

Feminist and Womanist Ethics
January 2010
Amy Plantinga Pauw
Gardencourt Room #213
M-F 9-11:30am

Course Description:

This course will examine the writings of contemporary feminist and womanist Christian ethicists.

Objectives:

1. To acquaint students with the distinctive emphases and controversies of contemporary feminist and womanist ethics
2. To encourage students to assess the relevance of this ethical reflection for the contemporary church and world.
3. To help students hone their own theological and ethical perspectives in dialogue with these scholars.

Requirements for 3 credits:

1. Conscientious attendance and participation in discussion. (25%)
Showing up with your reading and 50-word sentence done is an important component of your work in this course. Lack of attendance and of thorough and timely class preparation will adversely affect your course grade. Please inform me ahead of time if you have to miss class. Because of the intensive nature of this course, missing more than 2 sessions of class puts you in danger of failing the course.
2. 50-word sentences (50%)
*Students will record their response to the **Journal Question** posed in the syllabus for each class's reading; these will take the form of one 50-word sentence (see description by Professor Charles Cohen of the University of Wisconsin below). We will start each session by reading some of these aloud. I will collect these short assignments the last class period of every week, and turn them back to you the first class period of the following week. The sentences will focus on the content of the readings. **You are required to do 10 sentences.***
3. Take-home exam. (25%) **Due January 29**
Questions will be distributed on January 22. This exam will give you opportunities to develop your own constructive statement on the ethical issues explored in this class. If you prefer to write a research paper on a particular topic in feminist and womanist ethics, please set up an appointment to discuss this with me.

Note: You must take this course for 3 credits if it is to count as your "core" theology elective. However you may take this course for 2 credits and still fulfill an Area B elective requirement. Please see me if you are interested in this 2-credit option.

Charles L. Cohen on the 50-word assignment:

“A single-sentence exercise with a finite word limit counters students’ proclivity for aerating their prose with superfluities. Given at most fifty words, students must distill their arguments’ fundamentals and phrase them concisely, for, as my syllabus warns, the fifty-first word and its successors face a terrible fate. (I have been known to cut out extraneous verbiage and turn the tattered remnant into a paper airplane—a practice proved sound pedagogically if not aerodynamically.)

Fifty words might appear too many—the contests cereal companies run, after all, ask for only twenty five—but I prefer giving students sufficient rope. For one thing, the fifty-word limit allows them to cope with the assignment, which often requires complicated responses. For another, it weans them from dependency on simple declarative sentences and challenges them to experiment with multiple clauses. Some can handle compound-complex sentences, but most require—and appreciate—tutelage in them. Nor are fifty words too few; no student has ever complained about an inability to pare down the verbiage. Had Goldilocks stumbled into my section instead of the Three Bears’ den, she would have found the word limit “just right.”

Consider, for example, the assignment that I recently gave students in History/Religious Studies 451, entitled “Constructing a hypothesis”: “Using the maps in the front of the packet, compare the distribution of churches within Anglo-America east of the Mississippi River in 1750 with the distribution in 1850 and, in one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (need I say more?), hypothesize the reasons for the difference.” To complete the exercise, students must examine a series of maps, aggregate data presented graphically and convert it into written form, analyze that data and develop a hypothesis to explain patterns they may have found. They must attend carefully to the material (not the least of the minor assignment’s benefits is its capacity to monitor students’ preparation), read the maps against each other, and offer a succinct but accurate conclusion, thereby rehearsing several critical skills simultaneously.

The quality of the responses varied, as one might expect, but the best submission hit the mark exactly, intellectually and, at fifty words, quantitatively: ‘The maps show a relative decline in Anglican and Congregational Churches in relation to the growth of other churches between 1750 and 1850, which reflects the shift towards the disestablishment of state churches and the demand for a constitutional guaranty of religious freedom that occurred during the American Revolutionary Settlement.’ Even more impressive, English is not the writer’s native language.”

Academic honesty:

All work you submit in this class is expected to be yours. Any quotation of the words of others must be clearly indicated, and all direct indebtedness must be acknowledged by citation of author and source. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an early date, since violations of Seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grade for the course.

Inclusive Language:

In your writing, avoid language for people that leaves out part of the population or perpetuates stereotypes. Avoid gender specific pronouns when gender is unknown. Gender specific

pronouns should generally be avoided when referring to God unless you are quoting from a theological text or a translation of the Bible that uses them.

Required Text:

M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010)

Recommended Text:

Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006)

January 4

Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father"

<http://womenshistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/after/>

Beverly Harrison, "Keeping Faith in a Sexist church: Not for Women Only," in Carol S. Robb, ed., *Making the Connections*, 206-234. [CAMS]

Journal Question: Why does Harrison reject Mary Daly's approach to overcoming sexism?

