

2010 OTSSA / OTWSA

1st CALL FOR PAPERS / 1^{ste} OPROEP OM REFERATE

“**The Old Testament and Ethics**” is the overarching theme for the 2010 OTSSA conference to be held at the **North-West University (Vaal Triangle Campus)** from **15-17 September 2010**. The theme is quite broad, but more specifically seeks to explore the engagement between text and context and the role scholars and other interlocutors play in this process. Below a few topics are suggested for further pursuit.

Closing date for submission of paper proposals: Friday, 28 May 2010 (cf. form below)

The field of **ethics** (or moral philosophy) involves two broad categories, viz. substantive and analytic ethics. These categories are not watertight in practice, e.g. it is possible to describe the meta-ethical assumptions of an ancient group and conclude the discussion with a normative evaluation with reference to a contemporary controversial issue. However, the following provides an outline on basis of these categories.

A **Substantive ethics**

Substantive ethics may be subdivided into descriptive and normative approaches.

- The category of **descriptive ethics** involves describing how a people (e.g., ancient Israelites, contemporary Old Testament scholars, cultural group or a Church community) behave and/or what sorts of moral standards they claim to follow. Descriptive ethics incorporates research from the fields of anthropology, psychology, sociology and history as part of the process of understanding what people do or have believed about moral norms.
- The category of **normative ethics** (also known as ethical theory) involves the contemporary creating or evaluation of moral standards. Normative ethics is an attempt to figure out what people today should do or judging whether ancient or contemporary moral beliefs and behaviour are/were reasonable. One subdivision sometimes located separately – i.e. applied ethics – looks at specific controversial issues of our times. The other line (also associated with ethical theory and in terms of jargon the kind most familiar to students of biblical ethics) includes, inter alia,

virtue theories, duty theories (deontological or non-consequentialist approaches), consequentialist theories (e.g. utilitarianism, social contract theories).

B. Analytic ethics

- Analytic ethics typically has only one branch and is equated with what is better known today as **meta-ethics**. This line of inquiry is the most philosophical and most neglected one in Biblical Studies. Meta-ethics attempts to discern and analyse the metaphysical, epistemological and semantic aspects of (past or present) moral assumptions, concepts and ideas. The concern here lies with what is/was meant by the concepts of good and evil, what the ontological status of moral beliefs are, where do moral beliefs actually come from (nature or culture?), how moral knowledge is attained and justified, whether morality is a subjective or objective matter, what the motivation for morality happens to be, the relationship between religion and morality, etc.

As can be expected, there is no universal consensus on the divisions in ethics and moral philosophers disagree on many aspects of the encyclopaedia, e.g. the nature, number and contents of broad classifications of the field. The above-chosen distinctions are therefore not to be understood as absolute but instead as a functional and practical frame of reference for delineating the topics for the conference. *Interested participants can use these categories as general and rough guidelines and are welcome to mix them as they please.* The **subcategories (topics)** this conference will be concerned with include:

1. Origins of ancient Israelite ethics

Where do the ethical ideas in the Old Testament come from? What are their origins, their historical antecedents and their parallels in earlier ancient Near Eastern moralities? What are the differences between ethics in the Old Testament and the ethical contexts out of which it arose? How do later ethical ideas in the Old Testament related to earlier ones (complimentary, supplementary, contradictory).

2. Old Testament ethics and philosophical ethics proper

Old Testament scholars tend to use the concept of ethics rather vaguely. How does Old Testament ethics relate to divisions in philosophical ethics (also known as moral philosophy), a branch of philosophy which seeks to address questions about morality. In

philosophical ethics there is a concern with the fundamental semantic, ontological, and epistemic nature of ethics or morality (analytic or meta-ethics), how moral values should be determined (normative ethics), how a moral outcome can be achieved in specific situations (applied ethics), how moral capacity or moral agency develops and what its nature is (moral psychology), and what moral values people actually abide by (descriptive ethics). Which moral philosophical categories feature most in Old Testament ethics and which remain unexplored gaps in the research?

3. Origins of Old Testament ethics

Here the focus is on this “sub-discipline” in the encyclopaedia of theology. A number of issues can be dealt with ranging from literature reviews on the “subject” of Old Testament Ethics to comparisons of scholars working and methodologies used in the field, to a description of the history of such an approach to the Old Testament in the (South) African context.

