

Non-Violence: Theory and Practice

Instructor

Joe Groves
grovesjw@rascal.guilford.edu

Institution

Guilford College

Course Description

"Nonviolence" is a nebulous, frequently misunderstood, frequently abused term. As we will see during the course of the semester, it can be used in very narrow or broad constructs and can be based on a wide variety of philosophies and practices. The approach that this course will take to this variety will have several characteristics.

First, the approach will be constructive rather than comparative/critical. While we will examine several significantly different approaches to nonviolence, the focus will not be on comparing them for strengths and weaknesses, or comparing them with theories of social ethics that accept violence. Instead, we will work on constructing a nonviolent ethic that meets our own circumstances (or developing a critique of nonviolence that shows why it is inadequate).

Second, we will work within a broad understanding that nonviolence is a way of life. Thus, we will not be thinking of it as merely a set of tactics to effect social change, or, conversely, as merely a philosophy that has little bearing on how we live our lives. Instead, we will consider what it means to construct a theory of nonviolence that affects our thinking, our feelings, and our actions, that forms a coherent approach to real life in a real world.

Third, in order to accomplish this, we will focus as much on the ways that the practice of nonviolence has been used to change human societies as on any individual application. Thus, we will begin the course by examining social movements related to a philosophy of nonviolence.

Fourth, we will treat nonviolence as an experience, not merely a way of thinking. That is, we will wrestle with the idea that acting nonviolently, not merely thinking about it theoretically, is what changes perceptions and behavior. And we will wrestle with this in practical ways. If we need to "enact" nonviolence in order to understand it, how do we accomplish this "real world" activity in the artificial situation of a course and a classroom?

Fifth, we will work from the assumption that, in our day and time, no understanding of nonviolence based on one religion or philosophy is adequate. Thus, we will examine several of the main currents of nonviolent thought and practice (Gandhian, Christian, Buddhist, Feminist, Liberationist, Social Scientific) as approaches that have much to offer but that may be inadequate by themselves. So our approach to the works that we read will be simultaneously (or alternately) appreciative and skeptical.

Course Procedure

This course will require intense involvement by all participants, in the classroom and outside. The classroom experience will focus on cooperative discussion that will build over the course of the semester. It will involve continuing interaction between the theoretical and the personal, between critical analysis and personal appropriation. This interaction and our continuing reflection on the interaction will ask that you be

open, flexible, and continually engaged. For the course to achieve the depth encounter and analysis that is possible, each participant will need to be fully prepared for each class and each assignment.

Evaluation

I hope that you will focus on the learning, the deepening, and the growth that we regard as the core of the course. But there are specific elements of the course (which may or may not accurately reflect what you learn) that I will use to give you a grade for the course.

Exams

Final Exam. Oral and written exam, done by groups and presented to the class as a final project. The nature of the project will evolve out of the work of the course and be determined as the course progresses.

Written Assignments.

1. First Paper. A 10-15 page paper analyzing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s work and the Birmingham movement, using Bondurant's analysis of Gandhian nonviolence as a framework for your analysis of King. You will write the paper with no prior discussion of King's movement. We will suspend class for a week to allow you to write the paper. Due before midterm.
2. Outline of Nonviolence Theory. An outline of the main points that you would write about if you were constructing an adequate theory of nonviolence, with possible resources. The purpose of the Outline is to get you to think about the scope of nonviolence. Due near the end of the semester.
3. Second Paper. A 10-15 page paper that takes one key question, point or insight from your outline and develops it thoroughly. Due near the end of the semester.

Preparation and Participation.

Attendance. With a course that relies on participation as centrally as this one does, attendance at every class is imperative. I assume you will be in class unless you are ill. If you miss three classes during the semester, you must consult with me to see whether or not you should continue in the course. I take absences immediately before or after semester breaks especially seriously.

Preparation. For each class session you will prepare a worksheet of questions, insights, critical comments, and key passages from the reading for the class and keep them in a notebook. For each praxis session you will write a response page to the session and keep it in your notebook. We will use your worksheets as the basis for class discussion. I may collect the notebooks from time to time and read them to make sure that you are keeping up with the assignments.

Participation. I expect this to be a student-led class, where you generate the questions and direction of discussion out of the insights that you have recorded on your worksheets. I will act as a guide, elucidator (on occasion), and questioner as the discussion progresses. For this type of student-led discussion to work, everyone must engage in discussion with regularity, consistency, and seriousness. You will also need to listen attentively to the comments of other students and work at building an interactive, substantive, focused class discussion. I will be looking for all of these elements in your class participation.

The completion of all these elements are necessary for credit in the course. It is your responsibility to make arrangements with me if you are having difficulty meeting deadlines or completing the work.

Texts for the Course

Sharon Welch, Communities of Solidarity and Resistance

Joan Bondurant, The Conquest of Violence.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't Wait.

Fred Eppsteiner, Ed. The Path of Compassion.

Riane Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade.

Gene Sharp. The Politics of Nonviolent Action: Part I, Power and Struggle.

Supplemental Readings on Nonviolence. (Photocopied reader.) Readings in this text are marked with an asterisk (*) in the Course Outline.

