

SYLLABUS

**Seeking the Welfare of the City:
Urban Altruism and Loving Our Neighbor(hood)s**

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Office hours: T/Th 10:30am-12:00pm

Course website: www.calvin.edu/~jks4/city

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 FORMAT

The course will inhabit space at the nexus of seminar, tutorial, and informal lecture. Students are invited to the table of conversation as co-researchers. Our seminar will be exploratory and problem-oriented, which means readings will be from a number of different fields and genres in order to get at “the things themselves.” Student research will be engaged with both texts and on-the-ground phenomena and experiences.

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

We are going to try an experiment in this seminar, working with more of a (British) tutorial format where our readings are topic-driven. So rather than assigning texts to be purchased (and then reading only portions of them), I will assign a wider range of readings which will be secured in various ways:

- Articles marked^{web} are available to be downloaded from the seminar website
- Articles or chapters marked^{han} will be provided as a handout
- Articles or chapters marked^{res} are available in the library reserves to be read and/or copied for your use
- Readings from “classics” such as Augustine’s *City of God* or Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* are widely available in multiple copies in the library (plus you should own them!)

Books on Reserve:

Post, *et. al.*, *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Dialogue*

Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*

Kevin Lynch, *A Theory of Good City Form*

Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*

James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*

Graham Ward, *Cities of God*

Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*

See also the attached “Secondary Bibliography” for further reading and course research. If you want an accessible, background read, check out Eric Jacobsen’s *Sidewalks in the Kingdom*.

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 [or university press anthologies] 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. Students are encouraged to consider this as a *service-learning project*. Further details will be provided. [40%]
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 that 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. [20%]
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 SCHEDULE [subject to revision]

DATE	TOPIC [READING]
January 31T	Intro Session: The Geography and Architecture of Altruism
February 2R	Defining Altruism [Oord ^{web} ; Post, chapter 4 ^{res}]
7T	<i>Subdivide and Conquer</i> Screening & Discussion
9R	No Class [in lieu of Sprawl Tour on April 1]
14T	The (Social) Science of Altruism [Post, chapter 1 ^{res} ; chapter 7 ^{res}]
16R	The Ethics of Altruism: Intro to Levinas [Levinas ^{res} 11-30]
21T	Responsibility for the Other: Levinas, cont'd [Levinas ^{res} 109-127]
23R	Substitution for the Other: Levinas, cont'd [Levinas ^{res} 80-95]
28T	Altruism and Self-Love [Post, chapter 10 ^{res} ; Kristeva ^{han}]
March 2R	Critique of Levinas [Milbank, "Midwinter Sacrifice" ^{han}]
7T	Critique of Levinas, cont'd [Milbank, "Soul of Reciprocity I" ^{web}]
9R	Critique of Levinas, cont'd [Milbank, "Soul of Reciprocity II" ^{web}]
14T	Thinking About the <i>Polis</i> [Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , Books I; III.1-5; VII.1-5; recommended: Lynch, chapter 4 ^{res}]
16R	Thinking About Two Cities [Augustine, <i>City of God</i> , Book XIX]
	Spring Break
28T	[review session]
30R	Suburbanization [Kunstler chs. 1,4,10 ^{res} ; Jackson Introduction ^{rev}]
*April 1 (Sat)	"Sprawl Tour" (with Mulder, Urban Sociology)
April 4T	Desocialization: Advent of the Auto [Jackson, chs 2+9-10 ^{res} ; Slovenko ^{web}]
6R	Ontology and Anthropology: Urban Planning as Salvation? [Ward chapters 1-2 ^{res}]
11T	An Alternative Anthropology: Love in the City [Ruskin ^{han} ; Morris ^{han}]
13R	Christian Socialism and the City [F.D. Maurice ^{han}]
18T	The Church and the City: Catholic Social Thought [Benedict

	XVI ^{web}]
20R	The Church and the City, cont'd: Catholic and Reformed Perspectives [Francis Cardinal George ^{web} ; Van Pelt and Greydanus ^{web}]
25T	[Academic Advising: No Class]
27R	Visions of Another City [Morris ^{web} ; Fishman, Part I ^{res}]
May 2T	Planning for Community: The Geography of Altruism [TBD]
4R	Planning for Community: The Architecture of Altruism [TBD]
9T	Poster Session
May 12, 6:30pm	FINAL EXAM

SECONDARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

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