A HISTORY OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

COL 109 / PHIL 224 – FALL 2011

Professor Tushar Irani (tirani@wesleyan.edu)
Department of Philosophy and College of Letters

Location: Butterfield A 413
Time: Tues. / Thurs. 1:10-2:30pm
Office hours: Tues. 3:00-4:30pm (Butterfield C 512) and by appointment

Description

This course will explore some classic readings on civil disobedience and nonviolent political action in literature, history, and philosophy. We will examine connections between some key moments in the history of intellectual thought in 5th-/4th-century BCE Athens and the 19th/20th century. The lives of Socrates, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. will be the focus of our study, though we will also read works of Greek tragedy (Sophocles), comedy (Aristophanes), and history (Thucydides), and various different political tracts on civil disobedience from the modern period, including writings by Percy Shelley, Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Doris Stevens, Rabindranath Tagore, George Orwell, and John Rawls. The course will conclude by examining the use and relevance of nonviolent action in the 21st century.
Readings

The following texts are required and available at Broad Street Books. ISBN information is provided in brackets in case you wish to purchase these books online. Many can be bought in good second-hand condition on amazon.com for as little as $3.00, but you must purchase the same translation/edition of the texts listed below.

Sophocles, *Antigone*, translated by Paul Woodruff [9780872205711]


Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, translated by Sarah Ruden [9780872206033]

Aristophanes, *Clouds*, translated by Peter Meineck [9780872205177]

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (3rd edition), translated by G.M.A. Grube, revised by John Cooper [9780872205541]

*Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings* [SPW], edited by Dennis Dalton [9780872203301]

*A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* [EWS], edited by James Washington [9780060646912]

All other assigned readings will be distributed on the Moodle course website.

Requirements

Since this course is a seminar, classes will be heavily discussion-based. For the first two units of the seminar (see reading schedule below), I will take charge in leading discussion by providing some context to the readings and giving my own thoughts on the material. These thoughts will be fairly provisional and by no means authoritative, and you should feel comfortable expressing dissent (civilly, of course). For the rest of the seminar, students will be expected to take charge in initiating and leading discussion. At all times, your comments should be informed, by which I mean you should be able to give reasons for your views by appealing to the readings or other relevant source material. When you disagree with someone, explain why. Be receptive to the views of your peers and willing to have your mind changed by others.

In order to maintain an environment conducive to study and discussion, the use of electronic communication devices (laptops, smartphones, iPads, etc.) is forbidden in class, unless granted special permission. Students found texting, e-mailing, or browsing the web during class time will be penalized with a lower class participation grade.
Each reading assignment must be completed before class and brought to class. Consider each text on its own terms, read the material critically but with an open mind, and come prepared to comment and raise questions of your own. Resolve to participate and do so.

Group presentations: you will be assigned to a group of 3-4 students at the start of the course. Beginning in the third unit, groups will be responsible for kicking off discussion for the class with a 20-min. presentation on the reading. There will be 6 presentations in total (3 in the first half of the semester and 3 at the end) and your presentation will comprise 10% of your class participation grade for the course. (Scheduled presentations are marked with a 🗓 below.) Presentations should take roughly the following form, but originality will be rewarded and I encourage you to speak with me if your group has any other ideas:

1. Explain relevant historical context or background events to the reading;
2. Summarize the goals and methods of the movement or action in question;
3. Evaluate the success of the action or (if ongoing) its success so far.

Written assignments: a central aim of this course is to introduce you to the practice of writing college-level essays. There will be two 4-5 page essays due during the semester on assigned topics, each with a mandatory rewrite; one response paper on the movie Gandhi; and a 6-7 page essay due at the end of the semester on a topic of your choice. Further instructions will be provided during the semester.

There is no better way of clarifying your ideas than to have another person read your work and provide feedback, and I encourage you to visit Wesleyan’s Writing Center during the semester where you will find peer tutors and mentors available to work with you individually at every stage of the writing process. You can find more information about the Writing Center online at http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/award-winners/index.html.

All work in this course is assigned under Wesleyan’s Honor Code and suspected violations will be brought before the Honor Board. Please plan ahead when completing assignments and contact me to discuss any difficulties you have with the material. Students who require accommodations should contact me or Dean Lazare (slazare@wesleyan.edu; ext. 2332) so that arrangements can be made. Procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found online at http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html.

