



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Proposal

The attached document contains the narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful proposal may be crafted. Every successful proposal is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the program guidelines at <http://www.neh.gov/grants/education/enduring-questions> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Education Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: NEH Enduring Questions Course on Virtue and Gender

Institution: Boston College

Project Director: Martha Bayles

Grant Program: Enduring Questions

Do the Virtues Have Gender?

Martha Bayles, Boston College

I. *Intellectual Rationale And Teaching Value*: What is a virtuous person? The question lies at the heart of every civilization. In the West, the word *virtue* is derived from the Latin *vir*, meaning man. So other questions arise: Do the separate virtues, such as courage, moderation, and greatness of soul, have gender? Similarly, do the separate vices, such as cowardice, licentiousness, and smallness of soul, belong to one sex more than to the other? If our description of a virtuous person differs according to whether that person is male or female, should we think of that difference as natural, rooted in biology; or as artificial, part of a socially constructed gender role? Are “masculine” virtues superior to “feminine,” or vice versa? And finally, would the world be a better place if the virtues (and vices) did not have gender?

The course will also include a “Bridging Cultures” dimension, focused on the difference between Western and Islamic views of the relationship between virtue and gender. As explained below, this aspect of the course grows out of the research on the research for my latest book, *Through a Screen Darkly: Popular Culture, Public Diplomacy, and America’s Image Abroad* (Yale 2014). While conducting in-depth interviews in eleven countries, including Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Indonesia, I was repeatedly struck by the fascination – and concern – that people in Muslim-majority countries feel toward contemporary American ideas about gender. Viewed from the Western perspective, the charged debate about women’s role in society is chiefly about equality. But viewed from the perspective of millions of ordinary Muslims, a majority of whom admire the West and have adopted many Western ways, the debate is also about virtue. Neither side is very good at bridging this cultural gap, so a course that traces the connections between gender and virtue in both Western and Islamic cultural contexts could not be more relevant to the current generation of undergraduates.

The first step will be to challenge the students’ received ideas about virtue and gender. Thus, we will begin with Ursula Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a beautiful, compelling novel about an extraterrestrial race of humans who are sexless except during their mating season, when they become, temporarily and involuntarily, either male or

female. By creating fully rounded characters, noble and ignoble, who belong to this race, Le Guin forces us to detach our understanding of the separate virtues from our expectations of how men and women should behave. From this starting point, the course will proceed through five units: **Origins, Difference and Equality, Masculine Virtue, Feminine Virtue**, and **Battle and Truce**.

The first unit, **Origins**, will begin with the ancient Greek myth of how the cosmos was engendered by the agonistic coupling of male sky (Uranus) and female earth (Gaia), and the first man, fashioned from clay by Prometheus, was punished by Zeus with the creation of Pandora, whose curiosity unleashed all the world's woes. For an account of the separate virtues as understood in the West, we will read Book 3 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Then we will turn to the divergent creation stories found in Genesis 1, Genesis 2, and the Quran; followed by the naturalistic theories of sex difference put forth by Aristotle, Darwin, and Freud. None of these accounts will be taken at face value; all will be considered in the light of thoughtful feminist critiques.

The second unit, **Difference and Equality**, will proceed from the assumption that, while sex is a (more or less) accepted biological fact, gender is a fluid concept. Hence the perennial debate between "difference feminism," which sees gender as natural but insists on parity between the masculine and feminine virtues, and "equality feminism," which sees gender as a social construct devised to keep women subjugated. To gain historical perspective on this debate, we will read Book V of Plato's *Republic*, which imagines the consequences of eliminating gender for the sake of justice, and two works about gender role reversal: Aristophanes' political satire *Ecclesiazusae*, and Shakespeare's romantic comedy, *As You Like It*. (We will also watch the film version of *As You Like It*, directed by Kenneth Branagh.) And finally, we will read about the current debate over whether neurological differences between male and female brains explains anything about gender.

The third unit, **Masculine Virtue**, will consider the masculine virtues celebrated by Athens and Rome: bodily strength, courage in battle, self-control, rational intellect, leadership. The readings will begin with the portrayals of Hector and Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*, and *Augustus* by the American novelist John Williams. For the transformation of masculine virtue wrought by monotheistic religion, we will read about Abraham and Moses in the Torah, Jesus in the Gospels, and Muhammad in the Hadith of Sahith al-Bukhari. Then

we will consider the medieval synthesis of pagan and Christian virtue delineated in Geoffroi de Chamy in *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*. And finally we will read three sober but appreciative assessments of masculine virtue in the modern age: "The Moral Equivalent of War" by William James; *Out in the Dark*, an anthology of First World War poetry edited by David Roberts; and *Iron Man* by Robert Bly.

