

DISCERNMENT AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

COURSE INFORMATION

Times: Mondays (alternating) 10am-12pm

Room: Stokes N 228

CONTACT INFORMATION

Professor

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Solvitur ambulando, "It is resolved by walking." Let us suppose that what is to be "resolved" is not merely a practical hindrance or an elusive puzzle, but a deeply personal question or problem. Everyday experience teaches us that taking a walk can clear our heads, prompt the emergence of previously unexpected solutions, or set a rhythm for stimulating conversation. Walking sometimes goes together with thinking in a way that opens the mind while exercising the body. Could this also be the case for our attempts to know who we are, what we ought to do with our lives, and the challenges that stand in our way? Could the very urge to take a long walk signal a deeper urge to be alone with oneself, so as to ponder one's condition and one's calling? Could it be that a consideration of walking is in itself an exercise in exploring the human condition? A range of perspectives on these questions can be found in the western intellectual tradition. Among them is the spirituality of pilgrimage, in which walking becomes the model for living in response to a transcendent call. As the pilgrim tells us, when one walks one does so in the presence of God, and the resolving that is done along the way is illumined by a personal sense of one's relation with God (*Solvitur ambulando cum Deo*).

MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

In my classes, I promote open, critical, and respectful discussions and work to create an environment in which students approach not only the text but also the comments of others with an attitude of openness, trust, and generosity—not only because it meets the demands of intelligent conversation, but also because it fosters an intellectual humility that resonates with the deepest wisdom of my own Jesuit education. As a teacher at Boston College, I believe that I bear a responsibility, not in spite of but rather because of its Jesuit Catholic identity, to

encourage my students to be open to all questions and listen to all voices with the aim of nurturing the kind of rigorous and collaborative pursuit of understanding at the heart of both the intellectual life and the life of a responsible citizen. In my understanding, teaching is about leading students out of their solitude and into solidarity with others. It is about leading them out of their silence and into a community of conversation with the text and their fellow classmates in ways that awaken wonder and invite an authentic response. It is about persuading students to become open, even vulnerable to what the text and others have to say to them.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Solnit, *Wanderlust*
Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*
Thoreau, *Walking*
Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*
Laird, *Into the Silent Land*
canvas readings

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

25% Active Participation. This includes coming to class prepared to discuss the readings, participation in all meetings, whether in the classroom, on retreat or during the pilgrimage in Spain, as well as walking exercises and reflections.

25% Essay. One five-page essay on readings of particular interest to you. The essay should pursue the central themes or questions of those readings more deeply into the authors work and into the questions or themes themselves. The focus and aim of the essay should be approved by Professor Petillo.

Reading Reflections. For each set of readings, please write a reflection, 1-2 pages in length with reference to at least 2 of the authors for that week.

25% Oral Exam. Oral exam during finals week on the readings. This exam will be scheduled on an individual basis.

25% Final Essay. One 10-12 page final essay on your experience of pilgrimage, relating to discernment and self-knowledge, and with reference to some of the readings. Due in late July.

- **Prior to each class, students should have: A) Read the required texts and be ready to participate; B) submitted a 1-2 page reflection on the readings for that week; C) engaged in the walking exercise and submitted a reflection on the experience.**

PARTICIPATION

Silent/Guided Meditation

At the beginning of each afternoon class period, we will engage in a brief silent/guided meditation. The purpose of this exercise is to clear the mind of distractions so that we can listen more effectively and prepare ourselves to focus on the text and each other.

Large Group Participation

Part of your participation grade will be based on class attendance. Beyond your attendance, participation means one or more of the following: voicing your own opinions, asking questions, verbally responding to another student's opinions or questions, verbally responding to the professor's questions or comments. Effective participation in class requires preparation. Be sure to read the assigned texts and come to class, with the text, ready to focus on the topic.

Small Group Participation

At various times during our classroom meetings, students will form small groups and discuss an idea or question relevant to class material.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND EXERCISES

INTRODUCTION

January 13th

CLASS 1

January 27th

Walking: Anthropological, Historical, and Philosophical Perspectives

Readings:

Pilgrimage as Spiritual Practice, A Brief Phenomenology of Pilgrimage (Bloechl); (Sweeney)
Pilgrimage as Comedy: (re)Forming Individuals into Community (canvas)
Solnit, *Wanderlust*: (1) Tracing a Headland: An Introduction, (2) The Mind at Three Miles an Hour, (3) Rising and Falling: The Theorists of Bipedilism

Questions for Discussion:

What are the differences between pilgrims and tourists?
What is the relationship between walking and the life of the mind?
How does walking give us insight into human nature?
Though walking is somewhat intentional, and the pilgrim moves with a general plan for the day, in what sense is there a value in being open to the unexpected and surrendering control?
How might differences in your group impact the pilgrimage journey? In what sense and to what degree are authentic friendships between members of the group necessary for its success?
Are there dystopic elements of society from which you wish to escape?
What do you think would be difficult about retaining the insights and the feelings of the intense experience of the pilgrimage when you return home? What could you do to retain the insights of the experience after you return home?

