

## POWER AND PERSONAL VULNERABILITY

Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies in the  
Humanities and Social Sciences  
F/W/S 1979-80

### Aim of This Program

There is but one truly philosophical problem, said Albert Camus, and that is the problem of suicide. Suicide, he argued, more than any other human action makes us ask whether life is worth living. Once we have asked that question, we are compelled to look into many others that seem to issue from the first quite naturally: If it is worth living, under what conditions should life be lived? How, for example, should society be organized -- to benefit the few or the many? to protect the individual or to absorb him into the collectivity? to reconcile humanity to a better life in the hereafter or to establish the good life in the here and now? What is the good life, and who is to say what it is, and what, as individuals and citizens in today's often baffling and menacing world, are we to do with such knowledge?

And other questions arise. What is justice? Is it secured when each member of the polis is doing what he is best suited to do, as Plato insisted? Or is justice just an empty abstraction, like honor, that tyrannizes us all, as Shakespeare's Falstaff so amusingly (eloquently?) argued? Or yet again is justice perhaps better thought of today through the image of a human face being stomped on by a jackboot, in George Orwell's grisly vision of the future? Possibly justice is the law of the father, of patriarchy, as Freud explained.

The Western mind has been habitually inclined to cast experience in terms of dichotomies, to choose one pole or the other of these dichotomies as a basis for action, and/or to impose them where they aren't appropriate. Among these dichotomies are: Freedom as against Authority, Thought as against Action, Authoritarianism as against Self-Determination, The Happiness of the Moment as against Posterity, and so on. These lofty abstractions are not as far removed from our daily lives as they may at first appear to be; on the contrary, a little reflection reveals that our late twentieth century consciousness is thoroughly informed by them. We Americans love freedom and equality, but ardently insist, when the chips are down, on being like each other and on keeping the "outsider" outside, where he belongs: to reduce the person of color to only his or her color, to ghettoize the young into their own separate but equal generation, to divide the world into Democracy and Communism.

This program is based on the premise that the dichotomies listed above (along with others) cannot be reconciled, that indeed we must learn to live with their irrecconcilability, to think and feel and act within them. Freedom loses its distinctively political character when severed from, and pitted against, legitimate authority; and authority, when divorced from political freedom, degenerates into mere authoritarianism, as twentieth century history proves. What is called for is not some bland, gutless harmonizing of these opposing terms, however, but a new vision of human existence altogether, along with a restoration of political life. What that new vision should be cannot be specified ahead of time; it can only be born of disciplined, imaginative inquiry into such questions as one that bothered Camus. How, he asked while pondering the Algerian War, can I possibly choose between my family (which was French Algerian) and my principles (which told him to side with the Algerian rebels, his family's mortal enemies)? Camus lived the agony of that dilemma.

In choosing to sign up for this program, you are choosing to be bothered by the same dilemmas and questions that have concerned Western thinkers since classical antiquity. Their conclusions about the nature of justice and about other questions make up one part of our study; equally important are their arguments leading to these conclusions, arguments presented in the form of philosophical inquiry, dramatic art, novels

and psychological and political-economic treatises. Being bothered by these questions entails learning how to analyze these various forms of expression, to speak and write about them cogently, and above all to develop a rewarding measure of self-confidence and intellectual poise as a participant in the dialogue.

In this program, disciplined, imaginative inquiry means specifically: 1) working throughout at an upper-division academic level; 2) doing all of the required reading, which will be hard and rich and copious (authors for fall quarter include Plato, Sophocles, Dostoevsky, Arendt, Wright, Freud and others); and 3) doing a lot of required writing, both expository and creative. It will be exciting and fun.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

The first meeting of the Power and Personal Vulnerability Program will be held on Tuesday, October 2, 1979, from 9 A.M. to 12 noon. The place of the meeting is CAB 108. For more information, contact one of the following people:

- David Marr, Lab I, 1010, Ext. 6157 (Program Coordinator)
- Priscilla Bowerman, Lab I, 1004, Ext. 6157 (Program Faculty)
- Rudy Martin, Lab I, 1013, Ext. 6736 (Program Faculty)
- Sharron Coontz, Lab I, 2013, Ext. 6736 (Program Secretary)

Students in the program should complete the first week's reading prior to the first program meeting, Tuesday, October 2.