Unit four, **Feminine Virtue**, will begin with the ancient view of the separate feminine virtues – modesty, industry, frugality, nurturing, and obedience, and the rest – as inferior to the masculine, because they arise from the private necessities of raising children and maintaining households. In the Abrahamic tradition, women are held to be the equal of men in the eyes of God, but at the same time, God is male, and women are taught to fear and love Him through the mediation of male kindred and authority figures.

To keep this unit from being one-dimensional, we will also read two ancient works in which the feminine virtues can be interpreted as superior. One is *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides. (We will also watch the film version directed by Michael Cacoyannis.) The other is Augustine's *Confession*, in which he describes his mother Monica, an illiterate woman from a backward province of the Roman world, as a paragon of Christian virtue.

The association of feminine virtue with Christianity has a long history, so we will turn next to the Christian, specifically Protestant, roots of the contemporary American belief that if women had more power, the world would be a more peaceful and harmonious place. We will study the nineteenth-century debate over the role of women in public life by reading excerpts from social reformer Lucretia Mott, who believed that "the mind has no sex"; and suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who initially agreed with Mott but later took the more politically viable position that women belonged in the public sphere precisely because their virtues were superior to those of men.

In the fifth and final unit, **Battle and Truce**, we will read Herodotus' telling of the myth of the Amazons, which ends with a surprisingly equitable truce between that tribe of warrior women and a tribe of Scythian men. Then we will read Book 5 of the *Emile*, in which Rousseau argues for a separate and unequal form of education for Emile's future wife Sophie, followed by two critics of the *Emile*, Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macauley, who stress the failure of conventional female education to prepare young women for any challenge beyond that of attracting a respectable husband.

In this general vein, the course will end with an examination of the post-Enlightenment ideal of marriage as a noble truce, in which true friendship, once seen as exclusively male, is united with erotic passion, once seen as disruptive to marriage. In the words of the eighteenth-century Scottish poet James Thomson, couples who achieve such a truce are “the happiest of their kind ... / Attuning all their passions into love; ... / Where friendship full-exerts her softest power, / Perfect esteem enlivened by desire.”

Ask American college students what kind of marriage they hope for, and the answer will likely reflect this ideal. Sociologists call it “companionate marriage,” and because many students believe, mistakenly, that it is a product of twentieth-century feminism, this final unit will hint at a longer pedigree. Thus, we will read the final ten books of Homer’s *Odyssey*, which depict not only the excellence of the hero’s judgment but also that of his wife, Penelope. And we will compare accounts, taken from primary and secondary sources, of the relationship between Muhammad and his first wife, Khadija.

Returning again to modernity and America, we will end with selections from the correspondence of Abigail and John Adams, followed by Tocqueville’s observations about American women in Volume Two of *Democracy in America*. In the final week, we will bring this Enduring Question back home by watching selected episodes of *Friday Night Lights*, an extraordinary TV series that, while ostensibly about a high school football team in West Texas, offers an intelligent, subtle, and moving portrayal of a successful companionate marriage.

II. *Course Preparation*: My first impulse, when sketching the outlines of this proposed course, was to frame the question primarily in terms of gender. But upon reflection, and in consultation with colleagues who have worked extensively on gender-related topics, I decided to turn the question around and frame it in terms of virtue – or more accurately, the separate virtues. Based on my experience teaching in the Boston College Honors Program, I expect this approach to be more arresting and challenging to contemporary undergraduates than one framed in the familiar language of gender.

I have no doubt that the preparation for this course will expand my intellectual and scholarly horizons. The interviews, research, and writing that went into *Through a Screen Darkly* whetted my appetite for a deeper immersion in the questions posed here – questions that preoccupy millions of people around the world, and (as noted above) are

likely to remain urgent for the current generation of students. An Enduring Questions grant would allow me to approach these questions from three angles. First, it would enable me to build on what is already an abiding interest in ancient and modern political theory. Second, it would require me to delve more systematically into the Islamic side of the global debate over virtue and gender. And third, it would provide an opportunity to read more deeply in the history of feminism, especially as it has developed in the United States.

