

Conflict, Community, and Contemplation

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Course Description:

These are precarious times. The 21st century has been ushered in by America's engagement in two wars, the rise of international terrorism, the rise of both rogue and failed states, the prospect of peak oil, global resource depletion, species extinction, and climate change. As if these examples of expanding uncertainty, loss, and strife were insufficient to challenge us, the recent meltdown of Wall Street and the ensuing financial crisis ensure that today we confront the world with good amounts of suspicion, fear, and, all-too-often, despair.

This course approaches the intellectual and practical challenges of this precarious world through the lens of community and contemplation. While conflict can and often does occur between individuals, its most threatening forms today arise between collectives – nation-states, ethnic groups, religious sects, and ideological organizations. The call to community is a prerequisite for virtually all organized strife and war. But if the cultivation of community is often the cause of – or excuse for – violent struggle, it also presents a crucial avenue for solidarity and peaceful coexistence. Indeed, in the last century, a sense of cosmopolitan community has been central to the growth of peace movements, the pursuit of international human rights, global conflict resolution, and humanitarian aid.

In this course, we will explore the human capacity and need for community, while considering the enduring threat and indispensable route it presents to a more peaceful and equitable world. The contemplative community holds special promise and will receive special attention, with the classroom community and its contemplative practices providing students with first-hand experience.

Course Objectives:

Students will gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the human capacity for community and the role it plays in conflict and creativity in global affairs and our personal lives. Students will become familiar with the various manifestations of community, from the restrictive “tribal” community to the all-inclusive cosmopolitan community. Students will explore community and conflict experientially in the classroom in tandem with contemplative practices, and ground their scholarship on these direct and reflective experiences. In turn, students will push their scholarship and experiential learning beyond the classroom, engaging in a campus project that involves active learning. Lessons will be drawn regarding the opportunities for, benefits and limitations of, and inherent challenges to the building of community.

1. Course Materials

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Wisdom, 2002)

Melvin McLeod, *Mindful Politics* (Wisdom, 2006)

Adam Kahane, *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change* (Berrett-Koehler, 2009)

Tim Ryan, *A Mindful Nation*

Frances Moore Lappe, *Getting A Grip 2.0* (Small Planet Media, 2010)

Aldous Huxley, *Island* (Harper, 2009); *Brave New World*

Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi* (Oxford, 1997)

2. Rules and Requirements

Attendance

Attendance at all classes and sections is a requirement of the course. Persistent unexplained absences constitute grounds for failing the class, regardless performance in other course requirements.

Participation

The more students actively participate in class discussion, the better. I encourage questions and discussion during all meetings. Participation will count in my assessment of your final grade.

Laptops and portable electronic devices

Texting, browsing, emailing, etc., during class are distracting to you and others, and so I respectfully ask that all laptops, phones, and other electronic devices be switched off and stowed away during class. Students are likely to retain more of the information covered in class if they take handwritten notes, so I encourage bringing a notebook and pen.

Readings/Viewings

Students are expected to complete the reading and viewing assignments in accordance with the schedule. If you have trouble understanding what you have read or watched, don't be shy about visiting office hours for help. Learning to navigate through complex material is one of the most valuable skills a college degree can impart and I am happy to offer pointers on how best to develop that skill.

Academic Integrity

Students must comply with all provisions of the UVa Honor Code. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are surprisingly easy to detect and very easy to avoid. Collaboration on tests and quizzes is strictly forbidden.

3. Grading Policies

Grade breakdown

- Participation = 10%

- Two in-class presentations = 30% (15% each)
- Two in-class responses = 10% (5% each)
- Final Paper = 40%
- Journal = 10%

Late work

There are very few assignments that have deadlines. For those that do, requests for extensions must be received in writing, by email, at least one week prior to the deadline. No extensions will be granted after that date. To request an extension, please send an email to me. Outside of approved extensions, late work will be penalized at a rate of a third of a grade per 24-hour period. These penalties may be waived in cases of documented emergency. NOTE: Loss of data (e.g., due to computer problems) does *not* count as an emergency. It is your responsibility to ensure that your work is backed up.

Grading procedures

Every effort will be made to return graded assignments within one week of submission. Students who wish to have a particular grade reviewed can submit a written grade appeal beginning five days after the assignment is returned. Note, however, that grades may be adjusted up or down upon review.