4. Ethics in the Old Testament

In this case the emphasis is more on the text of the Old Testament and what can be gauged from the text about the development, nature and “conduct” of ethics in ANE and Israelite societies during specific periods (pre-prophetic, prophetic, Deuteronomistic, exilic etc.). The focus is on a descriptive enterprise.

5. Ethics of reading the Old Testament

The ethics of reading has been highlighted since the last decades of the previous century (e.g. Schüssler-Fiorenza, Patte) and more recently given a South African (and specific ecclesiastical) flavour (Snyman, 2007). Is an ethical reading of the Old Testament possible and if so, what does it entail?

6. Ethics of teaching the Old Testament

Teaching undergraduate students on the main issues of consensus in the field of Old Testament study leads time and again to the realisation of how huge the divide between popular notions about these books and scholarly interest in them has grown. How should tutors approach their students? Does the academic context allow for pastoral or iconoclastic approaches to the issue (to mention two extreme positions)? Is there a mid-way?

7. Ethics of preaching the Old Testament

To what extent are Marcionist tendencies manifested in the devotional use of the Old Testament? Do preachers “rewrite” the Old Testament to serve current (id/th-eological) agendas? Can traditional ways of dealing with detesting practices in the Old Testament still be justified? How are congregations exposed to the results of Old Testament research?

8. Future of Old Testament Ethics

What are the issues that inhibit the growth of this field of study? What are the prospects for this field in the 21st century? What challenges lie ahead?

9. Old Testament and eco-ethics

Religion and ecology have been on the academic agenda for the past four decades or so. The 2009 OTSSA-conference provided the guild with an overview of our contribution in this regard. With the 2010 conference taking place in one of the industrial hubs of South Africa, this issue is in need of further consideration. A specific focus on the religious function of animals in the text can be considered.

10. Sensational Old Testament: the media and religion

10.1 From time to time the (Afrikaans) news media carries stories on the debates that exist mostly between scholars and those in the pews on issues related to the understanding of the Old Testament. What are the moral codes involved in such scimmages?

10.2 The media is flooded by reports on violent crime. To what extent does a morality selectively based on the Old Testament contribute to violence?

11. Old Testament and morality: what’s the link?

To most people the Old Testament is a religious text that inspires certain religious attitudes and general conduct. The Old Testament has the power to transform worldviews. How does / should this impact on the use of these texts?

12. Ethics of publishing Old Testament research

To many scholars publication is the life line that makes the attachment to an institution of higher learning a still worthwhile experience. However, has “worthwhile” been traded in for “enriching” (in the plainest sense of the word)? What drives our research? Are we guarding the quality thereof well enough?

Participants are most welcome to envisage other creative topics of relevance within moral philosophy and are free to choose any other related topic that is not explicitly mentioned.

13. Research project: The ethics of Old Testament historiography

The “Project 2nd Temple Literature” will have one open session related to our conference theme for which proposals are also invited. For more information in this regard, please contact the project leader, Prof. Louis Jonker (lcj@sun.ac.za), as soon as possible. If you are proposing a paper in this slot, please indicate so on the submission form below.

“Other stuff”

Hopefully the theme as outlined above will keep the creative minds ticking during the summer holidays. Please use the form below to send in your submission(s).

Further details pertaining to the conference (registration, housing and transport) will be sent in the new year and also be posted on our website (<http://www.otwsa-otssa.co.za>).

Wishing all a blessed period of rest!

Organisers: 2010 OTSSA

**SUBMISSION OF PAPER PROPOSAL
2010 OTSSA CONFERENCE
(FOR ATTENTION: HANS VAN DEVENTER)**

Name, Surname and Affiliation of presenter	
Title of paper	
Abstract (100-300 words)	

INTEREST GROUP RESEARCH PROJECT (Please circle your response.)

Is this proposal made with reference to topic 13 above?	YES	NO
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AV EQUIPMENT (Please circle your response.)

Do you need a data projector for your presentation?	YES	NO
Do you need an overhead projector for your presentation?	YES	NO
Do you need a slide projector for your presentation?	YES	NO

Submit:

- Electronically (as attachment) to Hans.VanDeventer@nwu.ac.za

OR

- Per fax to +27 (0)16 910 3451 (FOR ATTENTION: HANS VAN DEVENTER)