

CE – 261 Christian Social Ethics
Methodist Theological School in Ohio Fall 2008
Tuesdays, 8:30 – 11:20 a.m., L 1
Dr. Yvonne Zimmerman
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Course Description

The Christian community as both context and resource for shaping moral sensibilities is called to sustain ways of life with distinctive loyalties, values and commitments that are patterned after the life and teachings of Jesus. The type of ethical discernment this requires is informed by both social theory (i.e., analysis of class, race and gender systems) and the Christian tradition (i.e., Biblical norms and church teachings). With these tools, students in this course are challenged to imagine how Christian people and the church can engage the world in ways that go beyond pseudo-ethical analyses of functionality (i.e. Do particular social arrangements work?) to engage the more difficult ethical questions about whether particular social arrangements and practices reflect the radical commonwealth of God to which we belong.

Required Texts

Miguel De la Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*

Patricia Hill Collins *Black Sexual Politics*

bell hooks. *Where we Stand: Class Matters*

Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*

Michael Kimmel, *The Gendered Society*

Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*

H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*

Traci West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*

Requirements

In order to get the most out of this course, your participation in the following experiences is essential:

- Attendance at all class meetings and informed participation in class activities
- Careful reading of assigned material
- Ethical Lounging with Course Companions
- Leading class discussion with Course Companions
- Intellectual Journals
- Text memorization
- Final Paper

The details of these requirements are as follows:

1. Attending and participating in class sessions and discussions.

Because of the format of this class, your presence and involvement at all class-meetings is essential.

- You are permitted 1 absence during the semester—no questions asked—but additional absences and/or chronic tardiness will result in the lowering of your final grade, so I suggest you reserve this excused absence for emergencies. Students who take additional absences are not eligible to receive an A in the course.
- During class discussions, it is not likely that we will agree on all issues. However, disagreement—no matter how profound—must not be used as a pretense for rude or unprofessional behavior. I suggest that conflicting perspectives be used as opportunity to practice the professional and pastoral skill of agreeing and disagreeing with one another in love. . . .or, at least, with collegial respect.
- Please turn cell phone ringers off during class. Surfing the internet and sending or receiving text messages are not permitted.

2. Reading the assigned materials To insightfully participate—and to learn—you will need to read carefully all the assigned reading. You should arrive in class having read the material and prepared to ask and answer questions about it.

3. Ethical Lounging with Course Companions

You are required to meet on a weekly basis with a small group to discuss current readings. These individuals will be your course companions for the semester. Each group will submit an analysis of the group's discussion for that week. These analyses should indicate who was present, as well as the high and low points of your discussion.

4. Leading Class Discussion with Course Companions

During the semester, each group of Course Companions will be responsible for leading 2 approximately 1-hour long class discussions. Your presentation should cover the key points of the assigned reading and should address the following questions:

- How does the author understand the urgent social issues of the day?
- If the author identifies as Christian, what does s/he see as the role of Christian ethics in addressing these problems?
- What is the method in the doing of Christian ethics? And/or what kind of use of social science is made?
- Who are the major dialogue partners from both the present and the past for the author(s)?

Finally, pose some interesting and challenging questions for the class to discuss.

Please, please, **please** be creative!

5. Intellectual Journal

Each student will maintain an Intellectual Journal throughout the course to assist you in being a meaningful contributor to class discussion and to the ethical lounging you do with your Course Companions. In it you will have abstracts of the readings (summaries of the main points) and

your responses to the readings, including how they connect to your own vocation and/or understanding of Christian community. Additionally, your Intellectual Journal is a good place to “store” passages from the texts that you consider good candidates for the memorization assignments. (Note: Placing a passage in your Journal does not commit you to memorizing it; rather, this is just a good way to keep track of good possibilities, and it is also helpful for me to see which passages you feel are most salient for you).

You will make one entry per week for a total of 12 entries. You may collaborate with your colleagues outside of class on these journals, but each person is ultimately responsible for her/his own work.

*** Please keep your entries focused on the texts and attendant issues. These journals are *not* an appropriate place for general or personal reflection on your own lives (however interesting that may be!)

Length: While your typed and dated journal entries may vary in length, each should be a minimum of 2 -3 paragraphs (approximately 250 words), *not* counting your memorization-candidates—these can be as long as you like.

Due: Sept. 9, Sept. 30, Oct. 28, Nov. 18

6. Text Memorization

How often have you been in a conversation with someone about some very important issue and you remember reading some insightful tidbit about the topic at hand, and all you can say is “Well, I know that Name of Author had a really interesting point about _____. I forget exactly how s/he said it, but it was something to the effect of...” and you proceed to not very effectively deliver some otherwise very powerful insight? This is your opportunity to commit to memory *exactly* what the author of your choice said!