January 5

Saiving, Valerie. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* (April, 1960) [CAMS]

Andolsen, Barbara Hilkert. "Agape in Feminist Ethics." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9 (1981): 69–83 [CAMS]

"Can We Be Different but not Alienated? An Exchange of Letters" (Katie Cannon and Carter Heyward) in Lois Daly, ed., *Feminist Theological Ethics*, pp. 59-76. [CAMS]

Eugene, Toinette M. "Appropriation and Reciprocity in Womanist/Mujerista/Feminist Work" in Lois Daly, ed., *Feminist Theological Ethics*, pp. 88-117. [CAMS]

Brown-Douglass, Kelly. "Womanist Theology: What is its Relationship to Black Theology?" in Cone and Wilmore, eds., *Black theology: A documentary history, volume two: 1980-1992*, pp. 290-299. [CAMS]

Recommended: Christine Smith, "Sin and Evil in Feminist Thought" *Theology Today* Vol. 50, no. 2 (July 1993) <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jul1993/v50-2-article4.htm>

Journal Question: How does womanist theology distinguish itself from both feminist theology and black theology?

January 6

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, xi-xii. [distributed]

Sanders, Cheryl J. "Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (Fall 1989): 83-91. [CAMS]

Coleman, Monica A. "Must I Be a Womanist?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22 (Spring 2006): 85-96 [CAMS]

NOTE: please also read the responses to the Sanders and Coleman articles

Recommended: Katie Cannon, "Appropriation and Reciprocity in the Doing of Womanist Ethics" in *Katie's Canon*, 129-135 [CAMS]

Journal Question: What are the differences in Sanders' and Coleman's perspectives on womanist ethics and theology?

January 7 **Reading day**

January 8 **Reading day**

January 11

Noddings, Nel. "Caring," in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, 7-30. [library reserve]

Gilligan, Carol. "Moral Orientation and Moral Development [1987]," in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, 31-46. [library reserve]

Baier, Annette C. "The Need for More than Justice," in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, 47-58 [library reserve]

Friedman, Marilyn. "Beyond Caring: The De-Moralization of Gender," in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, 61-78 [library reserve]

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Black Women and Motherhood [1991]," in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, 117-135. [library reserve]

Ruddick, Sara. "Injustice in Families: Assault and Domination [1995]," in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, 203-223. [library reserve]

Recommended:

Benhabib, Seyla. "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory." In *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender*, 77-95 [library reserve]

Journal Question: How do you see the relationship between an ethics of justice and an ethics of care?

January 12

Van Leeuwen, Mary Stewart "Re-Inventing the Ties that Bind," 33-52; Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "Christian Understandings of Human Nature and Gender," pp. 95-110; Purvis, Sally. "A Common Love: Christian Feminist Ethics and the Family," pp. 111-124; Gudorf, Christine. "Sacrificial and Parental spiritualities," pp. 294-309; All in Anne Carr & Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, eds., *Religion, Feminism, and the Family* [CAMS]

Kaveny, Cathleen. "Virtuous Decision Makers and Incompetent Patients." In Maura A. Ryan and Brian F. Linnane, S.J., eds., *A Just & True Love: Feminism at the Frontiers of Theological Ethics: Essays in Honor of Margaret A. Farley*, 338-365. [library reserve]

Hayes, Diana L. "Standing in the Shoe My Mother Made: The Making of a Catholic Womanist Theologian," in Stacey Floyd-Thomas, ed., *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, 54-76. [library reserve]

Journal Question: Which Christian teachings about family are affirmed by these writers?

January 13

Farley, Margaret. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 174-311.

Journal Question: What does Farley mean when she writes “Our understandings of sexuality remain immersed in the economy of defilement” (p. 177), and how does she intend her ethical framework to be an alternative to this economy?

January 14

Patrick, Anne E. “Framework for Love”: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Christian Vocation, In Maura A. Ryan and Brian F. Linnane, S.J., eds., *A Just & True Love: Feminism at the Frontiers of Theological Ethics: Essays in Honor of Margaret A. Farley*, 303-337. [library reserve]

Porter, Jean. “Contraceptive Use and the Authority of the Church.” In Maura A. Ryan and Brian F. Linnane, S.J., eds., *A Just & True Love*, 369-405. [library reserve]

West, Traci C. “A Space for Faith, Sexual Desire, and Ethical Black Ministerial Practices,” in Pinn and Hopkins, eds., *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, 31-50. [library reserve]

Journal Question: According to Patrick and West, what is the appropriate place of sexuality in the vocation of Christian religious leaders?

January 15

Douglas, Kelly Brown. “Heterosexism and the Black American Church Community: A Complicated Reality.” In Marvin M. Ellison and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion: Problem and Prospect*, 177-200. [library reserve]

Heyward, Carter. “Coming Out: Journey without Maps,” *Christianity and Crisis*, June 11, 1979: 153-6. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=429>

Hunt, Mary E. “Eradicating the Sin of Heterosexism,” In Marvin M. Ellison and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion*, 155-176. http://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv2_2005/p_hunt.pdf

Sanders, Cheryl J. “Sexual Orientation and Human Rights Discourse in the African-American Churches.” In Saul M. Olyan and Martha C. Nussbaum, eds., *Sexual Orientation and Human Rights in American Religious Discourse*, 178-184. [CAMS]

Anderson, Victor. “The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual,” in Pinn and Hopkins, eds., *Loving the Body*, 297-312 (Anderson’s article is a commentary on Sanders’ article.) [library reserve]

Journal Question: How does race enter into understandings of sexual orientation for these writers?

