



Prototypes I-III: Artist Photos, Diapers (Rinsing), ca. 1976, Mary Kelly

Theorizing Care in an Uneven World

THEOCRIT 9659

Winter 2023

Tuesdays 1:30-4:30pm

Prof. Kate Lawless

klawles@uwo.ca

519-438-7224 x705

Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

Care is both a vital human need and a form of relationality that remains highly under-valued and under-theorized. And yet, in the age of pandemics, human displacement and ecological crisis, it is (back) on the global agenda. This seminar engages (the return to) care from a variety of disciplinary and theoretical vantage points to examine how it might serve as an analytic for contemporary social and political life. We explore normative and radical conceptions of care, in terms of its practical/theoretical, ethical/political, individual/structural configurations, beginning with philosophical foundations (Plato, Aristotle) and moving through various historical and theoretical moments, including world-care and self-care (Heidegger, Arendt, Foucault); feminist, Black and Indigenous care ethics (Gilligan, Noddings, Lorde, Kimmerer); the politics of care work (Federici, Fraser); fugitive planning as care (Harney and Moten); and speculative ethics (Puig de la Bellacasa). We close with two multi-species ethnographies that theorize more-than-human forms of care, their intersections with human ideals (such as conservation and resilience), and their challenge to the category of the human itself (Hartigan Jr., Parreñas). Throughout the course, we ask: How can care be a site of social and political change? Can we imagine a radically transformative form of care? What is the relationship between an ethics of care and its politics? Is care intrinsically good? Might it be violent? What is the relationship between self-care and world-care? Is self-care inherently narcissistic or individualistic? Has it been co-opted by neoliberalism? How is this challenged by Black radical and Indigenous traditions? What can we learn about the history of care by reading it through the lenses of social and material difference? How do collapsing ontological distinctions and new epistemologies challenge our normative and anthropocentric notions of care? What forms of living and dying, thinking and knowing, building and letting go might emerge from care's re-enchantment? Overall, our aim in this course is to investigate the socially, politically, and ethically revolutionary possibilities of theorizing and materializing care in an increasingly hostile and uneven world.

Learning Objectives

1. To recognize the long but often implicit tradition of theorizing care in philosophy and contemporary theory
2. To identify connections between ethics and practices of care and the organization of social and political life
3. To examine normative conceptions of care and challenges posed by feminist, Black, Indigenous, and post-humanist thinkers
4. To imagine the revolutionary possibilities that might emerge from (re-)centering questions of care

Assignments

- Critical Questions (10%): *weekly*
- Peer Teaching Presentations (30%): *students will select dates*
- Conference Paper Abstract **OR** Annotated Bibliography (20%): *Feb 27*
- Conference Paper + Presentation **OR** Stand-Alone Literature Review (40%): *Apr 11 & 25*

Details for all assignments will be provided in class and on OWL under Assignments

Critical Questions: Beginning in week 2, you will prepare weekly questions based on the assigned readings. Your questions should be critical but clear, as well as directed and meaningful. You should provide some preamble to situate your question. These should be emailed to me at least 24 hours prior to the start of class. Each question is worth 1% and is graded on a 3-point scale.

Peer Teaching Presentations: On pre-selected dates, you will prepare two 30-minute teaching presentations designed to help your peers understand the assigned readings. You may engage with one reading or several from the same week. You should provide some elaboration of the reading, or portions of it, and prepare an activity or exercise (preceded by some context) that will make the reading even more legible. Each presentation is worth 15% and is graded on both the content elaborated and your capacity to teach it.

Conference Paper Abstract: If you choose this option, you will prepare a 500-word abstract proposal for a conference paper. This abstract should be grounded in at least 2 readings from the course and contain the following elements: 1) a compelling title; 2) an introductory statement outlining the purpose or motivation of your paper; 3) a clear statement expressing the problem; 4) an explanation of your methodology or approach; 5) your anticipated findings or analysis; and 6) a concluding sentence. This assignment is worth 20%.

Annotated Bibliography: If you choose this option (instead of the conference paper abstract), you will compile an annotated bibliography based on one of the weekly topics. You should

annotate a minimum of 10 sources, 2 of which are course texts. Each annotation should include a description of the text in your own words and your evaluation of the text. Aim for 150-200 words per annotation. This assignment is worth 20%.

Conference Presentation + Paper: If you chose the earlier assignment 'Conference Paper Abstract,' you will participate in an end-of-semester conference on April 11 for which you will prepare a 15-minute presentation. You should not simply read from a pre-written paper, but instead prepare an engaging presentation. You may or may not include a visual component. Using peer feedback from the presentation, you will submit a 2500-word conference paper on April 25. The presentation for this assignment is worth 15% and the paper is worth 25%.

Stand-Alone Literature Review: If you chose the earlier assignment 'Annotated Bibliography,' you will write a stand-alone literature review based on your annotated bibliography. In this 8000-word paper, you will review a specific body of care literature (i.e., Black feminist self-care). Your aim is to provide an overview and evaluation of the existing literature in one sub-field of care theory with a particular eye to strengths, limitations, controversies, and gaps. You should conclude with ideas for a future research agenda. This assignment is due on April 25 and is worth 40%.

Required Texts

Butler, O.E. (1993). *Parable of the Sower*. Grand Central Publishing.

Hartigan Jr., J. (2017). *Care of the Species: Races of Corn and the Sciences of Plant Biodiversity*. University of Minnesota Press.