Exercise 1

Take a walk for about 60 minutes with another student in the course. For the first 30 minutes, walk in silence. For the next 30 minutes, converse with your partner. Reflect on your experience and write a 1-page response.

CLASS 2
February 10th

The Metaphysical and Existential Pilgrimage of Bodies and Minds in Motion

Readings:

Solnit, *Wanderlust*, (15) Aerobic Sisyphus and the Suburbanized Psyche
Thoreau, *Walking*
Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XII (the metaphysics of motion)
Plato, *Republic* VII, 514a-520a (allegory of the cave)
Miller, *In the Throe of Wonder*: Prologue (canvas)

Questions for Discussion:

How does walking in a city compare to walking in nature?
How is walking distinct from other modes of travel?
Is all reality perpetually in motion? Do all things in motion seek rest?
To what extent are the movements of our bodies and minds in our control?
Is human life moving towards a common destination?
In what sense can we think about the motion of our bodies and minds as pilgrimage?
In what ways are suffering and death involved in the intellectual journey or pilgrimage of the mind?
In what sense is being a pilgrim about surrendering to the unknown?

Exercise 2

Take a walk for 60 minutes. Spend 30 minutes in the woods or in nature and 30 minutes in the city. Reflect on the different experiences and write up a 1-page response.

CLASS 3
February 24th

Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist Visions of Pilgrimage

Readings:

Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage: Medieval Patterns of Pilgrimage: A Mirror for Today? (canvas)
Pilgrimage as Spiritual Practice, Brouillette, Journey and Body (canvas)
Doing the Truth in Love, Sacramental Vision (canvas)
Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions, Translating the Sacred: Patterns of Pilgrimage in the Buddhist World (canvas)

Questions for Discussion:

What makes a space holy? What is the significance of physical place in a life of holiness? Can all places be holy? Can we speak of sacred spaces outside of a religious context?
What does the claim of sacred space suggest about the relationship between divine transcendence and immanence, the particularity and universality of salvation, time and eternity?
What is the connection between geographical pilgrimage and spiritual transformation?
What is the symbolic significance of exodus and exile in the spiritual life?
In what sense is pilgrimage a metaphor for human life?
What are the benefits and dangers of a place-centered approach to spirituality?
In what ways do the physical challenges faced and pain endured by the pilgrim give us insight into the challenges and suffering of spiritual life? Is there a benefit to facing these challenges and enduring physical/emotional pain?
What features of ordinary life must be carried on in the extraordinary activity of pilgrimage?
How might their meaning be altered there?
How can one foster a greater embodiment in pilgrimage and after one returns?

Exercise 3: Walk with a partner to a place of worship or religious site that is about 30 minutes away. Spend some time at or in the place of worship. Reflect on the particularity of this type of walking compared to the previous experiences. Is there anything distinctive that comes up as you set your sights on a particular goal. Do you notice anything distinctive when you arrive at your destination? Write a 1-page response.

CLASS 4
March 10th

The Journey of the Restless Heart: The Pilgrimage of Becoming Human

Readings:

Himes, *Doing the Truth in Love: The Journey of Restlessness: the Search for God* (canvas)
Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Gracious Mystery, Ever Greater, Ever Nearer* (2) (canvas)
Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*
Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IV (canvas)

Questions for Discussion:

How does restlessness characterize spiritual pilgrimage? Is it our nature to be pilgrims?
What are we moving away from or moving towards? What does it mean spiritually to be moving through a strange land? What does it mean to say that the place we journey towards is our homeland?
Is rest and stillness to be valued over movement and change? Is coming to rest the purpose of the movement? What does it mean to come to rest? Is rest and stillness the mere absence of movement? Does rest or restlessness reveal our deepest nature?

Exercise 4

Walk aimlessly for 60 minutes. Reflect on your experience of walking without a purpose compared to walking with a purpose. Write a 1-page response.