FALL QUARTER THEMES AND READING SCHEDULE

<u>Week</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Reading</u>
I	The Public and the Private	Sophocles, <u>Sophocles One (Theban Cycle)</u> Freud, <u>General Psychological Theory</u>
II	The Public and the Private	Arendt, <u>The Human Condition (Pt. 1)</u> Shakespeare, <u>Macbeth</u>
III	Thought and Action	Homer, <u>Odyssey</u>
IV	Thought and Action	" "
		Finley, <u>The World of Odysseus</u>
V	Appearance and Reality	Plato, <u>Republic</u>
VI	Appearance and Reality	" "
		Frankfurt Institute, <u>Aspects of Sociology</u>
VII	Freedom and Authority	Dostoevsky, <u>The Brothers Karamazov</u>
VIII	Freedom and Authority	" " " "
		Shakespeare, <u>Henry IV, Part I</u>
IX	The Individual and Society	Wright, <u>The Outsider</u> Camus, <u>The Myth of Sisyphus (part)</u>
X	The Individual and Society	" " " "
		Shakespeare, <u>Othello</u>

POWER AND PERSONAL VULNERABILITY: ADVANCED INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN  
THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

F/W/S, 1979-80

This program will examine at various historical points western man's insistence upon choosing one pole or the other of such dichotomies as: Freedom vs Authority, Public Power vs Personal Vulnerability, Individualism vs Citizenship, Individual Insight vs Historical Action, Authoritarianism vs Self-Determination, and Happiness vs Posterity. Since modern man looks back and sees multiple failures of unitary monistic views applied to the world, should he look yet further for a new one? Or should he abandon the assumption that a single unitary view can and should be found and opt instead for a dualistic or pluralistic stance in resolving contemporary crises?

Our studies will be guided by two major premises. (1) That western civilization is waning largely because man has rejected simple dichotomies (such as those listed above) as legitimate thought patterns and sought a monistic theory of existence; and (2) that in the twentieth century there have emerged numerous forms of the counter-premise that such dichotomies are irreconcilable and that a viable future is predicated only on the acceptance of their irreconcilability. Looking through the disciplinary assumptions of history, literature, psychology, economics and political science, we will explore such questions as: What is the nature of authority? Of power? Where do they reside and how are they perpetuated? Are myth, dogma and ideology manifestations of power? Of authority? Of neither? How does, or should, the past influence present practice or future hopes?

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The three quarters of work. First quarter we will concentrate on the consolidation of the monistic view in Greek thought up through Aristotle by reading such works as Renfrew, Before Civilization, Child, What Happened in History?, Arendt, The Human Condition, Sophocles, The Theban Cycle, and Adorno, et. al., The Authoritarian Personality. Second quarter, we will examine the waning of the monistic theory of Christian Europe and the rise of the worldly ascetic ideal in both its capitalist and Marxist forms. The reading will include Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Marx, Paris Manuscripts, Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy, Milton, Paradise Lost. Third quarter, we will analyze the breakup of unitary theory in the twentieth century and the emergence of enormously profitable business enterprises whose "mind" is capable of smoothing out tensions and contradictions. Some of the reading will be Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, Heisenberg, Physics and Philosophy, Jacobson, Pride and Solace, Ellison Invisible Man, Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic.

Weekly activities will include two lectures, three seminars, individual tutorials, and writing and skill development workshops. We will do formal study in the writing of expository essays (personal and analytical), parables and plays. The major third quarter writing project will be the analysis of a developing nation, focusing on the choices made among dichotomies (e.g. Tradition vs Modernization) and both the public and personal costs of rejecting the opposite poles in pursuit of a unified theory.

## FACULTY COVENANT

An agreement on mutual rights, obligations, and responsibilities among the faculty of the "Power and Personal Vulnerability" coordinated studies program.

