

FEMINIST/WOMANIST VIRTUES AND ETHICO-POLITICAL SELFHOOD

Fall 2007

Wednesdays 6:20-8:50

Instructor: Dr. Sara L. Puotinen

COURSE DESCRIPTION

How do we develop into ethical and political selves who possess a critical consciousness and can translate our passionate desire for social transformation and justice into effective and sustainable agendas and actions? How do we become aware of our own responsibility and connection to a wide range of others across cultures, nations, and communities? How do we learn how to live with the discomfort and uncertainty that feminist/womanist activism, in its many different forms, requires?

In this seminar, we will explore these questions, taking as our basic premise the idea that feminists/womanists need to develop and practice certain virtues in order to become effective and responsible ethical and political (or ethico-political) selves. After spending three weeks examining some introductory texts on traditional virtue theory and its limits, we will devote the rest of the seminar to an exploration of the importance of virtue for selves/communities and their practice of feminism/womanism. First, we will critically examine several key virtues, including: courage, truth telling, passion, flexibility and trouble-making. Second, we will assess the value of moral/spiritual/political feminist education for developing and practicing these virtues. Third, we will study the underlying desire for the livable and/or good life that motivates these virtues and feminists'/womanists' desire for social transformation and justice.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Within a small graduate seminar like this one everyone's participation is crucial. To that end, you are responsible for coming to class fully prepared (with texts in hand), actively and respectfully contributing to discussions, asking questions when you do not understand the material and giving feedback to me on what is working and not working in the class.

COURSE READINGS

Allison, Dorothy. *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure (TOTT)*

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved (B)*

Course Packet (CP)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and Participation 20%

You are required to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions, both in class and on Blackboard. **More than one unexcused absence will lower your class participation grade.** For each class, you must be prepared, with fully read text in hand.

2. Presentation #2: Group Project 40%

You and 1-2 other people are required to give a 35-45 presentation on one of the five virtues we are discussing. Your presentation should include an in-depth discussion of the virtue and its importance for a particular community/organization or individual engaging in feminist or womanist activism. In your presentation, you must draw upon readings from the class, class discussion and outside sources. Be as creative as possible

in your presentation; consider using movie/video clips, music samples, or other visual aids. You could also supplement your discussion of the main issues with the production and screening of a digital video documentary in which you interview an individual and/or group about their activism. While you and your group may choose which virtue to present on, only one group can present on each of the virtues. A more detailed handout on this assignment and a sign-up sheet will be distributed in the next couple of weeks. Group presentations will take place at the end of the semester, December 5 and 12.

3. Paper/s

40%

You may choose one of the following options for this assignment:

- a. Write a 15-18 page paper on a topic related to Feminist Virtues and ethico-political selfhood. This paper requires that you do outside research about your topic and that you include at least 5 additional sources, that is 5 texts/readings that we do not discuss/read in class (internet sites may be used but do not count as part of the 5 sources required). In addition to the paper, you must submit a 250 word abstract with tentative bibliography and meet with me to discuss your topic. The abstract/bibliography will be due on November 7. The final paper will be due on December 12.
- b. Write three shorter analysis papers (5-7 pages) on three out of the four sections of this course. While this option does not require that you do outside research (like option a), it does require that you critically engage with the readings and our class discussions. In each of your papers, you must draw upon our class discussions and at least four of the texts. The first paper on Feminist/Womanist thinking on the virtues and their limits is due September 26. The second paper on the virtues is due November 7. The third paper on how we develop the virtues OR why we develop the virtues is due December 12.

CLA GRADING CRITERIA

- A achievement *outstanding* relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B achievement *significantly above* that level necessary to meet course requirements
- C achievement meeting the *basic* course requirements in every respect
- D achievement *worthy of credit* even though it does not meet the basic requirements
- F performance *failing* to meet the basic course requirements
- S equivalent to a grade of C or better

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

INTRODUCTION

September

5 Introduction to class; distribute syllabus

12 Defining the Ethico-Political Self and Virtue

READING:

1. Aristotle. Excerpts from *Nicomachean Ethics* (CP)
2. Bar On, Bat-Ami and Ann Ferguson. "Introduction" in *Daring to be Good. Essays in Feminist Ethico-politics* (CP)

19 Feminist/Womanist Thinking on the Virtues and their Limits: An Introduction

READING:

