**Revolution Ethics Project**

**Academic Yearly Syllabus (proposed, 2014-2015)**

Session number roughly corresponds to one 2 hour meeting

Topics are a guideline; every effort is made to keep seminars student-centered and relevant to current events

1. What are we talking about when we discuss ethics?
   1. Not law…
   2. Not religion…
   3. A branch of philosophy…
   4. Real world application of religion, philosophy, ideas.
2. Inspiring us all to bring about change
   1. Read “Wonder, Anger, Love” by Rev. William Sloane Coffin
   2. Read poetry from “The Prophet” by Kahlil Gibran
   3. Discussion: What fires you up?
   4. Discussion Activity: Who are your moral heroes?
3. Is there an Absolute Truth?
   1. Socrates and Plato—overview and discussion
   2. What is Philosophy? What is the Truth?
   3. Allegory of the cave—how do we caution against being intellectual elites?
4. Challenges to Determining “Right” from “Wrong”
   1. Cultural Relativism: can’t judge other cultures
   2. Emotivism: ethics are just expressions of emotion
   3. Egoism: even when we do ‘good’ it’s for selfish reasons
   4. “Kids these days”: society is becoming less ethical
5. Current Issue: Poverty
   1. Read and discuss Jonathan Kozol’s “Savage Inequalities”
   2. Local issues: looking at the economic breakdown of New Hampshire school districts. Unequal funding for schools?
   3. International Development: why are poor countries poor? Reading from “Development Economics Reader.”
   4. One solution: Peter Singer’s “Singer Solution to World Poverty.” Read and discuss
6. Utilitarianism
   1. Background on the Theory—lecture and discussion
   2. Testing the theory: apply Utilitarianism to quandaries (Trolley Problem) and then expand to real issues (poverty, killing to save a life)
7. Absolutism—Kantianism
   1. Introduction to Kant and his philosophy—lecture and discussion
   2. Testing the theory: apply Kantianism to quandaries (lying to save a life; killing one to save many) and then expand to real issues (capital punishment; lying)
   3. Compare Utilitarianism to Kantianism. Which would you choose?
8. Current Issue: Government Abuses—Have we Lost Control?
   1. Campaign Finance Reform: Guest speaker from New Hampshire Rebellion
   2. “The Secret Government”: reading on the shadow government, discussion. Bill Moyers’ “Secret Government” video?
   3. Guantanamo Bay and Torture: is this too far? Compare to other executive actions during historical wars
9. Anything Goes? Friedrich Neitzsche
   1. Read and discuss “Geneology of Morals”
   2. His criticisms of traditional Utilitarianism and Kantianism
   3. What does Nietzsche mean by “New Philosophers” and how might you be one?
10. Action Plans
    1. Introduce student project assignment
    2. Distribute Action Plan guide sheets
    3. Sample projects from other students: ConVal School Board initiative; Campaign finance reform with NH Rebellion; Empty Bowls fundraiser for the hungry; joining anti-human trafficking group; KIVA loans or donations to charities
    4. Action Plan check-ins will take place each week from this point forth
11. Current Issue: Human Trafficking
    1. Guest Speaker: Revolution Ethics Alumna and current University of Maryland student Jess Nerz
    2. Relate her actions back to student action plans assignment
12. Ethics of War: Can War Ever be Justified?
    1. Just War Theory and UN rules of war—go over and critique
    2. Pacifism: a viable theory? Adin Ballou, Leo Tolstoy, and Gandhi readings
    3. Recent issues in War: read Wendell Berry, Stanley Hauerwas
    4. Why do people protest and what good does it do?
13. Jesus’ Revoluitonary Teachings
    1. Ethics of Jesus
    2. Christianity—organized Church vs. Jesus’s teachings
    3. Bible readings compared to “church fathers.”
    4. Christian rebels—those who went against the mainstream church: Walter Rauschenbusch, Tolstoy, William Lloyd Garrison, Oscar Romero
14. Dostoyevsky and Ethics
    1. Background lecture on Dostoyevsky’s context
    2. Read “Grand Inquisitor” and discuss
    3. Father Zossima and exemplar
    4. Discussion and activity: who do you know who SHOWS ethics (showing vs. saying)
    5. Is this a viable religious outlook?
15. Kierkegaard and the Leap of Faith
    1. Background lecture on Kierkegaard
    2. Readings from “Fear and Trembling” and “Repetition”
    3. What is the “Knight of Faith” and how does he relate to ethics?
    4. Abraham sacrificing Isaac? Too much?
    5. Discussion: How does recognizing that life is absurd actually help?
16. Current Issue: How can one LIVE the ethical life
    1. Read “Everyone a Changemaker” by Drayton and discuss
    2. Guest Speaker: Lila Trowbridge, Beth Bradford and putting faith into action
    3. Joe Juneau video and discuss: how might you use your skills to help others?
    4. Rough Drafts of Action Plans
17. Wittgenstein: Ethics Without Philosophy
    1. Background lecture on Wittgenstein’s life and the elements of his philosophy background
    2. How he brings it all together…Why he’s my favorite
    3. Saying vs. Showing—ethics is how you live
    4. Discussion: How will you live?
    5. Current Connection: Read “This is Water” by David Foster Wallace
18. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the transition to Virtue Ethics
    1. Background lecture on Bonhoeffer’s life and times
    2. Discussion: Would it be ethical to murder Hitler?
    3. Bonhoeffer’s ethics…relate to Virtues of Aristotle
    4. Is this Christian ethics? If so, does it relate to the whole world, many of us?
19. Virtue Ethics
    1. Overview of Alisdair MacIntyre
    2. Handout: Aristotle’s Golden Mean, compare to Buddhist “Middle Path”
    3. St. Thomas Aquinas and the virtues…was he onto something?
    4. Eugene Rogers’, Margaret Farley’s contemporary interpretation of Aquinas and Augustine (Roman Catholic ethics)
    5. How does the virtue approach free us to make ethical decisions?
20. Breaking down the virtues with Current Issues
    1. What is justice? Current examples…
    2. Should we forgive? Current examples (e.g., terrorism, ISIS, prisoners…)
    3. Prudence? Courage? Current examples (are snipers cowards?)
    4. Examples in our community/school?
21. When you Begin to Lose Motivation…
    1. Fighting when it seems all is lost: Read Camus’ “Myth of Sisyphus” and discuss
    2. Compare “Myth of Sisyphus” with “Bhagavad Gita.” How does this inspire you to “fight.”
    3. Abraham Joshua Heschel: you are the messiah of your own world
    4. Back to Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard: you make your own world
22. How to Bring it All Together and Make Change
    1. Martin Luther King as example: lecture on his background and connection to Bonhoeffer and Gandhi
    2. Read and discuss: “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
    3. Blueprint the process for Civil Disobedience
    4. Read and discuss: “Break the Silence: Poverty and Vietnam” by MLK
23. True Revolutionaries?
    1. Look at current and recent historical examples of Revolutionaries and evaluate their work. Does it jive with the mission of the Revolution Ethics Project
    2. Examples: Eugene Debs, Dorothy Day, Che Guevara, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Lech Welesa,