

Humanistic Studies Program
HMST 296 Western Humanistic Tradition 1 & 2: Fall 2007,
Winter 2008

CORE THEMES

HMST 296

Core theme, Fall 2007: What is it to be a woman? What is it to be a man

This year, in HMST 296, we are concentrating on (**but not exclusively on**) the what-is-it-to-be-human sub-questions: What is it to be a woman/man? -- in the gender sense. The two questions are always interrelated. In seeing our authors' understandings of one gender, we can also often see their understanding of the other. Very often they are opposing definitions (polar opposites), sometimes they are the same (unisex), sometimes they are complementary, and sometimes they are a combination of all three. As we all know, in the west, except for very recently, women have been perceived to be inferior to men. In fact, in many aspects of life and in some parts of the west or western perceptions this is still true. Some women born in the last few decades (including many in my classes) living in privileged conditions take for granted the principle and the practice of equality of rights for the two genders. Perhaps the situation is more precarious than they think. Because the IDEAS of equality and inequality have a history in the west that goes back to many of the pre-1600 texts that we will read, HMST 296 will consider some of the roots of modern inequalities AND modern concepts of equality --. In brief "we" will see "where we're coming from" (directly for many, indirectly to greater or lesser degrees for most of us) -- like it or not, bad and (often not recognized) good.

HMST 297

Core theme, Winter 2008: Human Rights

In the winter term, in HMST 297, as in previous years, there will be a Human Rights theme -- all human rights (never forgetting the largest group of people whose human rights are always in question -- the female half of the human race). In fact, we will bridge the two courses by studying Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* next January (if you are still with us). The "shrew" referred to in the title, is, of course, a woman, and the "tamer" is a man. By the time you get to the play, you will be well-equipped to deal with its underlying assumptions because you will be familiar with some of the sources of concepts of gender (and human) equality and inequality: for example, Plato, Aristotle, Genesis, St. Paul, St. Augustine, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*, and Christine de Pizan. In brief, you will know "where Shakespeare is coming from" -- like it or not.