CLASS 5
March 24th

Transformation of Desire: The Pilgrimage of Redemption

Readings:

Exodus: the call of Moses; journey up Mount Horeb as pilgrimage (Exodus 1-3)
Augustine Confessions, Book VIII (canvas)
Alison, *Loving Enemy Within a Divided Self* (online)

Questions for Discussion:

What obstacles do we face along the pilgrimage of human existence?
Do we know what we most deeply desire? How can we become aware of our desires?
Do we have agency over our desires? To what extent do we possess control over the generation and life of our desires?
Can we name different kinds of desires?
What does it mean to experience imprisonment or liberation in the life of desire?
How does desire relate to identity?

Exercise 5

A) Choose a starting point and walk there. Do not have a plan of where you want to walk next. When you get to your starting point, attend to your desires. Where do you want to go? Do you desire to visit a friend? Do you desire to get food at the cafeteria? Let your desires lead the way. No time limit.

B) Choose a place you have never been to before but have desired to visit. Walk to your destination and attend to the ways in which the reality of the place conformed or did not conform to your expectations. How different was the site in *reality* from the site in your *imagination*? (if your destination is too far to walk to, take a T or Uber part way and walk the rest)

Reflect on either experience and write a 1-page response.

Retreat in New Hampshire
March 28th-30th

CLASS 6
April 7th

The Journey up Mount Moriah as Pilgrimage of Faith

Readings:

Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*: Preamble from the Heart, Problema I and II

Questions for Discussion:

Is the pilgrimage of faith a journey in solitude or is it a communal journey?

To what extent does the pilgrimage of faith involve suffering and sacrifice?

To what extent is the pilgrimage of faith a suspension of the rational? In what way is a life of faith informed by feeling and passion?

How can the knight of faith be instructive for people who are not faithful in the traditional sense?

Have you ever trusted someone without rational warrant? Why did you trust them? Would you consider this kind of trust a risk? Does this act of faith have merit in human life?

Exercise 6

Walk with a partner for 90 minutes, stopping a few times along the way. For the first 45 minutes, place your trust in your partner and let them take the lead, walking where they choose to go and stopping where they choose to stop. For the next 45 minutes, reverse positions. Reflect on your experience of trusting your partner and the differences between trusting and leading. Write a 1-page response.

CLASS 7

April 14th

The Ultimate End of Our Earthly Pilgrimage: Eschatological Perspectives

Readings:

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Beatific Vision (prima pars, question 12)

Rahner, *The Content of Faith*: The Pilgrimage of Life (23); The Christian Understanding of Death (163) (canvas)

Petillo, Resurrection (canvas)

Questions for Discussion:

How do we think about death in relation to life? How do we think about death in relation to human agency and freedom? How do we think about death in relation to human identity?

Is death the ultimate problem or evil of human life?

What is the meaning of Resurrected life?

How does eschatological vision alter how we view of the body?

How is the pattern of death and resurrection a model of human authenticity?

Exercise 7

Walk alone or with a partner to a grave site or walk through a cemetery. Reflect on the significance of grave sites and reflect on the meaning of death in relation to human life. Write a 1-page response.

CLASS 8

April 28th

Contemplative Practice: Journey of Self-Discovery as Pilgrimage

Readings:

Laird, *Into the Silent Land*

Questions for Discussion:

What does it mean that the sacred place to which we travel is already within our depths?
What are the implications of the claim that the separation of self and God is an illusion?

Exercise 8: Include a form of contemplative or meditative practice in your walk and see what effect it has. Take a 60 minute walk. Halfway through the walk, stop and find a place to meditate for 15 minutes. Resume your walk, trying to maintain the same state of attention from your meditation. Reflect on your experience and write a 1-page response.

CAMINO

Students will need to be in good health, and ready to adapt to simple conditions. It would be a very good idea to do some extensive walking prior to leaving for Spain and practice living without technology for stretches of time.

A. Walking with a small pack on one's back, for an average of about 17 miles per day (depending on the terrain). We will cover some uneven (though never severe) terrain, and sometimes encounter rain and/or hot sun. According to the rules of all hostels we will have to be awake and on our way by 7.30 am each day. We will walk, with breaks along the way, until approximately 2-3 pm.

B. Eating good, simple food and drinking a great deal of water each day. On days when we finish our walk early enough, we will take turns cooking for each other in groups of 3 or 4. This will include planning the meal, shopping, and cooking. A simple rule prevails: the others must eat what is prepared with gratitude and, at times, a sense of humor.

C. Sleeping and bathing in simple accommodations. The hostels are adequate to a pilgrim's needs, but seldom more than that.

D. Students will keep a journal in which they reflect on their experiences in light of course readings, ongoing discussion and discernment. Each student will sometimes share a portion of his/her journal that she/he is comfortable discussing with the group. The journal will not be graded and will not be read by anyone else unless at the request of the student.