I will begin work upon receipt of the grant in September 2015, and plan to teach it in the fall semesters of 2016 and 2017. My preparation will involve extensive reading, consultation with colleagues well versed in the literature included in the course, and fine-tuning the core reading list to make it challenging but also manageable for the kind of highly motivated undergraduates I have been teaching for the last ten years at BC, and before that at Claremont McKenna College.

III. *Envisioned Course Design:* As a Senior Seminar offered by the Boston College Arts & Sciences Honors Program, the course will benefit from an already existing intellectual community. But it will in turn benefit that community, in three ways. First, it will focus on a question that comes up in many Honors courses but that because of the program's structure does not receive sustained attention. Second, it will highlight the American contribution to the Western cultural tradition, a topic unfortunately neglected in a curriculum whose orientation is decidedly Eurocentric. And third, it will search out the common ground between Western and Islamic views of virtue and gender, at a time when greater understanding is urgently needed.

The course will be open to all Boston College undergraduates who have completed the core requirements in humanities and social science. For the sake of group cohesion and fruitful discussion, the class will be limited to 17 students. We will meet once a week for fifteen weeks, with each session lasting two hours and twenty minutes. We will also meet outside of class to share meals, watch films, and attend plays or exhibitions. The written assignments will include a response paper to each reading assignment, as well as two longer analytic essays and a take-home exam made up of three or four argumentative essays.

IV. *Dissemination:* My goal is to speak about this course before the Honors Program's Faculty Symposium, the Council for Women at Boston College, the Harvard Club of Boston

and New York, and similar groups. Further afield, I will submit a paper to the annual conference of the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC) and reach out to colleagues at overseas universities such as Koç University in Istanbul, the American University of Beirut, the American University in Cairo, the American University of Sharjah, the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, and New York University in Abu Dhabi. In such settings, where the potential for friction on the subject of virtue and gender is great, my approach to the topic should attract considerable attention. And finally, as a nationally known cultural critic, I will have many opportunities to share the experience of teaching the course with the wider reading public.

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TENTATIVE COURSE READINGS

Depending on difficulty, the average weekly reading will be 100-125 pages.

Introduction:

Le Guin, Ursula. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Ace Books, 2000 (entire).

Origins:

Hesiod. *Theogony* (trans. R. S. Caldwell). Focus Classical Library, 1987 (excerpt).

Genesis (trans. Robert Alter). Norton, 1997 (excerpt).

Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man*. Penguin Classics, 2004 (excerpt).

Difference and Equality:

Plato. *Republic*, Book V (trans. Allan Bloom). Basic Books, 1991.

Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Signet Classics, 1998 (entire).

Masculine Virtue:

Williams, John. *Augustus*. New York Review Books, 2014 (entire).

Chamy, Geoffroi de. *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry* (trans. Elspeth Kennedy).

University of Pennsylvania, 2005 (excerpts).

Feminine Virtue:

Euripides. *Iphigenia in Aulis* (trans. Charles R. Walker). In *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Mark Griffith, ed. University of Chicago, 2013 (entire).

Mott, Lucretia. *Discourse on Woman*. Quantro Historical Reprints, 2009 (excerpts).

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. *Eighty Years and More*. Humanity Books, 2002 (excerpts).

Battle and Truce:

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile and Sophie, or the Solitaries* (trans. Christopher Kelly), in Kelly, Christopher and Grace, Eve, eds. *Rousseau on Women, Love, and Family*. Dartmouth College Press, 2009 (entire).

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*. Pearson Longman, 2007 (excerpts).

Homer. *Odyssey*, Books XIV-XXIV (trans. Robert Fitzgerald). Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.

Adams, Abigail and John. *The Letters of John and Abigail Adams*. Penguin Classics, 2003 (excerpts).