1. We will come on time to, and participate in, all program activities including seminars, lectures, and student conferences.
2. We will prepare for all program activities and meet all expectations of faculty in our program's "Expectations and Requirements for Students and Faculty."
3. We will hold regular faculty seminars and business meetings.
4. We will make all policy decisions by collective agreement, abide by the policy decisions collectively made, and bring to the faculty for collective decision any exceptions to program policy.
5. We shall plan and schedule the program content collectively and make alterations only by collective agreement.
6. We will discuss with other members of the faculty team our teaching plans, strategies, and methods, but, so long as there is no conflict with adopted program policies, leave each other free to pursue those plans, strategies, and methods in his or her own way.
7. We will refrain categorically from talking with students about their problems with other faculty members, except with the permission of the other faculty involved or in joint consultation with said faculty, and then only after the students themselves have talked about the problems with the faculty member in question.
8. We will divide administrative responsibilities on the basis of reciprocity, special ability, conjunctural circumstances, and mutual trust.
9. We shall each, at the end of the quarter, prepare written evaluations of our own seminar students. By the mid-quarter date indicated in the college calendar, we shall inform in writing any student whom we consider already in jeopardy of receiving no credit for the quarter. Disputes about the content of faculty evaluations of students shall be handled alone by the faculty and students involved. Student challenges to credit denials may be appealed by the student to the faculty team as a whole and will then be decided collectively by the faculty team as a whole.
10. We shall prepare written evaluations of ourselves and the other members of the faculty team, and meet collectively to discuss those evaluations before deans' conferences.
11. We shall prepare drafts of evaluations of the students for discussion in student evaluation conferences.
12. We shall exercise great prudence in the spending of program funds, including no book store purchases, no bulk Xeroxing -- over ten copies -- no print shop work, and no out-of-state long distance phone calls, without authorization from the budget unit head.

13. We agree that the activities of the program are our most important priority as faculty at The Evergreen State College, and that we should avoid overcommitment to other activities on and off campus.
14. We shall keep at least 5 regular open and unscheduled office hours per week for students outside the program as well as in the program.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE  
WRITING AN EVALUATION OF A TEACHER

1. Did you learn anything from this teacher? Was it worth learning? How do you measure or assess that learning?
2. How did the teacher present himself or herself in relation to the subject of the program, group contract, individual contract? Was he or she enthusiastic, serious, bored, etc.? What inferences do you draw from your observations in this regard about the teacher's work, particularly in relation to your own work?
3. What specifically has this teacher done to contribute to making a body of knowledge your own?
4. What specifically has the teacher done to help you learn the skills necessary to pursue the study of your choice?
5. What are some things the teacher did to help you define, judge, change, achieve your goals as a student? Where are you now in relation to those goals compared with where you were when you began working with this teacher?
6. What evidence can you offer of this teacher's ability to hear, perceive, read, understand what students are saying to him or her? What evidence can you offer of the teacher's ability and willingness to articulate more clearly and to help students articulate more clearly?
7. What evidence can you offer of the teacher's helping you to learn to use the available resources at Evergreen?
8. What evidence can you offer of this teacher's integrity, honesty, fairness?

Each of these questions requires that you respond with evidence: specific instances of the teacher's performance in light of these criteria.

Think about these questions -- and any others that seem to bear on the task at hand: writing a thorough, well-thought-out evaluation of the teacher's work. Don't write a list of answers to the eight questions. Rather, write an essay for which you have prepared yourself by reflecting on your work with the teacher.

Remember, generalizations are worthless if not amply illustrated. On the other hand, if amply illustrated they can materially contribute both to the particular teacher's development and to the clarification of your own relation to teachers and teaching, to learning, and to education generally.

Consider your audience: the teacher, the teacher's colleagues (present and future), Deans.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT  
BEFORE WRITING A SELF-EVALUATION

1. Where were you, intellectually and academically, when you entered this program, group contract, individual contract? What did you expect to get from it and why did you want that?
2. How did you present yourself in relation to the subject of the study? Enthusiastic? Bored? Serious?
3. Can you point to specific signs of having learned to make the material of the study your own?
4. What specifically did you do in this period of time: what was your work?
5. What have you learned of specific strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing, speaking?
6. Where do you intend to go, intellectually and academically, upon leaving the program, group, or individual contract that you are now completing?
7. Did you get from the academic experience what you expected to get? If so, was it worth getting? If not, was what you got instead worth getting?

Each of these questions requires that you respond with evidence: specific instances of your performance as a student in light of these criteria.

So think about these questions -- and about any others that seem to bear on the task at hand: writing a thorough, thoughtful evaluation of your work. Don't write a list of answers to the seven questions. Rather, write an essay for which you have prepared yourself by reflecting on your academic development.

Remember, be specific. Force yourself (if necessary) to make your essay come alive in the particulars of the personal academic development you are recounting and examining. Avoid any generalization that you cannot substantiate with specific details.

Consider your audience: future teachers, prospective employers, registrars.