Should our society be just or merciful? Should we forgive debts, pardon criminals, and offer private charity to the poor? Today, we often pit the two against each other, and question whether mercy is a virtue: we fear that mercy undercuts justice, which we understand in terms of rights and equal, impartial treatment. But mercy was long understood as a virtue that complements justice rather than contradicting it. This fall, Collegium Institute invites faculty members from the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel, and other area universities to take part in a reading group spanning the history of justice and mercy, exploring the tension between the two and the values of justice and mercy in today’s world.

Our five-session survey may include:

1) The Ancient World: Selections from Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics and Rhetoric and Seneca, De Clementia (On Mercy)

2) Christianity: Selections from Augustine’s City of God and Political Writings (Letters) and Aquinas’s Summa Theologica

3) The Renaissance: Dante’s Inferno (very brief selections) and Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice


For more information or to participate, contact program coordinator Elizabeth Feeney: elife@sas.upenn.edu