

Dominican University
Liberal Arts and Sciences Seminar
Virtues and Values
Gandhi and the Western Classics
LAS 483 01 FALL 2010
Lewis 308 10:00-11:15 Tuesday and Thursday

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Special request: Please do not use your cell phone or text messaging device in class.

How to participate in a discussion class. Read the material and come prepared to talk about it. Please do not dominate the discussion, especially if you have not read the material. Please do not sit in stone silence and let other carry the burden. Empirical research shows that you learn if you participate. Please don't waste your money.

Course Description

Gandhi and the Western Classics. The focus of this course is the enduring question, "What is justice?" Gandhi's answer to this question is not a Hindu answer or a Muslim answer, yet Gandhi taught his message as one that speaks to both Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi was influenced by the teaching of the Russian writer, Tolstoy, according to which "the kingdom of God is within you." The universalism of Gandhi's answer to the question of justice makes it useful to compare it with the earlier universalism of the Stoic philosophers. As a way of framing the question, "What is justice?" the course will begin with a discussion of the Socratic claim that "it is better to suffer injustice than to do injustice."

Course Goals

This course is offered through the sponsorship of the National Endowment for the Humanities under its "Enduring Questions" Grant Program. The grant encourages the creation of courses that take a pre-disciplinary approach to enduring questions, for example, in our case, the question, "What is justice?" The pre-disciplinary approach asks us to confront questions as they occur to us in lived experience, more so than as they are presented in and through academic specialties. These goals fit exactly with the goals of the Liberal Arts and Sciences seminars at Dominican University. The grant also encourages the reading and teaching of whole books, not excerpts and isolated passages. The thought here is that context matters. The specific goals of this course are:

- To read in their entirety books worth reading from a pre-disciplinary approach.

- To take justice seriously, as a claim upon our lives that each of us must struggle with every day for a lifetime. (Does Gandhi model such a struggle for us? Does Socrates or Jesus or Marcus Aurelius?)
- To begin to become aware of the voices, both eastern and western, that address the question of justice and that help us to find answers with which and by which we can live.
- What is the status of justice and the other moral virtues? How seriously should we take it? Is the morally good human being good simply? Or does the good life require other values in addition to moral virtues?

If you have read this far, you may be asking yourself, “What has any of this to do with me? I am going into business or law or medicine. I will never need to know what justice is. I will never need to model Gandhi or Socrates or Jesus.” Perhaps simply raising these questions is enough to make one have second thoughts. My goal is not that you should answer all of the questions raised in the goals above, but simply to make one more attempt before graduation to persuade you that these really are questions that speak to you now and will speak to you **even more** after graduation.

Readings for the Course.

With the exception of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, we will reach each one of the following works in its entirety.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Martin Oswald.
 Marcus Aurelius. *The Meditations*. Penguin. ISBN : 0143036270
 Mohandas Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Beacon Press. ISBN : 0807059099
 Plato. *Gorgias*. Cornell University Press . ISBN : 0801485274
 Tolstoy. *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. Wildside Press.
 ISBN : 9781557429285

Assignments.

- During the first seven weeks of the course, prior to Spring Break, you will hand in each week a typed, double-spaced, one paragraph reflection on the reading for that week. This need not be a summary of the reading. Rather it should engage one or two of the points that you found most challenging or provocative in the reading the reading for that week.
- During the second half of the course, I will ask you to make two entries on the Discussion section of Blackboard each week. One entry should be a short reflection on the reading for that week. The second entry should be a follow-up on the class discussion for that week. Comment on something in the discussion that you disagreed with or that you found interesting and provocative. Explain why. I will look at your Blackboard entries each week.
- In addition, please hand in two short papers, 3-5 pages each. The **first paper**, due the last week in March, should focus on the question, “What is justice?”

How have two or more of the readings in this course addressed that question? Have they in any way deepened your own thinking about that question? Have they influenced at all your own values? The **second paper**, due at the end of the semester, should address the guiding questions of the senior seminar: What does it mean to be good, to lead a good life? How does what I do relate to who I am? How does one reconcile self-interest with a broader sense of responsibility? How does one negotiate conflicts between social norms and personal convictions?

- Finally, there will be a quiz every now and then just to help you measure how you are keeping up with the reading.

August

31 *Gorgias* 447a-461a

September

2 No Class. I will be at a conference in DC.

7 *Gorgias* 461b-481b

On this day, please submit a one paragraph reflection on the reading (461b-481b). What does Socrates discuss with Polus? Why does Callicles think Socrates must be joking (481b)?

9 *Gorgias* 481c-497c Last day to add

14 *Gorgias* 497c-513c Hand in a one paragraph reflection on the reading for today. What seemed to you to be the main point or a good point to focus on? Why?

16 *Gorgias* 513d-527e

21 Gandhi, *Autobiography* Part I

23 Part II

28 CARITAS VERITAS Our class will attend the 10am lecture on Gandhi by Professor McElwain

30

October

5 Part III

7 Part IV

12 Professor Francis X. Clooney
Harvard University

14 Part V

19 Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book I

21 Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book III

26 Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book IV, secs. 1-5

28 Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book V, secs. 5-8

November

2 Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book VI, secs. 5-8, 13

4 Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book X, sec. 6 to the

9 Tolstoy, *Kingdom*, pp. 1-38

11 *Kingdom* pp. 39-89

16 *Kingdom* pp. 90-135

18 *Kingdom* pp. 136-177

23 Chekhov “Ward No. Six”

25 Thanksgiving

30 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Books I-III

December

2 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Books IV-VI

7 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Books VII-IX

9 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Books X-XII

13-18 Exam Week