

E530INT
**Ethical Wisdom: a Comparative Study of Buddhist, Native American, African
American and Humanist Traditions**

January Intensive
Dr. Sharon D. Welch
January 23-27, 2012
9:00 – 5:00
swelch@meadville.edu

In this course we will explore the way in which ethical thought and action is redefined through post-colonial critique and engagement. From a critical study of Engaged Buddhism, Native American philosophy and ethics, and African-American humanism and Christianity, we see systems in which ethical action is founded on particular spiritual and meditative practices that elicit habits of attention, shape desire, and form a sense of the self as embedded in a collective and historical matrix. From these traditions, we discover the ways in which ethics is as much a matter of shaping collective courage, will, and emotion as it is a matter of individual critical, rational and principled judgment.

From a study of post-colonial comparative religious ethics, we also see western ethics differently. From the point of view of Buddhist, Native American and African American traditions, we will explore the critical possibilities of one prevalent form of western ethics – social contract theory. We will also take up a third task: given the challenges of religious and ethical pluralism, how do we see and understand difference, and then work together to shape a collective, ethical wisdom?

Course Bibliography

Required:

Course reader –Carol Lee Sanchez, “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: The Sacred Connection,” in Carol Adams, editor. *Ecofeminism and The Sacred*. New York: Continuum, 1993, pp.208-228;
Carol Lee Sanchez, “New World Tribal Communities” in *Weaving the Visions*. Edited Judith Plaskow. San Francisco: Harper Collins, pp. 344-356;
James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*. New York: Grove Press. 1998, pp. 43-71.
Michel Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher,” in Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984. Volume I.*, pp. 321-328.
Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations,” in Paul Rabinow, editor, *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. pp. 381-390.
Albert Bandura, “Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 1088-8683, July 1, 1999, Vol. 3, Issue 3.
Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.2010. Preface, chapter three and chapter five.

Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *African American Women Tapping Power and Spiritual Wellness*, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004. preface, chapter one and chapter two.

Required Texts:

- Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003.
- Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Thich Nhat Hanh: *Essential Writings*. Edited by Robert Ellsberg. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001.
- Anthony Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.
- Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.
- William F. Schulz, *Tainted Legacy: 9/11 and the Ruin of Human Rights*. New York: Nation Books, 2003.
- Sharon Welch, *After Empire: The Art and Ethos of Enduring Peace*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.
- Sharon Welch, *Sweet Dreams in America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work*. New York: Routledge Press, 1999.

Recommended Texts:

- Read one of the following books. Groups will be assigned to present a synopsis of one book to the class.
- Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves*. Mariner Books. 2006
- Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Mariner Books, 1999.
- Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2006.
- James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*. New York: Grove Press. 1998.

Objectives:

1. Understand the task of postcolonial comparative religious ethics.
2. Understand each of the four ethical positions studied in the course.
3. Clarify your own position on the correlation of ethical action and judgment and spiritual and meditative practices.

Requirements:

1. Post a one page bio and description of your goals for the class by **October 21**.
2. Daily class attendance.

3. One page response to each selection in the course reader, completed prior to beginning of course. Identify major points that you would like to explore further, or areas where you have questions to ask of the text.

4. Written responses to each required text, two- three typed pages, prepared before course begins. Identify major points that you would like to explore further, or areas where you have questions to ask of the text.

5. Presentation on colonial history:

Select one of the suggested texts on colonial history, and notify the instructor of your choice by **November 1**. You will meet with others who have selected the same book the first day of class in order to plan your joint 30 minute presentation. You will plan those presentations in the morning, and present them in the afternoon. No written text is required. The required readings for the first day of class on postcolonialism and moral behavior (Young, Appiah and Bandura) will help you focus your presentation. They raise key issues about colonial history, the causes of collective inhumanity, and the nature of moral revolutions. We will discuss the readings by Young, Appiah and Bandura, and then explore, based on your presentations, the ways in which these theories are illustrated, challenged, or confirmed in the four colonial histories.

6. Presentation and research paper on postcolonial ethics.

Research topic confirmed by **November 1**, paper due **January 24 – 27**. In addition to the required texts, select one additional reading on either Native American ethical traditions, Engaged Buddhism, African American traditions or social contract theory. In your research paper and class presentation, relate the recommended reading that you have chosen to the required text, focusing on how it amplifies or contrasts with what everyone else is reading for that session. You may also devote up to one third of the paper to a comparative discussion of your own understanding of the relationship of ethical action and judgment and spiritual and/or meditative practices. The paper will be turned in the day of your in-class presentation.

During the class, you will meet with others who have chosen the same topic to coordinate your presentations. You will each have up to 30 minutes for your individual presentation on the reading that you have selected.

Class session outline:

- 1. Monday.** Challenges and opportunities of postcolonialism. Discuss Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*; from course reader, essay by Albert Bandura and chapters by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Presentation of histories of colonialism.
- 2. Tuesday.** Challenges and opportunities of postcolonialism. Discuss Welch, *Sweet Dreams in America*, and, from course reader, essays by Michel Foucault. Native American traditions. Discuss required reading: Course reader – selections from Sanchez, and Wilson; King, *The Truth About Stories*.
- 3. Wednesday .** Presentations – Native American Traditions Engaged Buddhism. Discuss required reading: Thich Nhat Hanh, *Essential Writings*. Presentations.

4. Thursday. African American traditions. Discuss required reading: Anthony Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*, Karen Baker Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, and from course reader, Stephanie Mitchem, *African American Women Tapping Power and Spiritual Wellness*. Presentation.

5. Friday. Social contract theory. Discuss required reading: William F. Schulz, *Tainted Legacy*, and Sharon Welch, *After Empire*. Presentation

Presentations

Select one additional book to compare to the required readings.

II. Tuesday. Native American traditions.

Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Jace Weaver, *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.

James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*. New York: Grove Press, 1998.

Leslie Marmon Silko. *Ceremony*. New York Penguin Classics: 2006.

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Gardens in the Dunes: A Novel*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

III. Engaged Buddhism.

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism. Third Edition*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998.

Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism Without Beliefs: A Guide to Contemporary Awakening*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997.

Christopher S. Queen, Editor. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. 2000.

Linda Holler, *Erotic Morality: The Role of Touch in Moral Agency*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

IV. African American traditions.

Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: a Womanist Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2008.

Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: the Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. New York: Random House, 2010.

V. Social contract theory.

William F. Schulz, *In Our Own Best Interest*. Beacon Press: 2002.

William F. Schulz, *Making the Manifesto: the Birth of Religious Humanism*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2002.

William F. Schulz, *Finding Time and Other Delicacies*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1992, and The 2006 Berry Street Lecture, “What Torture’s Taught Me” (available at <http://www.uuma.org/BerryStreet/Essays/BSE2006.htm>)
Sharon D. Welch, *Real Peace, Real Security: The Challenges of Global Citizenship*, with a foreword by William Schulz. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2008, and “The Machiavellian Dilemma,” *Tikkun*, May 2010. (available at <http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/the-machiavellian-dilemma>)