

UNIV/PHIL 190

MISSION CORE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL VISION [3-credit course]

Rationale of Course and Relevant Resource-Material

The proposed course is designed for transfer students, ranging from those with a 2-year Associate degree to those with more than 1 semester of transfer credit. The course is mission-driven, introducing the students to LUC's vision and its view of the mission that flows from that vision. The course will present that mission holistically: the syllabus is aimed at transmitting LUC's commitment to ethical behavior, social justice, sustainable living, and global solidarity in their distinctive grounding in the Catholic faith-tradition.

The philosophy department's approach to course's main themes will be mediated by standard philosophical tools:

- (1) A mission-based approach to a comprehensive view of reality (involving metaphysics, a philosophy/anthropology of the human person and philosophy of religion) linked to a faith-perspective;
- (2) Exploration of the different ways of knowing that humans are capable of (sciences, humanities, common-sense knowledge, religious knowledge), through introducing epistemology, logic, and reason in general, in which the student comes to understand what it is to be an inquirer and a knower, an imaginative and critical thinker, and is helped to appropriate his/her personal knowing process;
- (3) An ethic, that (i) embraces human goods and value, presenting the Catholic vision of God as the ultimate common good, and (ii) shows how an appropriately person-centered normative theory about right action can be built on such a vision of the good, where ethical concern and a Judeo-Christian notion of stewardship and an ethic of care extends to the entire living environment.

The course is not a replacement for PHIL 130, 181, and 182, although its content has some similarity to theirs. Transfer students taking it will usually take other courses in philosophy, theology and ethics.

The Jesuit Catholic mission of Loyola (<http://www.luc.edu/mission/index.shtml>) is anchored in a vision of reality that includes (a) Christian faith as an indispensable hermeneutic element, (b) a panorama of the different kinds of knowing, and of the questioning subject who appropriates them, (c) a focus on the common goods, justice, human rights, care for the environment and the living world, and (d) concern for the excluded and marginalized. In a course introducing a transfer student to LUC's vision, values and commitments, the unifying meta-theme must be the human person.

This meta-theme is key to understanding what the LUC mission document, *Transformative Education in the Jesuit Tradition* (hereafter “TE”), states about the core curriculum:

“The CORE should result in a radical transformation not only of the way the student sees him or herself but also in the way the student habitually perceives, thinks, and acts in the world. In order to accomplish this, the CORE must be more than a set of distribution requirements; it must be an integrated curriculum designed to produce ever deepening reflection and new habits of the heart, mind and will. It should enable students to integrate faith with intellectual and cultural life. The CORE experience needs to be something consistently describable by all students rather than merely dependent on teachers, syllabi, etc.” [TE, p. 10: “Undergraduate Education”]

<http://www.luc.edu/media/lucedu/mission/pdfs/Transformative%20Education%20document.pdf>

So, while the course will have significant academic content, it must not be so overloaded that it obstructs personal assimilation of the mission-vision. The syllabus must have sufficient experiential focus to draw the students into the LUC intellectual and moral community.

The goal of the course is primarily to address the LUC mission themes philosophically, and secondarily (as means to the primary goal) to transmit philosophical content. The instructor can invite non-philosophers to address the class on particular topics where the speaker can make an explicit and in-depth link to the mission document.

The course should address the following themes, by lectures, significant class discussion, combining both content and the experiential.

Part I: Reality and the Transcendent

< A response to “A Hunger for an Adult Spirituality”>

1. (A) Class-themes: Persons are attuned to the human need for transcendence, meaning, the divine (God), and growing in awareness of this need within him/herself; aware of how this is anthropologically and historically central for human beings; growing in the capacity to develop an empowering personal spirituality; and committed to supporting that faith-based journey.

[Readings, class-discussions, essays, etc should aim to develop habits of mind such as: wonder, imaginativeness, reflectiveness, openness to diverse spiritual approaches, commitment.]

Texts:¹

- A response to TE's "A Hunger for an Adult Spirituality"
- Jewish Scripture, Genesis, chaps 1 and 2.
- Christian Scriptures, "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7);
- brief readings from St Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*;
- The Poetry of Rumi; the Bhagavad Gita; the Tao Te Ching; Zen Buddhist readings;
- Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, chap. 1;
- Charles Taliaferro, *The Golden Cord: A Short Book on the Secular and the Sacred* (2013)

Outcome for Objective 1A: The student can -

- (i) describe significant aspects of the human experience (his/her own or as reported by others) of needing and seeking some kind of meaning or purpose of human existence and cosmic reality,
- (ii) explain the fact and the nature of that experience in ways that are supported by reasoned reflection,
- (iii) articulate some of the questions to which the experience gives rise, whether scientific, cultural, philosophical, or personal, and
- (iv) creatively outline some elements of a personal response or spirituality.

