

Acadia Senior College Course
“THE MORAL ARC OF THE UNIVERSE:
MORAL/SOCIAL EVOLUTION?”
Teachers: Ron Beard, Gray Cox and Ed Snyder

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We will test Martin Luther King's assertion that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." Is there evolution/growth/change from “law of the jungle” toward a just, humane, nonviolent society respectful toward all people and the natural world? Are homo sapiens’ activities on the planet so destructive that civilization as we know it may end?

We will discuss historical and current aspects, both negative and positive, in the United States and around the world. Participants will be encouraged to share their experience, perspectives, current reading and research.

Subjects will include the influence of gender, religion, war/nonviolence, and economic and social systems.

Participants will prepare for each session based on a one page summary distributed at the end of the previous class, including framing questions, one required reading article or reading of no more than 60 pages, some relevant/thought provoking quotes, a list of links and websites of optional readings, and 2 or 3 specific questions on which to focus discussion, perhaps with an invited resource person.

We will set up a website for participants to go to and read articles, chapters, etc. that we and other participants have posted by scanning in or pasting various items.

Classes will be held in the Mellon Room of Northeast Harbor Library, from 9:30 to 11:30 AM, starting on April 2 and concluding on May 14.

Tuesday, April 2 Session 1: Introduction

9:30 Gather, introduction of course leaders, brief overview of course and format (Ron)

9:40 A little more about you! (discuss in triads and prepare to report out) (Ron)

1. Personal introductions (questions sent out in advance)

- a. Name, residence, experience and perspectives you bring to the course
- b. What motivated you to sign up for this course?
- c. What is your view on the basic issue raised in the Course Description? (“Is There Moral/Social Evolution... does it “bend toward justice”?)
- d. We will be discussing Prehistory, Religion, Gender, War/Nonviolence, *Political/Economic/Social Systems*.
Which of these issues especially interests you? Would you be willing to do some advance reading/research on it to share with the group?
 - i. Are there other issues you would like to see included?

2. What has worked well for other ASC courses that you have taken. Share ideas on how you gather information and do research? Personal library? Conversations with friends and associates? Local library? Google? Wikipedia? Amazon book comments? Favorite websites?

10:15 Reports from Triads on what you found in talking together (Ron- who tracks participant willingness to take on research or assist with future sessions)

10:30 Discuss some basic issues/concepts raised in the Course Description (Ed and Gray)

“**Universe**” Should we include everything in the universe or only our civilization on this planet?

“**Moral**” Are we assuming an overarching meaning/purpose/intelligent design claimed by many faiths or rather a random or chaotic system?

“**Justice**” Whose definition? *How does “Justice” relate to human rights, prosperity, love, “pursuit of happiness”, stewardship of the earth?* [Here are a number of possibilities, that should come out in the discussion:

--Sharia law? <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia>

--Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see

http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Universal_Declaration_of_Human_Rights)

and the more specific Covenants on Civil and Political Rights

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>

and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights?

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>

--Earth Charter? <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/What-is-the-Earth-Charter%3F.html>

--Rawls *Equal Opportunity* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Theory_of_Justice

[Gray is looking up more items to include in initial discussion.]

11:20 Wrap up discussion, quick evaluation of what worked well today, notes on assignments for next time (Ron)

Tuesday, April 9 Session 2: Prehistory

9:30 Quick Overview of today's discussion, check-in question for participants (Ron)

9:45 Ed and Gray offer remarks that expand on core reading and follow up on questions posed for discussion

Where did "altruism" come from in human society?

