

Feminist and Womanist Ethics

Jan. 9-20, 2017

Amy Plantinga Pauw

Schlegel 123

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 body of 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 (40%)

*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 at the end of the syllabus). We will start each session by reading some of these aloud. I will collect these short assignments the last class period of each week, and turn them back to you the beginning of the following week. The sentences will focus on the content of the readings. **You are required to do 7 sentences.***

3. Take-home exam. (35%) **Due January 28**

Questions will be distributed on January 20. You will answer your choice of 2 questions (3 pp. each). This exam will give you opportunities to develop your own constructive statement on the ethical issues explored in this class. If you prefer instead to write a short research paper on a particular topic in feminist and womanist ethics, please set up an appointment to discuss this with me.

Note: 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.

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:

Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader, eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Westminster John Knox, 2011) Readings from this text will be in CAPS in the Course Calendar.

Course Calendar

January 9 Feminist Classics

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

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/after-death-god-father>

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

Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist theology in Theological Education," in Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, eds. *New Feminist Christianity*, 11-20 [CAMS]

Judith Plaskow, "Setting the Problem, Laying the Ground," in Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, eds., *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 2nd ed., 16-33. [CAMS]

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

January 10 The Need for Womanist Voices

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

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

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

TOWNES, ch. 3

WEEMS, ch. 4

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

Journal Question: Why is it important for womanist theology to distinguish itself from both black theology and various expressions of feminist theology?

January 11 Challenges to Womanist Thought

Cheryl J. Sanders, "Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (Fall 1989): 83-112 [CAMS]

Monica A. Coleman, "Must I Be a Womanist?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22 (Spring 2006): 85-134 [CAMS]

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

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

GILKES, ch. 6

Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Semitism; The Unacknowledged Racism," in *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics*, 94-99

Journal Question: What are Sanders's and Coleman's criticisms of mainstream womanist ethics and theology? Are there ways in which these two scholars agree?

January 12 Lynching and Black Suffering

COPELAND, ch. 9

BAKER-FLETCHER, ch. 10

TOWNES, ch. 11

SIMS, ch. 12

SIMS, ch. 16

Kelly Brown Douglas, "The Black Body: A Guilty Body" in *Stand your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, 48-89.

Journal Question: What connections can be drawn between lynching and other forms of African-American oppression and suffering?

January 13 Latina Theology

Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "Latina Feminist Theology: Charting Future Discourse," in Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, eds. *New Feminist Christianity*, 11-20 [CAMS]

Maria Pilar Aquino, "Analysis, Interconnectedness, and peacebuilding for a Just World," in Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, eds. *New Feminist Christianity*, 41-51 [CAMS]

Daisy Machado, "The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminism, and the Undocumented Woman," in Maria Pilar Aquino, Daisy Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, 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 María Pilar Aquino, Daisy Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 80-97 [CAMS]

Journal Question: How are Latina and womanist ethical concerns similar? How are they different?

January 17 Sexual Identity

Katie Cannon, "Sexing Black Women: Liberation from the Prisonhouse of Anatomical Authority," Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, eds., *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 2nd ed., 78-94 [CAMS]

Kelly Brown Douglas, "Black and Blues: God-Talk/Body-Talk for the Black Church," in Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, eds., *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 2nd ed., 48-66 [CAMS]

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power in Sexuality and the Sacred" in Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, eds., *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 2nd ed., 73-77 [CAMS]

Laurel Schneider, "What if it is a choice? Some Implications of the Homosexuality Debates for Theology," in Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, eds., *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 2nd ed., 197-204 [CAMS]

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]

Journal Question: How does race enter (or not enter) into understandings of sexual orientation for these writers?

January 18 Embodiment

Leola A. Johnson, "The Spirit Is Willing and So Is the Flesh: The Queen in Hip-Hop Culture" in Anthony Pinn, ed., *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*. 154-70 [CAMS]

Traci West, "A Space for Faith, Sexual Desire, and Ethical Black Ministerial Practices," in Anthony Pinn and Dwight Hopkins, eds., *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, 31-50 [CAMS]

COPELAND, ch. 7

BROWN DOUGLAS, ch. 8

GILKES, ch. 13

Beth Felker Jones, "Redeeming Lemons," review of Beyonce's *Lemonade*, *Christian Century*, June 20, 2016.

Journal Question: What do these writers want to affirm about Black women's bodies and their public representations?

January 19 Asian feminisms

Jane Naomi Iwamura, "Ancestral Returns: Reexamining the Horizons of Asian American Religious Practice," in Rita Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Seung Ai Yang, eds., *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, 107-121 [CAMS]

Nami Kim, "The 'Indigestible' Asian: The Unifying Term 'Asian' in Theological Discourse," in Rita Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Seung Ai Yang, eds., *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, 23-43 [CAMS]

Gale Yee, "She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn": Ruther, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority," in Rita Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Seung Ai Yang, eds., *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, 45-65 [CAMS]

Anne Joh, "Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality: Integrating the Diverse Politics of Identity into our Theology," in Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, eds. *New Feminist Christianity*, 52-63 [CAMS]

Aysha Hidayatullah, "Inspiration and Struggle with Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and Muslim Feminism," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Spring 2009)

Journal Question: What are the special challenges and obstacles for Asian women, according to these authors?

January 20 Sharing the Vision

Kwok Pui-Lan, "A Postcolonial Feminist Vision for Christianity," in Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, eds. *New Feminist Christianity*, 3-10 [CAMS]

Traci C. West, "Leadership," in *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*, 141-179.

Mary Hunt, "New Feminist Catholics: Community and Ministry," in Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, eds. *New Feminist Christianity*, 269-284 [CAMS]

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

CANNON, ch. 14

RIGGS, ch. 15

Journal Question A: Where do these feminist and womanist authors find reason to hope?

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

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."

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