

Ethical Wisdom: a Comparative Study of Buddhist, Native American, African American and Humanist traditions

Summer Intensive
Dr. Sharon D. Welch
July 20-24, 2009
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, 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 see 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 positions, 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;
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.
Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *African American Women Tapping Power and Spiritual Wellness*, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004. preface, chapter one and chapter two.
William F. Schulz, “What Torture Has Taught Me”
<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/6555.shtml>
William F. Schulz, “Hold On: the Wisdom of Endurance”
<http://www.uuworld.org/life/articles/121286.shtml>
William F. Schulz, “What Makes Rights “Right”” in *Tainted Legacy*, New York: Nation Books, 2003.

Required Texts:

- Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*. New York: Grove Press, 1998 (Prologue, Part I, and chapter on area of the country in which you currently live, or have lived).
- 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.
- 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 at least one of the following books. Groups will be assigned to present a synopsis of each 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.

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. Class attendance.
2. Prior reading of assigned texts and materials in course reader. Read the texts in the order in which they will be discussed during the class.
3. Two group projects, one on colonial history, one on postcolonial ethics. Research done, and groups formed, prior to class. Presentations planned once class begins.
4. Written responses to each required text, two- three typed pages, prepared before course begins.

5. Research paper, completed by August 15. Research proposals will be discussed with the instructor during the course.

Assignments:

1. Read the course packet prior to the course. Write a one to two page response to each essay.
2. Read each of the eight required texts, and write a one to two page response to each text. We will address your insights and questions in class discussions. Highlight key aspects of each text, areas that you find unclear, and/or your own critical response to the text.
3. Prepare a 30 minute presentation for two class sessions. In the first presentation, you will present your analysis of one study of colonial history. In the second presentation you will critically evaluate the texts assigned to the class in light of one additional reading (options listed below). Select a topic and optional text by June 15, and inform me of your choice.
4. Research paper, ten to twelve pages, due August 15. In this paper, continue the research begun in your in-class presentation. Address how the additional reading illuminates, challenges, amplifies or contradicts the assigned reading. 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.

Statement Regarding Adaptation or Accommodation

NOTE: If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible.

At any point in the course, if you encounter difficulty with the course or believe you could be performing at a higher level, consult with me. As an instructor, my obligation is to ensure that the work you encounter is relevant to your needs and is accessible. Unless you negotiate inadequate conditions, I will assume your learning needs are being met. Students experience difficulty in courses for a variety of reasons. For problems with writing skills or time management, please speak with me, and we'll locate resources to help you negotiate such an issue.

Class session outline:

- I. Monday. Challenges and opportunities of postcolonialism. Discuss Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*; from course reader, essay by Albert Bandura. Presentation of histories of colonialism.
- II. 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; James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*. New

York: Grove Press. 1998 – read prologue, Part I, and chapter on the area of the country in which you currently live, or the area of the country in which you were raised; Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*.

Presentation on Native American Traditions.

3. Engaged Buddhism. Discuss required reading: Thich Nhat Hanh, *Essential Writings*. Presentation

4. 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. Social contract theory. Discuss required reading: Reader: three articles by William F. Schulz; 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.

Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, *Women and Power in Native North America*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press. 1995.

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, Editor. *By These Hands: A Documentary History of African American Humanism*. New York University Press. 2001.

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.

Toni Morrison, *Paradise*. New York: Random House, 1999.

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*. New York: Vintage, 1998.
Stephanie Mitchem, *Name It and Claim It: Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 2007.
Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

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.
Sharon D. Welch, *Real Peace, Real Security: The Challenges of Global Citizenship*. with a foreword by William F. Schulz. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.