(B) Class-themes: Persons are capable of having a sophisticated vision of reality, rather than a narrow or reductionist view.

Texts:

- Plato, *Republic* 507b1-517c6 (cave)
- Plato, *Phaedo* 63e-95a (soul)
- Aristotle, *Categories* 2a11-4b19 (substance)
- Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (narrative structure of the self)
- Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis* (reductionist view).

Outcome for Objective 1B: The student can -

- (i) articulate the difference between a reductionist view of reality and a non-reductionist view;
- (ii) show understanding of the reasons that have motivated each view;

¹ Readings suggested are representative. The course instructor is at liberty to drop some of these readings and add others, once they are appropriate for achieving course-goals.

- (iii) grasp some of the implications of each view for (a) the development of his/her own personal spirituality or philosophy of life, and (b) society's sense of itself and of how to build a humane, sustainable world.

Part II: Knowledge and the Knower

<A response to TE's "A Hunger for Integrated Knowledge" >

2. Class-themes: A person is an inquirer/knower. As such the student seeks to grow in awareness of the inherent normativity in being an inquirer/knower, so that one grows in awareness of the authentic drive in humans to be more observant and attentive to human experience, more open-minded and imaginative in seeking understanding, more critical and balanced in judging, and seeking the right balance of rationality and emotional intelligence. The student must be educated to understand that objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity, i.e. that being objective in one's knowing is a matter of doing one's knowing well (virtuously).

Habits of mind to be developed: (1) Self-awareness of one's cognitive processes, as in experiencing and observing, in organizing data and synthesizing it, in reflecting critically on beliefs and judgments, in acting on one's judgments, and seeing where one is cognitively weak. (2) Open-mindedness and imaginativeness. (3) Critical thinking, sensitivity to logical fallacies. (4) Critical awareness that there are many sciences and other non-scientific forms of knowledge.

Skills to be honed: Logical consistency, attentiveness to data.

Texts:

- The full text of TE (*Transformative Education*)
- Brief extracts from Plato's *Republic*, e.g. the Cave.
- Aristotle's brief description of different kinds of knowledge in *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- Appropriate short texts should illustrate knowing in the physical sciences, social sciences, interpersonal relationships, religious knowledge, aesthetic knowledge.]

Exercises: (1) Asking student to reflect on how she does her knowing. What would be good knowing for her? (2) Ask student to specify how she knows that she understands a situation or text. (3) Ask student to describe her response(s), emotional and intellectual, to a situation where others disagree with her view.

Outcome for Objective 2a: The student can -

- (i) articulate how s/he learns from his/her experience, perhaps by describing some particular occasion or event that led to significant learning or change of mind;
- (ii) explain the difference, in a way that is strongly experientially grounded, between (a) experiencing (of any kind), (b) trying to understand and make sense of that experience or data, creatively and intelligently, and (c) evaluating that insight or understanding in a way that is critical, sensitive to whether there is adequate evidence to support it or claim it to be true, and aware of the dangers of bias;
- (iii) list and explain relevant intellectual virtues that make for objectivity.

Outcome for Objective 2b: The student can -

- (i) distinguish between different kinds of knowledge, e.g. moral, religious, aesthetic, scientific (natural and social), with respect to their differing kinds of objects, relevant data, methodologies, and roles in enhanced human life;
- (ii) articulate how the different kinds of knowledge find a kind of unity in their all being kinds of knowing: intelligent activities of the inquiring cognitive agent.

Part III: Values and Norms

< Response to TE's "A Hunger for a Moral Compass">

3. Class-themes: The human person is a locus of value. The student seeks to grow in understanding of what it means to say that human beings are of infinite value (or sacred) or ends in themselves, with intrinsic value. He or she also comes to understand the ways in which human beings can be originators of value, identifying objective common, social, and personal goods. Some explanation must be given of how moral norms, oriented to action, are ultimately grounded in the human good.

Habits of mind and character to be developed: (1) A sense of the moral primacy of persons. (2) Awareness of, and ability to reflect critically on, one's own character, addressing one's virtues and vices. (3) Awareness of what would improve or be good for society, along with greater awareness of one's own social groundedness.

