The Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Course Description:
In this seminar, we will study Martin Luther King Jr. as a political philosopher. We will take up King’s understanding of the civil rights movement—why it was necessary and what it aimed to achieve. Specifically, we will study his ideas about the political and economic organization of white supremacy, the impact of racial ideologies, and the importance of racial integration and the right to vote. We will investigate King’s philosophy of civil disobedience and nonviolence as well as a set of values he relates to that philosophy: dignity, self-reflection, self-improvement, love, hope, and freedom. We will relate these values to King’s understanding of justice. Our investigation will encompass King’s remarks on the Vietnam War, and the global elements of his vision of justice. Critical responses to King’s thought will be considered, including his lack of attention to gender justice. Readings will be from King’s speeches and writings and from a recent volume of essays by philosophers and political theorists (To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr., edited by Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry). In addition to the themes described above, these essays address the intellectual context of King’s work in relation to the teachings of W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Mahatmas Gandhi.

Tuesday [4:30 - 5:45]
Thursday [4:30 - 5:45]
Erin Kelly
PJS 190/Phil 191