Jeff Jeske, Writing at Guilford: A Manual.

Course Outline

1. W 8/28 Introducing Nonviolence

I. FRAMES, QUESTIONS, AND CAUTIONS

2. F 8/30 Thinking About Language, Power, Knowledge, & Truth

Read: Sharon Welch, Communities of Resistance and Solidarity, 1-31.

3. M 9/2 Analyzing Resistance & Oppression

Read: Welch, 32-73.

4. W 9/4 Praxis as a Mode of Inquiry

Read: Welch, 74-92; *Dermot Lane, "Praxis and Its Philosophical Background."

5. F 9/6 About Praxis:

Role Play on Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive behavior

II. NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM AS COLLECTIVE ACTION

A. GANDHI

6. M 9/9 Constructing a Gandhian Vocabulary for Nonviolence

Read: Joan Bondurant, The Conquest of Violence, v-xx, 3-35.

7. W 9/11 How Satyagraha Works

Read: Bondurant, 36-104

8. F 9/13 About Praxis:

Exercises on team-building and consensus (Consensus Octopus, Secret Spot)

9. M 9/16 Nonviolence and Religious Roots Read: Bondurant, 105-45

10. W 9/18 Questioning Fundamental Assumptions Read: Bondurant, 146-88.

11. F 9/20 About Praxis:

Exercises on Win-Win Situations (Crossing the Line)

12. M 9/23 Nonviolence and Political Theory Read: Bondurant, 189-233.

13. W 9/25 About Praxis:

Role Play on Intimidation (based on civil Rights Sit-Ins and Marches)

B. KING

14. F 9/27 NO CLASS: Preparing your paper.

15. M 9/30 NO CLASS: Preparing your paper.

16. W 10/2 NO CLASS: Preparing your paper.

17. F 10/4 About Praxis

Role Play about Nonviolent Intervention (Quick decision exercises)

18. M 10/7 King's Nonviolence

Read: I expect you to have read Morris, "Birmingham: A Planned Exercise in Mass Disruption," and all of King, Why We Can't Wait. FIRST PAPER DUE

19. W 10/9 King's Nonviolence

20. F 10/11 About Praxis:

Exercise on constructing a Base Community

C. LIBERATION THEOLOGY

21. M 10/14 Liberation Theology and the Question of Violence

Read: *Jose Miguez Bonino, "Love, Reconciliation, and Class Struggle"; *Dominique Barbe, "Why Active Nonviolence in Brazil?"

22. W 10/16 Base Christian Communities as Nonviolent Praxis

Read: *Richard Shaull, "Basic Christian Communities;" Dominique Barbe, "Church Base Communities."

23. F 10/18 About Praxis:

Exercise on constructing a Base Community

MIDTERM BREAK!!

III. NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM AS ALTERNATIVE THINKING

A. BUDDHISM

24. M 10/28 Basic Buddhist Attitudes

Read: Fred Eppsteiner, ed., The Path of Compassion, ix-xx, 9-18, 70-81, 203-13.

About Praxis: Guided Meditation on Suffering

25. W 10/30 Challenges of Buddhist Experience

Read: Eppsteiner, 31-9, 97-102, 155-69, 190-98.

About Praxis: Guided Meditation on the Great Ball of Merit

26. F 11/1 Historical and Contemporary Principles of Nonviolence

Read: Eppsteiner, 24-30, 103-44, 150-54.

About Praxis: Guided Meditation on Death

27. M 11/4 American Buddhism and Social Action

Read: Eppsteiner, 47-92, 182-89, 199-202.

About Praxis: Guided Meditation on Seeing Each Other

28. W 11/6 About Praxis:

Guided Meditation on Creating a Sphere of Peace

B. FEMINISM

29. F 11/8 Re-envisioning History

Read: Riane Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade, xiii-xxiii, 1-41.

30. M 11/11 Critiquing Patriarchy

Read: Eisler, 42-103.

31. W 11/13 The Perseverance of Alternative Paradigms

Read: Eisler, 104-55.

32. F 11/15 About Praxis:

Exercise on Envisioning a Nonviolent Future

33. M 11/18 Envisioning Possibilities

Read: Eisler, 156-203.

34. W 11/20 Consciousness of Language and Nonviolence

Read: *Barbara Deming, "Revolution and Equilibrium."

35. F 11/22 About Praxis:

Exercise on Envisioning a Nonviolent Future

36. M 11/25 NO CLASS: Preparing Outline on Theory of Nonviolence

37. W 11/27 NO CLASS: Preparing Outline on Theory of Nonviolence

C. SOCIAL SCIENCE

38. M 12/2 Power and the Possibility of Nonviolence

Read: Gene Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action: Part I, Power and Struggle, 3-62.

OUTLINE OF THEORY OF NONVIOLENCE DUE

39. W 12/4 Nonviolence as Active Struggle

Read: Sharp, 63-105.

40. F 12/6 Envisioning Nonviolent Defense

Read: *Gene Sharp, "The Significance of Domestic Nonviolent Action as a Substitute for International War."

IV. PULLING THE STRANDS TOGETHER

41. M 12/9 TBA

42. W 12/11 TBA

SECOND PAPER DUE