Grade explanation

Here is a rough guide to interpreting the grades assigned to work in the class:

- A grade of A, in any flavor, signifies (varying degrees of) excellence: to earn a grade in this region, students must show genuine insight into (as opposed to just a basic grasp of) the material, and successfully develop cogent, convincing, and original responses to it.
- A grade of B+ signifies superior command of the course material: to earn it, students must show a good understanding of the leading arguments covered in the course, and demonstrate the ability to assess them critically on their own terms without necessarily achieving responses to them that are fully cogent or convincing.
- A grade of B signifies good performance: students receiving a B will have shown a firm understanding of the course material and made plausible, if not fully developed, critical responses to it.
- A grade of B- indicates solid performance: work receiving this grade will display a decent understanding of the basic ideas covered in the course, though may nonetheless be marred by (e.g.) unclear or vague writing, omissions of relevant ideas, ambiguous formulations, conceptual muddle, or unsophisticated argumentation.
- C grades indicate performance of mixed quality: in such work, competence, understanding, and insight will sit alongside error, misunderstanding, cliché, simplification, and confusion.
- A grade of D, in any flavor, indicates work that is in some respect (and in varying degrees) radically inadequate: such grades are symptoms of (e.g.) unfamiliarity with, failure to understand, or half-hearted engagement with, the course materials.

4. Schedule

August 24: Introduction to course and the nature of experiential learning

Contemplation, Community, and Brawling

August 31: *Mindfulness*, pp. 1-38; *Mindful Politics*, pp. 112-114

Mindfulness, Religion, and Politics

September 7,9: *Mindfulness*, pp. 39-86; *Mindful Politics*, pp. 29-37, 45-54, 293-299

The Virtue of Love and Compassion

September 14, 16: *Mindfulness*, pp. 87-120; *Mindful Politics*, pp. 99-103, 129-146, 171-179, 189-197

The Need for Action in a World in Need

September 21, 23: *Mindfulness*, pp. 157-176; *Mindful Politics*, pp. 77-87, 201-238, 261-271, 285-290

Taking Power Seriously

September 28, 30: *Mindfulness*, pp. 121-156; *Power and Love*, pp. 1-50

October 5, 7: *Mindfulness*, pp. 177-198; *Power and Love*, pp. 53-102

October 12, 14: *Power and Love*, pp. 103-140; *Getting A Grip*, pp. xiii-29

Where did our Power Go?

October 19, 21: *Getting A Grip*, pp. 31-113

Creativity and Courage

October 26, 28: *Getting A Grip*, pp. 117-176

Seizing the Day

November 2, 4: *Getting A Grip*, pp. 177-224

The Call to Action

November 9: Gandhi, pp. 1-34

November 11: *Island*, chapters 1-3

November 16: *Island*, chapters 4-5

Equality, Responsibility, Communication, Community

November 18: Gandhi, pp. 35-63;

November 23: *Island*, chapters 6-10, pp. 73-209

Violence and Non-violence

November 30, December 2: Gandhi, pp. 64-91; *Island*, chapters 11-13, pp. 210-281

Conflict, Community, and Contemplation

December 7: Gandhi, pp. 92-126; *Island*, chapters 14-15, pp. 282-354

5. Assignments

Participation

- Counts for 10% of the final grade. Effectively, ½ point will be given for each class period in which you are well prepared to critically discuss the readings and participate in discussion, with two points given for consistent, outstanding contributions.
- Asking intelligent, probing questions is a highly recommended form of participation, as is critical and constructive engagement with your peers.
- Talking for the sake of talking is to be avoided.
- Students should have all the readings completed by the Tuesday class.

Term Paper

- 10-12 double-spaced pages.
- Due on December 10
- Late papers will be penalized ½ letter-grade for each day late without exception.
- Paper topics will be closely aligned to the seminar readings and themes, and will be chosen in consultation with Mr. Mittiga.
- The paper is worth 40% of your final grade.

In-class Presentations

- Students will write and deliver two presentations in class based on the weekly readings.
- The written presentations are to be emailed to Mr. Mittiga and the respondent by noon of the day preceding the presentation.
- Late electronic submissions will be penalized ½ letter grade.
- Written presentations should consist of three components:
 - A single-spaced, one-page synopsis of the weekly readings.
 - A single-spaced page consisting of three full paragraphs, with each paragraph posing a question that interrogates the reading(s) and underlines the significance of the problem being addressed.
 - One of your questions must address the development of the classroom community in terms of the weekly readings.
 - One of your questions must relate the current week's readings to the previous week's readings.
 - A single-spaced, two-page answer to one of the questions.
- Each presentation will account for 15% of the final grade, for a total of 30%.

Responses to Oral Presentations

- Students will give 8-10 minute oral responses to two presentations.
- Responses should address one of the questions left unanswered.
- Students should develop a typewritten outline of the response to serve as an aid, but should not read from it verbatim. This outline is to be handed in at the end of class.
- The oral responses are each worth 5% of the final grade, for a total of 10%.

Journal

- Students will be journaling each week in class, and are expected to journal at least once each week outside of class.
- Journals will be collected at the end of term, and those that have thoughtful, weekly out-of-class entries will be awarded full credit.
- Worth 10% of the final grade.