Your final grade for the course will be computed as follows:

- 1st and 2nd essays: 20%
- 1st and 2nd essay rewrites: 20%
- 3rd essay: 35%
- Class participation: 25% (incl. group presentation = 10%)

N.B.: on the evening of Friday, November 11 (exact time to be determined) we will have a private screening of Richard Attenborough’s award-winning biopic Gandhi. All students should attend (food will be provided) or check the movie out from the Science Library that weekend in order to submit a response paper the following Monday.
## Schedule of Readings

### I. Crimes of Reverence / Acts of Hubris

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tues. September 6</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs. September 8</td>
<td>Sophocles, <em>Antigone</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues. September 13</td>
<td>Sophocles, <em>Antigone</em></td>
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<td>Thurs. September 15</td>
<td>Thucydides, <em>History of the Peloponnesian War</em> (excerpts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues. September 20</td>
<td>Thucydides, <em>History of the Peloponnesian War</em> (excerpts)</td>
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<td>Thurs. September 22</td>
<td>Aristophanes, <em>Lysistrata</em></td>
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#### Mon. September 26:

**1ST PAPER DUE BEFORE 8:00AM (E-MAIL)**

### II. Socrates and the State

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tues. September 27</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Euthyphro</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs. September 29</td>
<td>Aristophanes, <em>Clouds</em></td>
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#### Mon. October 3:

**1ST PAPER REWRITE DUE BEFORE 8:00AM (HARDCOPY)**

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tues. October 4</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Apology</em></td>
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<td>Plato, <em>Crito</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs. October 6</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Laches</em> (excerpts); <em>Symposium</em> (excerpts); <em>Gorgias</em> (excerpts); <em>Phaedo</em> (excerpts)</td>
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### III. Soldiers of Truth

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tues. October 11</td>
<td>Percy Bysshe Shelley, &quot;The Masque of Anarchy&quot;</td>
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<td>Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”</td>
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<td>Thurs. October 13</td>
<td>Leo Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God is Within You” (excerpts)</td>
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<td>Tues. October 18</td>
<td>Thomas Jefferson, &quot;Declaration of Independence&quot;</td>
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<td>Elizabeth Cady Stanton, &quot;Declaration of Sentiments&quot;</td>
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<td>Doris Stevens, “Jailed For Freedom” (excerpts)</td>
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### IV. Gandhi and the British Empire

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<tr>
<td>Thurs. October 20</td>
<td>Dennis Dalton, “Introduction” (SPW, pp. 3-25)</td>
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<td>Gandhi, “My Experience in Gaol”</td>
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<td>Gandhi, Preface to “Story of a Soldier of Truth”</td>
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[FALL BREAK]
Thurs. October 27: Leo Tolstoy, “A Letter to a Hindu” and Correspondence with Gandhi  
*Satyagraha: The Power of Nonviolence* (SPW, pp. 27-59)

Tues. November 1: Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*  
Thurs. November 3: Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*

Mon. November 7: **2nd PAPER DUE BEFORE 8:00AM (E-MAIL)**

Tues. November 8: "Evidence Before Disorders Inquiry Committee" (SPW, pp. 60-64)  
*Swaraj: Gandhi’s Idea of Freedom* (SPW, pp. 95-131)  
Gandhi vs. Tagore: Readings from *The Mahatma and the Poet*

Fri. November 11: Film screening: *Gandhi* (directed by Richard Attenborough)

Mon. November 14: **RESPONSE PAPER DUE ON GANDHI BEFORE 8:00AM (E-MAIL)**

Tues. November 15: Rabindranath Tagore, “Gandhi the Man”  
George Orwell, “Reflections on Gandhi”

Wed. November 16: **2nd PAPER REWRITE DUE BEFORE 4:00PM (HARDCOPY)**

V. MLK and the American Dream

Thurs. November 17: Interview with Rosa Parks  
MLK, “The Power of Non-Violence” (EWS, pp. 12-15)  
MLK, “Pilgrimage to Non-Violence” (EWS, pp. 35-40)  
MLK, “Non-Violence: The Only Road to Freedom” (EWS, pp. 54-61)

Tues. November 22: Interview with MLK on "Meet the Press"  
MLK, “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (EWS, pp. 289-302)  
MLK, “The American Dream” (EWS, pp. 208-220)  
MLK, “I See the Promised Land” (EWS, pp. 279-286)  
David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross* (excerpts)

[THANKSGIVING]

VI. Trials of Conscience and the Future of Civil Disobedience

**Tues. November 29:** “A Symposium on Civil Disobedience and the Vietnam War”  
(Noam Chomsky, Lewis Feuer, Paul Goodman, Irving Kristol)  
John Rawls, “The Justification of Civil Disobedience”  
Gregory Vlastos, “Socrates and Vietnam”

**Thurs. December 1:** The United States vs. Tim DeChristopher: media coverage  
Tim DeChristopher, “I Do Not Want Mercy, I Want You To Join Me”
Tues. December 6: Gene Sharp, "From Dictatorship to Democracy"
Gene Sharp, “198 Methods of Nonviolent Action”
The Arab Spring: media coverage

Thurs. December 8: Wrap-up: parting words; final thoughts

Thurs. December 15: 3rd PAPER DUE BEFORE 8:00AM (E-MAIL)