Basic motivations for homo sapiens: Survival, Reproduction

Genes Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, get second or later editions, "This book will show how both individual selfishness and individual altruism are explained by the fundamental law that I am calling *gene selfishness*." p. 6

Groups E.O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth* "Once human beings had established nests, environmental pressures began selecting for traits that increasingly drew group members into cooperative relationships with one another (which cooperation was beneficial in such enterprises as hunting expeditions). This added cooperation not only contributed to the extent to which these early humans could reap resources from the environment, but also helped them in competition with other groups--especially in warfare. The benefits of cooperation and cohesion in allowing groups to out-compete other groups eventually allowed group-level selection to add a layer of tribalist sentiment to the members of our species (which tribalist sentiment draws from us a deep attachment to our in-groups, and a corresponding mistrust and contempt for members of out-groups)." From "The Book Reviewer" on Amazon.com.

Group Selection David Sloan Wilson is a foremost scholar on the origin and evolutionary significance of altruistic behavior. He has developed a major framework for understanding the evolutionary dynamic of "group selection" as distinct from "individual selection." His first and basic academic book is *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*. He then wrote *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* which advances his thesis and its broader implications for a general audience. He is sympathetic to religion and a good antidote to Dawkins. (From Keith Helmuth)

Molecules Paul J. Zak, *The Moral Molecule* "Under the influence of oxytocin, it's not too hard for us to behave with generosity, care, and concern toward those with whom we share a deeply personal bond." p. 30

Oxytocin: "A hormone that stimulates the uterus to contract during child birth and the breasts to release milk." Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine.

Hunter-gatherers to agriculture—consequences—
territory, growth of cities, leisure, war

Beliefs about the unknown—

Gods reflect human nature? Magical powers? Nature? Highest ethical standards?

Joseph Campbell, Myths http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Campbell

David/Daniel Bennett, Gray, you mentioned this name. I need more info to identify him

Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, www.amazon.com/After-Virtue-Theory-Second-Edition/dp/0268006113

11:15 Wrap Up Discussion, quick evaluation of what worked well today, and reminder of focus / assignments for next class (Ron)

April 16 Session 3: Where are we regarding Justice and Gender?

(we may shift this, depending on Alyne Cistone's availability)

- 9:30 Overview of today's session, introduction of guest presenter, brief check-in question for participants (Ron)
- 9:45 Alyne expands on core readings and poses additional questions for discussion, facilitated by Ron as needed

Possible Core Question: Where do we stand with regard to justice and gender?

New book--"*Man's Greatest Fear: The Final Phase of Human Evolution*"
Lister, Thomas M.; <http://www.amazon.com/Mans-Greatest-Fear-Final-Evolution/dp/0983991618>

The End of Men and the Rise of Women, Hanna Rosin, 2012 at Jesup Library
<http://www.amazon.com/The-End-Men-Rise-Women/dp/1594488045>
NY Times review
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/books/review/the-end-of-men-by-hanna-rosin.html?pagewanted=all>

Carol Gilligan, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_Gilligan

Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kohlberg%27s_stages_of_moral_development

Donna Haraway, The Cyborg Manifesto
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donna_Haraway

Margaret Mead, [Ron will ask our gender consultants about suggested resources and their possible participation on this subject.]

Carol Lee Flinders, Rebalancing the World: Why Women Belong and Men Compete and How to Restore the Ancient Equilibrium (from Keith Helmuth)

Are there basic differences in the way men and women view moral/ethical issues?
Polls, voting patterns. Women in public office
abortion, Catholic Church hierarchy,
Changing role of women in Islam

Matriarchal societies

(Currently women's admission to colleges, professional schools greater, better than men. Schools adopting affirmative action for men.)

see Robin Wright on Islam in next section. Put it here or there?

11:15 Wrap up, quick evaluation of what worked well today, reminder of focus and assignments for next week's session

April 23 Session 4: What does our history with war/nonviolence say about bending towards justice

9:30 Overview of Session and brief check-in question for participants (Ron)

9:45 Gray Cox provides overview of core readings and delves deeper in discussion of questions, facilitated by Ron as needed

What is the intersection between war and justice?