1. Tessman, Lisa. Excerpts from *Burdened Virtue Ethics* (CP)
2. Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. "The Feminine Virtues and Female Agency" in *Lesbian Ethics* (CP)
3. Bar-On, Bat Ami. "Everyday Violence and Ethico-Political Crisis" in *Daring to Be Good* (CP)

THE VIRTUES

26 Courage: The Courage to Survive

READING:

1. Sparks, Holloway. "Dissident Citizenship: Democratic Theory, Political Courage and Activist Women" (CP)
2. Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century" (CP)
3. Brown, Wendy. Excerpt from *Manhood in Politics* (CP)
4. Cannon, Katie. "Unctuousness as Virtue: According to the Life of Zora Neale Hurston" (CP)

If you chose to write three smaller papers, your first paper on feminist/womanist thinking on the virtues and their limits is due today.

October

3 Truth-Telling: Storytelling as Truth

READING:

1. Allison, Dorothy. "A Question of Class" (CP)
2. Trinh T. Minh-ha. "Grandma's Stories" in *Woman Native Other* (CP)
3. Allison, Dorothy. *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure. (TOTT)*
4. Foucault, Michel. Excerpt from *Fearless Speech* (CP)

10 Passion: Beside Oneself

READING:

1. Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of the Erotic" in *Sister Outsider* (CP)
2. Frye, Marilyn. "A Note on Anger" in *The Politics of Reality* (CP)
3. Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" in *Sister Outsider* (CP)
4. Butler, Judith. "Violence, Mourning, Politics" in *Precarious Life* (CP)
5. Hall, Cheryl. "Politics, Ethics and the 'Uses of the Erotic'" in *Daring to Be Good* (CP)
6. Welch, Sharon. "Frustration and Righteous Anger Do Not a Politics Make" in *Sweet Dreams in America* (CP)

17 Flexibility: Learning to Stretch, Bend and Twist

READING:

1. Lugones, María. "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling and Loving Perception" (CP)
2. Sandoval, Chela. "U.S. Third World Feminism, Differential Movement, Part I" (CP)
3. Haraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (CP)
4. Moya, Paula. "Chicana Feminism and Postmodern Theory" (CP)
5. Welch, Sharon. "Virtuosity" in *Sweet Dreams in America* (CP)
6. Barndt, Deborah. "Whose 'Choice'? 'Flexible' Women Workers in the Tomato Food Chain" (CP)

24 Troublemaking: The Pest as Prophet

READING:

1. Butler, Judith. "1989/1999 Preface" in *Gender Trouble* (CP)
2. Butler, Judith. Excerpt from *Undoing Gender* (CP)
3. West, Cornel. "Putting on our Democratic Armor" in *Democracy Matters* (CP)
4. Irigaray, Luce. Excerpts from *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (CP)

HOW DO WE DEVELOP THESE VIRTUES?

31 The Importance of Feminist Moral/Political/Spiritual Education

READING:

1. hooks, bell. Excerpts from *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (CP)
2. Alexander, Jacqui. Excerpts from *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* (CP)

If you chose to write three smaller papers, your second paper on the virtues is due today.

November

7 Feminist/Womanist Role Models: Individuals and Communities

READING:

1. Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" (CP)
2. Allen, Paula Gunn. "Who is Your Mother? The Red Roots of Feminism" in *The Sacred Hoop* (CP)
3. Collins, Patricia Hill. "Moving Beyond Critique" and "Searching for Sojourner Truth: Toward an Epistemology of Empowerment" in *Fighting Words* (CP)
4. hooks, bell. "Talking Back" (CP)
5. hooks, bell. "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" in *Yearning* (CP)
6. hooks, bell. "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" in *Yearning* (CP)

WHY SHOULD WE PRACTICE THESE VIRTUES?

14 Flourishing or Survival? The Good Life versus The Livable Life, part I

READING:

1. Butler, Judith. "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy" and "The Question of Sexual Transformations" in *Undoing Gender* (CP)

21 NO CLASS Happy Thanksgiving

WHY SHOULD WE PRACTICE THESE VIRTUES?

28 Flourishing or Survival? The Good Life versus The Livable Life, part II

READING:

1. Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*.

December

5 BEGIN FINAL PRESENTATIONS

12 Final Day: Recapping of class and final presentations

If you chose to write the three smaller papers, your third paper on how we should practice the virtues OR why we should practice the virtues is due today.

If you chose to write a larger research paper, it is due today.