will also be a course reader which will include readings from Aquinas, Ruskin, Milbank, Levinas, and others. See also the attached “Secondary Bibliography” for further reading and course research.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

As an upper-level seminar, we will incorporate student participation via a more seminar-ish format, with facilitation by the instructor. Be expected to be challenged. Students are expected to seriously engage the materials and come prepared for discussion. Specific requirements and grade distributions include:

1. Regular **participation** in class discussion which evidences critical engagement with the material.
2. A **literature review** on a question or theme addressed in the course. This will require students to research and locate *relevant* articles on a selected theme from *peer-reviewed* journals in philosophy, theology and relevant social sciences, then write a 4-5 page critical summary of the literature. This should provide both an *overall summary* of the literature and a *critical evaluation* of it in light of class readings. Research questions

and topics will be provided; further instructions will be discussed in class. Select student summaries will be posted on a course website. [20%]

3. A **journal** and **reflection paper** (8-10 pages) on a topic selected in consultation with the instructor on themes discussed in class. Students should choose an option early in the semester; further details will be provided. The project should start from “where you are;” that is, it should be informed by observation, analysis, and practices in the location in which you find yourself (e.g., suburbs, inner-city, etc.). The *journal* should record observations of your community (or a community of your choosing) in light of our readings and include your thoughts at the intersection of the two. The *paper* will consider a specific question that will require engagement with both the social sciences and philosophy/theology. Ideally this project should both build on the literature review and then feed into the small group research projects (see below). As such, it is a kind of “fulcrum” project. [20%]

4. A **small group poster presentation** near the end of the semester (due date TBD). In teams of four, you will explore a particular aspect of “urban altruism” relative to Grand Rapids (e.g., urban planning policies, local economics initiatives, neighborhood association planning, community church programs, the creation of “urban sanctuaries,” or innovative “everyday” practices). Your research will identify and analyze any current practices, programs, or policies that foster urban altruism, but also identify gaps which present opportunities for new initiatives. Each group’s research, based on sound social science, will recommend a new initiative in the relevant sector that will foster urban altruism. Research will be presented in a poster format which will be displayed in a public space in Grand Rapids (hopefully the downtown Ryerson Public Library), and then posted on the course website. [40%]

5. A **final exam** focused on course readings [20%].

GRADING

Your final grade will be calculated on the basis of the breakdown below; all assignments must be completed to receive a final grade. Grade/percentile equivalents are as follows:

A 100-95	B+ 89-87	C+ 79-77	D 69-65
A- 94-90	B 86-83	C 76-73	F 64-0
	B- 82-80	C- 72-70	

Satisfactory completion of assignments constitutes C-level work; B-level work exhibits a comprehension and understanding of philosophical concepts, terms, and categories (and their relation) and well-reasoned reflection on the topics and texts; A-level work is characterized by all of the above plus a creative appropriation, understanding, and communication of philosophical ideas.

COURSE OUTLINE

Unit 1: *Understanding Altruism*

Week 1: Defining Altruism [Post, *et. al.*]

Week 2: The Science of Altruism [Post, *et. al.*]

Week 3: The Theology of Altruism [Gospels, Aquinas, Ruskin, Milbank]

Unit 2: *The Geography of Altruism: Social Science Perspectives*

Week 4: The Spaces of Community: Architecture, Egoism, and Altruism [Jacobsen, Kunstler, Kemmis]

Week 5: Sprawl and Selfishness [K. Jackson; Kunstler; Jacobsen]

Week 6: Building Other-Regarding Neighborhoods: Architecture and Altruism Revisited [Kunstler, Harvey, Dear]

Unit 3: *The Possibility (and Limits) of Altruism: Philosophical & Theological Perspectives*

Weeks 7 & 8: For Whom is Altruism Possible? Revisiting an Old Question with an Urban Accent [Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Edwards, Ruskin, Milbank]

Week 9: "Urban Sanctuaries": Possibilities of the Church as Polis/Neighborhood

Unit 4: *Urban Planning for Altruism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*

Weeks 9 & 10: The Philosophical/Theological Anthropologies Behind Urban Planning [Ward]

Weeks 11& 12: Planning for Community with St. Francis: An Economics and Architecture of "Cooperation" [Ruskin, Milbank]

Week 13: Earthly Cities and the City of God [Augustine, Ward]

SECONDARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

[On reserve in the library]

Stephen Bridges, "Altruism Toward Deviant Persons in Cities, Suburbs, and Small Towns," *Psychological Reports* 79 (1996), pp. 313-314.

Stephen Bridges and Neil P. Coady, "Urban Size Differences in Incidence of Altruistic Behavior," *Psychological Reports* 78 (1996), pp. 307-312.

Mitchell B. Chamlin and John K. Cochran, "Social Altruism and Crime," *Criminology* 35 (1997): 203-228.

Ram Cnaan, *Keeping Faith in the City: How 401 Urban Religious Congregations Serve Their Neediest Neighbors* (University of Pennsylvania: Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, 2000).

Michael J. Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

Paul N. Dixon and Richard A. Stevick, "Urban-rural Differences in Social Interest and Altruistic Behavior," *Journal of Social Psychology* 118 (1982): 285-286.

Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

-----, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Timothy P. Jackson, *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

- Byron R. Johnson, David B. Larson, Spencer D. Li, and Sung J. Jang, "Escaping from the Crime of Inner Cities: Church Attendance and Religious Salience Among Disadvantaged Youth," *Justice Quarterly* 17 (2000): 377-391.
- , "The 'Invisible Institution' and Black Youth Crime: The Church as an Agency of Local Social Control," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 29 (2000): 479-498.
- Peter Katz, *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994).
- Daniel Kemmis, *The Good City and the Good Life: Renewing the Sense of Community* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).
- Charles Korte and Nancy Kerr, "Responses to Altruistic Opportunities in Urban and Nonurban Settings," *Journal of Social Psychology* 95 (1975).
- James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-made Landscape* (New York: Touchstone, 1993).
- , *Home From Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).
- Herman Lelieveldt, "Helping Citizens Help Themselves: Neighborhood Improvement Programs and the Impact of Social Networks, Trust, and Norms on Neighborhood-Oriented Forms of Participation," *Urban Affairs Review* 39 (2004): 531-551.
- Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
- Milbrey W. McLaughlin, Merita A. Irby, and Juliet Langman, *Urban Sanctuaries: Neighborhood Organizations in the Lives and Futures of Inner City Youth* (Josey-Bass, 2001).
- John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
- , "Grace: The Midwinter Sacrifice" [a sequel to "Can Morality Be Christian?"] in *Being Reconciled* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- William Morris, *News From Nowhere* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907).
- William R. Morrish and Catherine R. Brown, *Planning to Stay: Learning to See the Physical Features of Your Neighborhood* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1994).
- Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).
- John Ruskin, *Unto This Last* and *Fors Clavigera* in *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1907-), Vols. XVII, XXVII-XXIX.
- Ralph Slovenko, "Desocialization by Automobile," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 45 (2001): 535-538.
- Jeffrey L. Spear, *Dreams of an English Eden: Ruskin and His Tradition in Social Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
- Oded Stark, *Altruism and Beyond: An Economic Analysis of Transfers and Exchanges Within Families and Groups* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin's God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).