

# HUMN 4845 - Reading Culture: Mindfulness And Transforming Violent Hierarchies



In our hopes for a society that embodies the possibility of fulfillment and profound connection to each other and to the planet, we need to look closely at the major obstacles. Western culture is in many ways founded on hierarchies, which may often seem both necessary and innocent: Adults over children, humans over animals, civilization over chaos—what could go wrong? Yet their imposition has often come with violence, both covert and overt.

In order to succeed in the acceptance of their domination, these dualisms may go unnoticed, seen as the natural order of things, especially for those who benefit from that order. If we want to bring the opportunity for a whole and happy life to all, we need both to expose those dualisms and to dissolve them in ways which can open the space for new possibilities. Or as Rumi wrote,

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing  
there is a field.  
I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass  
the world is too full to talk about.”

In this class we'll use the full range of the mind's capacities, from close analytical reading to the practices of mindfulness and meditation, to understand and reach beyond these constraints. From the critical investigations of Foucault and others to the expansion of our powers of concentration and connection with the help of Thich Nhat Hanh (nominated for the Pulitzer Peace Prize by Martin Luther King) and the latest research in neuroscience showing the connection of meditation and compassion, we will look with careful critical analysis at what has held us back and what might propel us forward to our remarkable potentials both as societies and as individuals.

Among others, we will look with focused analytical attention and affection at the areas of social and ecological sustainability; surveillance, systems of punishment, and transformative alternatives; and the integration of the best of our rational and contemplative capacities, especially in our relations with animals and children.

**Readings will include texts (or excerpts) such as:** *Discipline and Punish*, *Child-Loving*, *Minding Animals*, *Being Peace*, “*In Between Right and Wrong*,” *Passage Meditation*, *Creating a Climate for Change*, “*Sustainability schizophrenia: The politics and promise of local sustainability*.”