

Making Things Right

Proposed CC Alumni Reading Group Syllabus Spring, 2007

General Description

This syllabus explores a variety of practices like atonement, punishment, compensation, history writing, and repentance that are undertaken in order to right wrongs or to “set the record straight” or to remedy past injustices or to redeem one's life. Readers should ask themselves whether “making things right” is ever fully possible, and if so in what contexts or domains—legal, moral, spiritual, historical. They should also ask themselves whether, even if it is impossible to “make things right” in a given instance, it is nevertheless important to make the effort.

Study Options

The texts and films are divided into six sections or units. Reading groups may select any number of units depending upon their interests and how often they meet. Each unit represents a different dimension of the problem of "making things right": making things right with the living (2); making things right with the dead (2); making things right with God; and making things right with oneself.

General Questions

Some questions from the following set of "basic questions" are worth considering as a part of each session. These will provide the reading group with continuity of inquiry from session to session:

1. What does it mean to make things right within this domain of discourse (law, history, religion)?
2. Why is it important to endeavor to "make things right" within this discourse domain?
3. What sorts of things must be accomplished in order to succeed in making things right?
4. Is "success" possible all of the time, some of the time, or none of the time? Offer examples, real or hypothetical, of how and why success could be or has been achieved.
5. If and when complete success is not possible, is it still nonetheless important to make the effort to "make things right." Why or why not?

Readings

Making Things Right with God

Davies and Evans, eds. *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford, 1998)

“Introduction,” vi-xxiii; *Why God Became Man*, 315-356

J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Eerdmans, 2001)

Chapter 2, 12-69 and/or Chapter 7, 179-224

Making Things Right with Oneself

Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (Signet Classic, 2003)

Making Things Right with the Dead I

Norman Maclean, *Young Men and Fire* (University of Chicago Press, 1993)

Making Things Right with the Dead II

Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (Anchor, 2001)

Making Things Right with the Living I

In the Bedroom (film), directed by Todd Field

Goldstein and Goldstein (eds.), *Crime Law and Society* (Free Press, 1971), 17-71

(Articles, by Stephen, Holmes, Cohen, and Hart)

Making Things Right with the Living II

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Signet Classics, 1998)

The Merchant of Venice (film), directed by Michael Radford