From the assigned readings, you will select four passages to memorize: two of the passages must be from Christian ethicists; two from social theorists. Each passage you select must contain a *minimum* of three sentences. You may memorize these either to be written (by hand!) in class on Oct. 14 and Dec. 2, **or** to recite to me orally (in my office by appointment) by those same dates. In advance of whatever method of recitation you chose, please prepare a brief 1-paragraph description of why this is a salient passage for you.

7. Final Paper. Details TBA

Grading

Attendance and participation: 60%

Includes attendance, contribution to the class, ethical lounging with course companions & in-class presentations

Intellectual Journals: 15%

Text memorization: 10%

Final Paper: 15%

Grade Scale:

90 – 100 = A

80 – 89 = B

70 – 79 = C

60 – 69 = D

Below 60 = F

Class Schedule

Week 1 (Aug. 26): Introduction

Read: West, Preface & Introduction
De la Torre, Preface, Ch. 1-2
Troeltsch, xix-xxi, 23-34 (Online)

Week 2 (Sept. 2): Christianity’s “Social” Ethic

Read: Troeltsch, 39-89; 991-1013 (Online)
Meeks 1-17, 91-110, 189-219

Week 3 (Sept. 9): Social... To What End?

Read: H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*
First set of Intellectual Journals due

Week 4 (Sept. 16): Doing Social Analysis

Read: Young, “Five faces of Oppression” (Online)
De la Torre, Ch. 3.
Recommended: “Introduction: The Politics of Critical Social Theory” in *Fighting Words*
by Patricia Hill Collins (Online)

Week 5 (Sept. 23): Gender I

Read: Kimmel: 1-17; 86-107
West Ch. 3
Course Companion Presentation 1: **group 4**

Week 6 (Sept. 30): Gender II

Read: Kimmel: 111-149, 242-268
Harrison, “Making Connections” (Online)
Boyd, “The Men We Long to Be” (Online)
Second set of Intellectual Journals due
Course Companion Presentation 2: **group 3**

Oct. 7: No class—fall recess!

Week 7 (Oct. 14): Race I

Read: Hill Collins, Ch. 1-2, 4
West, Ch. 4
First set of text-memorizations due
Course Companion Presentation 3: **group 1**

Week 8 (Oct. 21): Race II

Read: Hill Collins Ch. 5-6, 8

De la Torre, ch. 14

Course Companion Presentation 4: *group 3*

Week 9 (Oct. 28): Class I

Read: hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters*

** Third set of Intellectual Journals due**

Course Companion Presentation 5: *group 2*

Week 10: (Nov. 4): Class II

Read: West “The Policing of Poor Black Women’s Sexual Reproduction” (Online)

De la Torre, Ch. 9

Course Companion Presentation 6: *group 1*

Week 11 (Nov. 11): Sexuality I

Read: Rubin “Thinking Sex” (Online)

Gudorf “The Social Construction of Sexuality: Implications for Churches” (Online)

Taves “Sexuality in American Religious History” (Online)

West, Ch. 5

Course Companion Presentation 7: *group 3*

Week 12 (Nov. 18): Sexuality II

Read: Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*

Fourth set of Intellectual Journals due

Course Companion Presentation 8: *group 4*

Nov. 25: No class—Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 13 (Dec. 2): Wrap up & Review

** Second set of text-memorizations due**

General Guidelines for papers

1. All papers should be typed and double spaced with 1-inch margins. Font-size should be no larger than 12 pt, and no smaller than 10 pt.
2. Basic rules of grammar, punctuation, and sentence and paragraph structure must be followed meticulously. Contractions (i.e. can't, don't, shouldn't, etc.) are *never* appropriate in formal papers.
3. Wherever possible, in papers as well as in class discussions, you must use inclusive language.
4. All papers should be proof-read by someone *other than yourself* before they are submitted for a grade.
5. Please refer to the “Expectations for Documenting Work at MTSO” section of the student handbook
6. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day

Academic Integrity

No cheating is acceptable. Any work that is not your own creative effort or that falls under any of the categories specified as Academic Misconduct in the MTSO Student Handbook (available at http://academics.mtso.edu/Student%20Handbook%20and%20Policies/2007_8_handbook_FINAL.pdf, p.38-39) will automatically be given a zero. No rewrites or second chances will be permitted. Cheating can also result in the complete failure of the course.