Issues: weaponry: WMDs (\$200 billion for new nuclear weapons), drones, cyberspace

Rationale for military action: national security, collective action via UN or a coalition of the willing, morality—stop genocide, protect women (Afghanistan), Syria intervention

Less violence in post cold war period?

*Steven Pinker, Better Angels of our Nature,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Better_Angels_of_Our_Nature*

“Sovereignty” Doctrine of Discovery rationale; Maine v. Tribes Penobscot River bed.

Structural violence in U.S.—race, class, penal system, urban ghettos

Nonviolence Gene Sharp, law and order (int’l law, UN police force) etc

Find good quotes from Gandhi, M.L. King on nonviolence in int’l affairs

Here are links to Chuck Fager’s “Wheel of War” and “Wheel of Peace.”

<http://quakerhouse.org/Wheel-of-War.htm>

<http://quakerhouse.org/Wheel-of-Peace.htm>

????Either at the end of this session or the beginning of the next one, circulate a questionnaire asking

How do you feel about the number of major problems facing the world’s people, for example climate change, resource depletion, pollution, population growth, rising expectations in China, India and elsewhere, growing income gap between haves and have-nots in and outside the U.S.?

Do you seek out or avoid getting information on these subjects? What kind of a world do you envision your grandchildren living in?

Are you worried? fearful? hopeful? expectant that human ingenuity and technology will provide solutions? Are the prospects so depressing that you just avoid or deny the “facts”?

11:15 Wrap up, quick evaluation of what worked well today, reminder of readings and assignments for next time,

April 30 Session 5: Are our Political/Economic/Social Systems evolving toward justice?

9:30 Overview of session, brief check-in question for participants

9:45 Brief overview of core reading and discussion of key questions (Ed) with facilitation as needed by Ron

What is the interface between economics and justice?

History: patriarchy of pharaohs and kings, feudal system, mercantilism, capitalism, socialism, cooperatives

Today in U.S.: Me first, resource depletion, pollution, materialistic consumerism, no charge for externalities, concentration of wealth and power in political and economic elites, insufficient government role in regulation, advertisers manipulate facts, climate change deniers,

Earth—making a life on a tough new planet, Bill McKibben, 2010

Full Planet, Empty Plates The New Geopolitics of Food Scarcity, Lester Brown, 2012

James Robertson, [Future Money: Breakdown or Breakthrough?](#)

James Robertson [Transforming Economic Life: A Millennial Challenge \(Schumacher Briefings\)](#)

Important people: Charles Darwin, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, Herman Daly, Paul Krugman

Crucial issue: Perpetual economic growth vs. steady state economy—

The End of Growth Adapting to our New Economic Reality, Richard Heinberg 2011—Heinberg: “Our central survival task for the decades ahead, as individuals and as a species, must be to make a transition away from the use of fossil fuels—and to do this as peacefully, equitably, and intelligently as possible.”

Right Relationship Building a Whole Earth Economy, Brown and Garvey. A product of the Quaker Institute for the Future, see

<http://www.quakerinstitute.org/>.

See also associated pamphlets.

Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy <http://steadystate.org/>

See the CASSE report *Enough is Enough*. Can be downloaded in summary or complete form at <http://steadystate.org/foreword-enough-is-enough/>

Go to the bottom of the blog for downloading clicks.

It is due to be published in book form this month with Rob Dietz and Dan O'Neil as authors.

I have read Brian Czech's book and while it's ok it's not a good as several others on the same themes. Here are some suggestions:

Ecological Debt: The Health of the Planet and the Wealth of Nations – Andrew Sims

The Value of Nothing: How to Reshape Market Society and Redefine Democracy – Raj Patel

The Wealth of Nature: How Mainstream Economics Has Failed the Environment – Robert Nadeau

The Environmental Endgame: Mainstream Economics, Ecological Disaster, and Human Survival – Robert Nadeau

Growth Fetish – Clive Hamilton

You Can't Eat GNP: Economics as if Ecology Mattered – Eric Davidson

Alternatives: cooperatives, B Corporations, socially responsible corporations

11:15 Wrap up, quick evaluation of what worked well, reminders about topic and readings for final session (Ron)

May 7 Session 6: Religion and Justice

- 9:30 Overview of session, brief check-in question for participants (Ron)
- 9:45 Brief overview of core reading and discussion of key questions (Ed and Gray) with facilitation as needed by Ron

Does religion advance or deter justice?