E. The group will include a priest who will celebrate Mass daily, as well as offer spiritual direction. These components are not mandatory. Each day will begin with a meditative practice, a short spiritual reading by one person, and then a prayer led by our chaplain. For the next 45 minutes, we will walk in silence, in which one can reflect on the reading, pray or simply relax. On most evenings, before dinner, we will come back to the reading. The one who chose it will be

asked why she/he was drawn to it, and then others can share their own thoughts. Each student will be asked to choose the daily reading on at least one day of the walk.

Things to Pack

1. Lightweight backpack that can hold various supplies so that in sum you will not be carrying more than 15% of your bodyweight. It would be a good idea if the backpack also had a rain bonnet either built in or easily attachable.
 2. Hiking shoes--light, with good ventilation. Unless you have had some ankle problems in the past, high ankle shoes are not necessary, though a good, strong sole is (sandals, etc., would be the opposite of what you should look for). Buy them and start wearing them often.
 3. Water bottle that clips to your backpack. hydration is a constant concern, but water is easily found every couple of kilometers along the way.
 4. Two changes of clothes beyond what you would be wearing on a particular day. This means: two shirts, two shorts, two pairs of socks (I'd bring at least three), two underwear. One long sleeve shirt is a good idea for cool mornings and evenings. Long underwear might be good for a cool night here and there. Look into Under Armor: leggings for cold-weather jogging will be warm enough and are very light to carry.
 5. A roll-up fleece sleeping bag. These are small, light, cheap, and take up very little room. There are usually blankets in the hostels--but not always. The carry sack can be stuff with clothes and serve as a pillow if none can be found.
 6. Shower shoes that can double as a second set of shoes at the end of the day--that is, shower shoes that look like sandals.
 7. Small first aid kit that should include bandages, antiseptic, lip balm, ChapStick, aspirin, pain reliever, and any sort of allergy stuff you may need (pollen should not be a problem, but Claritin might be a good idea just in case)
 8. Small bath towel (THIS you may find yourself throwing in the trash before you leave Spain)
 9. Packet of laundry powder and clothes pins; most laundry can be done very easily in sinks and buckets that are reserved for that purpose, and every hostel has extensive clotheslines outside.
 10. Sunglasses and / or a hat with a brim, and sunblock; we will be in the sun a lot, and in the afternoon walking, more or less, right into it. If your skin tends to dry out, then cream is a good idea. It will be hot, dry and breezy much of the time.
- That sounds like a lot, but all those things are small and, with the new technology, pretty light.
11. Notebook and/or reading material
 12. Small pocket flashlight. If you have to get up at night you will be happy you have this.

13. Earplugs...15 or 20 people in one room means there will always be people who snore.

Buy your packs with this in mind, practice packing them and un-packing them, and weigh the loaded pack. It would be a good idea to take one extended walk with the pack on your back. You can then work out how to adjust it so that it sits comfortably.

No reason for formal clothing, though as we approach Santiago you may want to set aside the clothing that appears to be in the best condition. In general, pilgrims out on the path look grubby and often beat up--wait until you run into people who have been walking since France or farther--and in Santiago they look suddenly clean but like they've been through a small trial. No one stands on formality in the cathedral, apart from covering up decently (shorts to knees or below, shoulders covered).

Expenses Covered by Boston College

- 1) Retreat in NH
- 2) Overnight in Leon prior to starting the Camino
- 3) Overnight stay in Santiago
- 4) Albergue stays throughout the Camino
- 5) Dinners throughout the Camino
- 6) Travel Insurance

Student Expenses

- 1) Airfare to and from Spain
- 2) Any other overnights prior to May 27 and after June 10
- 3) Breakfast and Lunch throughout the Camino

Overview of Schedule in Spain

Meet in Leon, Spain on **May 27**. We begin our pilgrimage on **May 28**. Arrive at our destination in Santiago **June 10**. Spend 1 overnight in Santiago. Departure **June 11**. It is recommended that you arrive in Spain (Madrid?) on **May 26** in case of flight delays or cancellations. That should give you plenty of time to get to Leon, Spain by May 27.

Upon Return

Submission of 10-12 page final paper by the end of July. Papers should integrate experiences along the Camino, as material aiding critical reflection on two distinct views of the relationship between walking, thinking, and discernment found in the required readings. *This is an academic paper.*

Reunion meeting in the Fall. We will have some discussion of the pilgrimage experience itself, our sense of the return to ordinary life, and the insights and commitments that have stayed with us. This will include dinner together.