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COURSE PREPARATION READINGS

- Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. Yale University Press, 1993.
- Adams, Abigail and John. *The Letters of John and Abigail Adams*. Penguin Classics, 2003.
- Aristophanes. *Ecclesiazusae* (trans. Jeffrey Henderson). Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 4.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 3 (trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins). University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex* (trans. Constance Bord and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier). Vintage, 2011.
- Bloom, Allan. *Love and Friendship*. Simon and Schuster, 1993.
- Bly, Robert. *Iron John*. De Capo, 2004.
- Bowman, James. *Honor*. Encounter Books, 2006.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2006.
- Chamy, Geoffroi de. *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry* (trans. Elspeth Kennedy). University of Pennsylvania, 2005
- Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man*. Penguin Classics, 2004.
- Davies, Kate. *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Euripides. *Iphigenia in Aulis* (trans. Charles R. Walker) In *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Mark Griffith, ed. University of Chicago, 2013.
- Filmer, Robert. *Patriarcha and Other Political Writings*. Patrimonium Publishing, 2011.
- Flexner, Eleanor. *Century of Struggle*. Harvard University Press, 1977.
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. *Feminism Without Illusions*. University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (trans. James Strachey). Norton, 1990.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Dell, 1979.
- Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. *In the Wake of the Goddesses*. Free Press, 1992.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice*. Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. Dover Thrift, 1998.
- Genesis (trans. Robert Alter). Norton, 1997.
- Gunther-Canada, Wendy. "The Politics of Sense and Sensibility." In *Women Writers and the Early Modern Political Tradition*, H. Smith, ed. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Hagstrum, Jean H. *Esteem Enlivened by Desire*. University of Chicago, 1992.
- Herodotus. *The Histories* (trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt). Penguin Classics, 2003.
- Hesiod. *Theogony* (trans. R. S. Caldwell). Focus Classical Library, 1987.
- Homer. *Iliad* (trans. Robert Fitzgerald). Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.
- Homer. *Odyssey* (trans. Robert Fitzgerald). Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.
- James, William. *William James, Writings 1902-1910*. Library of America, 1987.
- Jensen, Pamela Grande. *Finding a New Feminism*. Rowman and Littlefield, 1996.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She Who Is*. Crossroad, 1992.

Kerber, Linda K. *Women of the Republic*. University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

Lasch, Christopher. *Women and the Common Life*. Norton, 1997.

Lawrence, Bruce. *The Qur'an: A Biography*. Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006.

Le Guin, Ursula. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Ace Books, 2000.

Locke, John. *Second Treatise on Government*. Hackett, 1980.

Macauley, *Letters on Education*

Saba Mahmood. *Politics of Piety*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Marsden, George M. *Religion and American Culture*. Thomson Learning, 2001.

Miles, Jack. *God: A Biography*. Vintage Books, 1996.

Meyers, Carol. *Rediscovering Eve*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Mansfield, Harvey C. *Manliness*. Yale University Press, 2007.

McClain, Linda C. "Nature, Culture, and Social Engineering." Boston University School of Law Working Paper No. 12-53 (2012).

Montagu, Ashley. *The Natural Superiority of Women*. Sage Publications, 1999.

Montesquieu. *Persian Letters* (trans. C. J. Betts). Penguin Classics, 2004.

Morgan, Edmund. *The Puritan Family*. Harper Torchbooks, 1964.

Mott, Lucretia. *Discourse on Woman*. Quantro Historical Reprints, 2009.

Newsom, Carol A. et al., eds. *Women's Bible Commentary*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.

Okin, Susan Moller, et al. *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton University Press, 1999.

Plato. *Republic*, Book V (trans. Allan Bloom). Basic Books, 1991.

Pollitt, Katha. *Reasonable Creatures*. Vintage, 1995.

The Qur'an (trans. Muhammad Abdel Hareem). Oxford World Classics, 2 S.

Roberts, David, ed. *Out in the Dark: Poetry of the First World War*. Transatlantic, 1998.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile and Sophie, or the Solitaries* (trans. Christopher Kelly), in Kelley, Chris and Grace, Eve, eds. *Rousseau on Women, Love, and Family*. Dartmouth College Press, 2009.

Ruthven, Malise. *Islam and the World*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Saxonhouse, Arlene W. *Fear of Diversity*. University of Chicago, 1992.

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Signet Classics, 1998.

Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Signet Classics, 1998.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. *Eighty Years and More*. Humanity Books, 2002.

Swanson, Judith A. *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy*. Cornell University Press, 1992.

Tipton, Steven Jr. and John Witte, eds. *Family Transformed*. Georgetown University Press, 2005.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America* (trans. Arthur Goldhammer), Library of America, 2004.

Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and Woman*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Williams, John. *Augustus*. New York Review Books, 2014.

Wilson, James Q. *The Moral Sense*. Free Press, 1997.

Wood, Gordon S. *The Idea of America*. Penguin, 2011.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*. Pearson Longman, 2007.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Harcourt Brace, 1981.