Texts:

- Plato, *Republic* 357b2-367c5 (morality and happiness);
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk I, chaps. 7-13;
- Philip Hallie, "From Cruelty to Goodness", in Gordon Marino, ed. *Ethics: the Essential Writings* (2010).

Outcome for Objective 3a: The student can -

- (i) identify basic goods for (a) persons, (b) the human community from local to global level, (c) the living eco-system in general, and explain how understanding of value arises from this;
- (ii) articulate an understanding of the intrinsic value of persons, of how they can be originators of value;
- (iii) show understanding, in a way that is experientially grounded and supported by a reflective and reasoned self-awareness, of the importance of personal moral character-development.

Outcome for Objective 3b: The student can -

- (i) describe how he/she would make a moral/ethical judgment oriented to decision leading to action (in an hypothetical or an actual case, but not one confined to personal involvement of the student);
- (ii) explain in a way that is both experientially grounded (i.e. personally in some way) and supported by reasoned reflection, why he/she judges this to be the morally/ethically correct judgment about the case;
- (iii) describe how he/she would respond to someone making a different moral judgment about the case;
- (iv) explain why he/she deems this response to be morally/ethically appropriate within the context of the dialogic moral community.

Part IV: Global and Communal Solidarity in Action

<Response to TE's "Hungers for Civic Participation and a Global Paradigm".>

4. Class-themes: In an era of globalization, the integrated person is committed to a global vision that encourages civic responsible participation.

Habits of mind and character to be developed: Social, political, and environmental awareness.

Skills to be developed: (1) How to reflect on current events; (2) How to network with concerned groups.

Texts:

- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: The Land Ethic* (1949);
- Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address;
- Martin Luther King, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*;

- David Batstone, *Not for Sale: The Return of the Global Slave Trade*]

Outcome for Objective 5a: The student can –

- (i) Describe what he/she judges to be the proper response to persons who hold that humankind need to learn to work together in addressing global human needs.
- (ii) Explain in a way that is experientially/personally grounded and supported by reasoned reflection how this response is morally/ethically correct.

Outcome for Objective 5b: The student can –

- (i) Describe what he/she judges to be the proper response to persons who hold that short-term thinking about human use of planetary resources ought morally to be changed for the sake of future generations of humans and out of respect for the living world.
- (ii) Explain how she/he would determine that this response is morally/ethically correct.

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Student assessment of the foregoing material can be carried out in a variety of ways. In general terms, the student should be able to write 3-4 short papers, reflecting (1) assimilation of the LUC vision and mission, along with (2) some basic comprehension of the content of the course, and (3) articulated responses and reactions to the LUC mission statement, indicative of some personal engagement with it, and indicative of personal, spiritual, and intellectual development.

The following is one possible option.

1. Class-work will proceed by a mixture of lecture and discussion, roughly two-thirds lecture and one-third class discussion or small group discussion. The lectures are to be on the topics listed earlier, along with a schedule of readings (such as those suggested above).
2. Attendance and participation are important. 20% of the total grade will be assigned to participation.
3. The student will write 3 short essays, each being about 3-4 pages in length, and each counting for 20% of the grade.

- (i) Essay I: “Explain the role and importance in a human being’s life of a worldview (whether a religion, a spirituality, or other) that affirms what and who one is, challenges one to grow in vision, and identifies some kind of transcendent purpose to human life.”
 - (ii) Essay II: (a) “There are many forms of knowledge. List the main ones, explain them briefly, and describe at greater length how they are united or interlinked.” *or* (b) “How do I personally experience myself as a knower – in questioning, making sense of things, and judging? In what ways am I tempted to be inauthentic in my knowing?”
 - (iii) Essay III: “At the end of my life, I want to be able to look back and say: ‘I’ve had a good life’ or ‘I’ve lived an extraordinary life.’ What would make it possible for me to say that?” *or* “What does justice – interpersonal, social, environmental, global – require of me? How do I see my time at LUC as preparation for that?”
4. At the beginning of the course, in the first week, the student will (partly in response to the TE document) write a short paper, articulating a personal worldview. At the end of the course, the student will be invited to revisit it, and revise it in light of what she has done and learned during the course. 20% of the grade will be assigned for this task.

OVERALL OUTCOME

The overall outcome-goal can be summarized thus:

- 1) To develop in the student the ability to articulate a personal worldview in relation to the LUC vision.
- 2) To foster a personal integration in spirituality, global vision, community participation, moral compass, and differentiated understanding of human knowledge that will promote the student’s future promoting of the LUC mission.
- 3) To promote intellectually open, imaginative, and critical skills and habits of mind.