January 18 Martin Luther King holiday

January 19

Copeland, M. Shawn. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 55-130

Recommended: Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 7-53

Journal Question: What is the ethical significance of the body of Christ for Copeland?

January 20

Martin, Clarice. "The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Women'" in Cain Hope Felder, eds., *Stony the Road We Trod*, 206-231 [library reserve]

Williams, Delores. *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 15-33 [CAMS]

Monroe, Irene. "When and Where I Enter, Then the Whole Race Enters With Me: Que(e)rying Exodus" in Pinn and Hopkins, eds., *Loving the Body*, 121-131. [library reserve]

Grant, Jacquelyn. "The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship," in Emilie Townes, ed., *A Troubling in my Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, 199-218 [CAMS]

Recommended: Jacquelyn Grant, "Servanthood Revisited: Womanist Explorations of Servanthood Theology," in Dwight Hopkins ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*, 126-137 [library reserve]

Journal Question: How do womanist interpretations of Scripture both challenge and reinforce prominent ethical themes in black theology?

January 21

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Like One of the Family: Face, Ethnicity, and the Paradox of American National Identity." In *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*, 29-54.

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Why Collective Identity Politics Matter: Feminism, Nationalism, and Black Women's Community Work." In *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, 123-160.

Machado, Daisy. "The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminism, and the Undocumented Woman," in Pilar Aquino, María, Daisy Machado, and Jeanette Roríguez, eds. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 161-176. [CAMS]

Guardiola-Saenz, Leticia A. "Reading from Ourselves: Identity and Hermeneutics among Mexican-American feminists" in Pilar Aquino, María, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Roríguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 80-97. [CAMS]

Journal Question: How are questions of "identity" in the United States portrayed differently by the womanist scholar Collins and the Latina scholars Machado and Guardiola-Saenz?

January 22

Soskice, Janet Martin. "Love and Attention." In *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*, 7-34. [CAMS]

Townes, Emilie M. "Searching for Paradise in a World of Theme Parks," in Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk*, 105-125. [library reserve]

Farley, Margaret A. "Feminism and Universal Morality," In Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr., eds., *Prospects for a Common Morality*, 170-190. [CAMS]

Plaskow, Judith. "Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 7 (Fall 1991): 99-108. [CAMS]

Journal Question: What is the most important thing you will bring away from your readings in this course?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andolsen, Barbara Hilkert. "Agape in Feminist Ethics." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 69-83.
- Benhabib, Seyla and Drucilla Cornell, eds. *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Cannon, Katie Geneva. *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1995.
- Carr, Anne and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, eds. *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Coleman, Monica A. "Must I Be a Womanist?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22 (Spring 2006): 85-96.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.
- Cone, James H. and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume Two: 1980-1992*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Copeland, M. Shawn. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010.
- Daly, Lois K., ed. *Feminist Theological Ethics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- Daly, Mary. "After the Death of God the Father." Pittsburgh: Know, Inc. Originally published in *Commonweal*, March 12, 1971.
<http://womenshistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/after/>.
- Ellison, Marvin M. and Judith Plaskow, eds. *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion: Problem and Prospect*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2007.
- Farley, Margaret A. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. NY: Continuum, 2006.
- Felder, Cain Hope. *Stony the Road We Trod*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991.
- Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M., ed. *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*. NY: New York University Press, 2006.
- Held, Virginia, ed. *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995.

Heyward, Carter. "Coming Out: Journey without Maps." *Christianity and Crisis* (June 11, 1979): 153-6. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=429>.

Hopkins, Dwight N., ed. *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007.

Olyan, Saul M. and Martha C. Nussbaum, eds. *Sexual Orientation and Human Rights in American Religious Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Outka, Gene and John P. Reeder, Jr., eds. *Prospects for a Common Morality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Pilar Aquino, María, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Roríguez, eds. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002.

Pinn, Anthony B. and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds. *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*. NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.

Plaskow, Judith. "Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 (Fall 1991): 99-108.

Robb, Carol S., ed. *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

Ryan, Maura A. and Brian F. Linnane, S.J., eds. *A Just & True Love: Feminism at the Frontiers of Theological Ethics: Essays in Honor of Margaret A. Farley*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Saiving, Valerie. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." *Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April, 1960): 206-234.

Sanders, Cheryl J. "Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (Fall 1989): 83-91.

Smith, Christine M. "Sin and Evil in Feminist Thought." *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 208-219.

Soskice, Janet Martin. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Townes, Emilie. *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1983.

Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.