Kimmerer, R.W. (2015). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Parreñas, J.S. (2018). *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation*. Duke University Press.

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017). *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. University of Minnesota Press.

All other readings will be posted on OWL under Resources

Reading Schedule

1: Jan 10 *Introduction: Why theorize care? Why now?*

Mol A., Moser, I., & Pols, J. (eds). (2022) *Care: Putting Practice into Theory. Care in Practice: On Tinkering in Clinics, Homes and Farms* (pp. 7-26). Transaction Publishers.

Engster, D. (2005) *Rethinking Care Theory: The Practice of Caring and the Obligation to Care. Hypatia* 20(3), 50-74.

Mol, A. (2008). Two Logics. *The Logic of Care: Health and the Problem of Patient Choice* (pp. 1-13). Routledge.

2: Jan 17 Philosophical Foundations

Plato. (n.d.) [c. 421-418 BCE]. *Laches* (B. Jowett, Trans.). MIT: Internet Classics Archive. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laches.html>

Plato. (n.d) [380 BCE]. Books III & VII. *Republic*. (B. Jowett, Trans.). MIT: Internet Classics Archive. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

Aristotle. (n.d) [350 BCE]. Books VIII and IX. *Nicomachean Ethics* (W. D. Ross., Trans.). MIT: Internet Classics Archive. <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>.

3: Jan 24 Care for the world

Heidegger, M. (2008) [1927]. Part VI. Care as the Being of Dasein. *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.) (pp. 225-273). HarperCollins.

Arendt, H. (2018) [1958]. Part II. The Public and the Private Realm. *The Human Condition* (pp. 22-77). University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, H. (1978) [1961]. The Crisis in Education and The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance. *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises on Political Thought* (pp. 170-222). Penguin Books.

4: Jan 31 Care of the Self

Foucault, M. (1988). Part 1: Dreaming of One's Pleasures and Part 2: The Cultivation of the Self. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: Care of the Self* (pp. 1-68). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Groups.

Bernauer, J.W. & Rasmussen, D.M. (eds). (1987). The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An interview with Michael Foucault on 20th January 1984. *The Final Foucault* (pp. 1-20). MIT press.

5: Feb 7 (Feminist) Ethics of care

Noddings, N. (1995) [1984]. Caring. In V. Held (ed.), *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (pp. 7-30). Routledge.

Gilligan, C. (1995) [1987]. Moral Orientation and Moral Development. In V. Held (ed.), *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (pp. 31-46). Routledge.

Tronto, J. (1995) [1989]. Women and caring: What can feminists learn about morality and caring? In V. Held (ed.), *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (pp. 101-116). Routledge.

Held, V. (1995) [1993]. Feminist Moral Inquiry and the Feminist Future. In V. Held (ed.), *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (pp. 153-177). Routledge.

6: Feb 14 Indigenous Care Ethics

Kimmerer, R.W. (2015). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions.

READING BREAK (Feb 20-24)

7: Feb 28 From Black Feminist Self-Care to the Undercommons

Lorde, A. (1988). A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer. *A Burst of Light and other essays* (pp. 40-??). Ixia Press.

Butler, O.E. (1993). *Parable of the Sower*. Grand Central Publishing.

Harney, S. and Moten, F. (2013). The University and the Undercommons. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (pp. 22-43). Minor Compositions.

8: Mar 7 Feminist critiques of care work and capital

Federici, S. (2020). Wages Against Housework (1975) and On Affective Labour (2011). *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle, 2nd Edition* (pp. 11-18 & 59-73). PM Press.

Barbagallo, C. and Federici, S. (2012). Introduction: "Care Work" and the Commons. *The Commoner* 15, 1-21.

Fraser, N. (2016). Contradictions of Capital and Care. *New Left Review* 100(99).

9: Mar 14 More-than-human care

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017). Introduction and Part I. Knowledge Politics. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (pp. 1-122). University of Minnesota Press.

10 & 11: Mar 21 & 28 Caring across species

Hartigan Jr, J. (2017). *Care of the Species: Races of Corn and the Science of Plant Biodiversity*. University of Minnesota Press.

OR

Parreñas, J.S. (2018). *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation*. Duke University Press.

13: April 4 Mini Conference

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Contact: I will attempt to respond to email messages within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on weekends and holidays. I will not hold regularly scheduled office hours; however, I'm happy to schedule individual appointments as necessary. Please email me to set a date and time.

Assignment Deadlines, Submission, and Grading: I am of two minds about deadlines: 1) they should always be flexible to some degree to accommodate for when life happens; 2) they are necessary to keep us motivated, accountable, and vigilant against procrastination and perfectionism. Some people are very good at imposing deadlines intrinsically, while others rely on extrinsic motivation. Whatever your case, we will be imposing some soft deadlines and some hard deadlines in this course. Assignments should be submitted to the appropriate assignment page on OWL by 11:55pm on the suggested (soft) deadline. Be aware that assignments submitted after the deadline may not receive full feedback. No assignments will be accepted after the final day of class without academic accommodations (this is a hard deadline).

Health and Wellness: As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help students achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing a graduate degree. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone in whom they feel comfortable confiding, such as a faculty supervisor, a program advisor, or the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies). Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.

Scholastic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously. Students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[Http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

Land Acknowledgement: We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service.