Everyone lives by some sort of faith--- formal religion, humanism, science, nationalism, the crowd, etc.

Are fundamentalists winning out in major religions? If so, why?

Positive influence of Jesus, Buddha, Rumi, Gandhi, M.L. King

Corruption of their message by their “followers” and the dominant secular culture

Is atheism/agnosticism growing worldwide? Is this a positive or negative trend?

Huston Smith, various books, recent: Why Religions Matter,

The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason, Sam Harris 2005

Rock the Casbah, Robin Wright, <http://www.amazon.com/Rock-Casbah-Rebellion-Islamic-concluding/dp/1439103178>

- 11:15 Wrap up, quick evaluation and reminder of focus and readings for next week

Note: Will Course evaluation be emailed to participants between this session and the final session?

May 14 Session 7: Keep Hope Alive

- 9:30 Overview of session, check-in question for participants
- 9:45 Discussion of core readings and questions (Ed and Gray, facilitated by Ron as needed)

Are we humans capable of adapting to the rapid social changes that are required to move us toward justice?

The Evolving Self A Psychology for the Third Millennium, Csikszentmihalyi, 1993:
“At this point in our history it should be possible for an individual to build a self that is not simply the outcome of biological drives and cultural habits, but a conscious, personal creation. That self will be aware of its freedom and not fear it.”
p. 4.

”The point is not to be browbeaten into the belief that you are powerless. It is in the interest of those who control our energy to make it seem that the status quo is natural, right, and impossible to change. It is in our interest to figure out that this is not always true. p. 105.

"Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy" Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, 2012 ,

"Future Perfect The Case for Progress in a Networked Age" Steven Johnson, 2012
'peer progressivism', 'liquid democracies' conscious capitalism"

Hopeful futurist with faith in technology:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Kurzweil

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexis_de_Tocqueville

last two chapters of Heinberg's *The End of Growth*

Internet vs mass media, memes, protection of the Commons

Goals are found in places such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights and Covenants, Int'l Criminal Court, Earth Charter and environmental movement, nonviolence movement, women leadership.

Decentralization, ground up governance and development

Transition Towns See Wikipedia Transition Towns

Also www.transitionus.org

All That We Share: A Field Guide to the Commons – Jay Walljasper

America the Possible: Manifesto for a New Economy (American Crisis) by James Gustave Speth (Sep 25, 2012)

11:00 Wrap up of session and of course (Ron) :
Reflections on the highlights and insights from participants and instructors

How will our readings and discussions influence your own thinking and action with regard to the “moral arc of the Universe” and the question of justice?

Possible additional session or questions folded into final course wrap-up in Session 7

What can we do locally to make a difference?

Some ideas to stimulate discussion:

Where/how to invest our money, resources?

Food—growing our own, joining CSA, supporting food pantries, delivering meals on wheels

Support local community building organizations: Acadia Senior College, our religious affiliation, food banks, civic organizations, town government,

Outreach: write letters to the editor, call in to talk shows, WERU, become active with citizen organizations, lobbies, (League of Women Voters, FCNL, Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, Maine Peoples Alliance, etc.)

Support MDI school systems and local libraries, COA lectures, library

Support Ellsworth or organize MDI Transition Town

Circulate, publish ideas you have developed in this course

Cooperatives to take power from Wall Street Nov. 30 Wash Post

http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/occupy-wall-street-just-defund-it/2012/11/30/a4bd9970-39b7-11e2-a263-f0ebffed2f15_story_2.html