

PHIL 368b: Equality and Social Justice

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Humanities 4-97

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Office hours: Wednesday 10:00-12:00 and by appointment

Week 1 | Introduction: Global Justice, Obligation, and Compassion | January 10,12

Week 2 | Obligation and compassion | January 17,19

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, ed. Hugh LaFollette (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997): 585-595.

Ram Dass and Mirabai Bush, "Called by Compassion," *Compassion in Action: Setting Out on the Path of Service* (New York: Bell Tower, 1992): 3-7.

Week 3 | Global impartiality and moral motivation | January 24, 26

Peter Unger, "Living High and Letting Die: A Puzzle About Our Behavior Toward People in Great Need," *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 24-61.

Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, "Natural Compassion," *How Can I Help? Stories and Reflections on Service* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988): 3-17.

Week 4 | Poverty, Responsibility, and Political Philosophy | January 31, February 2

Andrew Kuper, "Global Poverty Relief: More than Charity," *Global Responsibilities: Who Must Deliver on Human Rights?* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 155-172.

Peter Singer, "Poverty, Facts, and Political Philosophies: A Debate with Andrew Kuper," *Global Responsibilities: Who Must Deliver on Human Rights?* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 173-181.

Dass and Gorman: 18-35.

Week 5 | Questioning global impartiality | February 7, 9

Judith Lichtenberg, "Absence and the Unfond Heart: Why People Are Less Giving Than They Might Be," *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy*, ed. Deen K. Chatterjee (Cambridge,: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 75-97.

Dass and Gorman: 36-50.

Week 6 | A pause for breath | February 14, 16

Dass and Gorman: 50-71.

Week 7 | Addressing global injustice: Pogge | February 28, March 2

Thomas Pogge, "Eradicating Systemic Poverty: Brief for a Global Resources Dividend" *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002): 196-215.

Dass and Gorman: 71-92.

Week 8 | Addressing global justice: Robinson | March 7, 9

Fiona Robinson, "A critical ethics of care in the context of international relations" *Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory and International Relations* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999): 137-168.

Dass and Gorman: 93-121.

Optional: Elizabeth Spelman, "The Heady Political Life of Compassion," *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997): 59-89.

Week 9 | Images of suffering | March 14, 16

Stanley Cohen, "Images of Suffering," *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000): 168-195.

Dass and Gorman: 122-152.

Week 10 | Mutual indifference (1) | March 21, 23

Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy After the Holocaust* (London: Verso, 1998): 1-24.

Dass and Gorman: 153-183.

Week 11 | Mutual indifference (2) | March 28, 30

Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference*: 25-48.

Dass and Gorman: 184-216.

Week 12 | Mutual aid | April 4, 6

Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference*: 49-82.

Dass and Gorman: 217-243.

Week 13 | Ways forward | April 11

No readings

About the course

This course deals with connections between two areas of inquiry: (1) philosophical accounts of our obligations, as relatively wealthy world citizens, toward the world's poorest; and (2) how our ability to understand these issues, and act upon our understanding, is shaped by our openness to or dissociation from our own and others' suffering. I believe that connections between (1) and (2) are relevant not only for tackling questions of moral motivation—how we could individually and collectively rise to the challenge presented by widespread, needless suffering—but for coming to terms with our own experience as we encounter suffering.

A challenge for this course is that there is little philosophical literature (that I know of, anyhow) that makes these connections: we'll be breaking new ground. We'll use a number of methods: paying close critical attention to the texts we read and tracing connections between them; training ourselves to focus on the texture of our own experiences (with techniques like quieting the mind and free writing); talking and listening in groups and as a whole class; and using different kinds of writing to clarify and communicate our developing understandings.

This class won't be everyone's cup of tea. Contributing to the inquiry—and if you want to be mercenary, getting a good grade—will require that you combine careful analytical reading, writing, and dialogue with honest reflection on your own emotions, responsibilities, and place in the world. This in turn will require that you read and reflect on each week's material by Tuesday's class, develop and present your ideas in twice-weekly writing assignments, and contribute actively in highly participatory classes. It'll be hard work.

Moreover, there's no neat package of ideas ready for you to consume; I've chosen the readings, but we'll have to figure out how they fit together and what stories they tell about poverty and privilege, suffering and compassion, dissociation and engagement. We'll also be working to figure out how to study this stuff as a group—what kinds of classroom practices and weekly assignments keep us up with the reading, help us bring abstract ideas into dialogue with our own experiences, let us share our ideas in ways that engage rather than bore us, and so on.

Here are some of the things that I hope you'll get out of this course:

- **An active and reflective stance toward your own learning.** This is a UofA course, so there'll be hoops to jump through and grades to earn. But to do well in this course, and to get what it has to offer, you'll need to be more than a consumer or hoop-jumper. You'll need to be part of an ongoing conversation about what aspects of the class and assignments are helping or hindering your learning—and indeed, about what 'learning' means given the material we're studying together. Since the University often sets you up as consumers and passive information-sponges, I think you'll get a lot out of this more reflective approach to what and how you learn.
- **Skills at close reading.** In most of our overloaded lives, we move quickly through texts and ideas—skimming, surfing, highlighting, getting the gist. Not in this course. We'll be pushing at our abilities to read closely and meticulously, wringing every ounce of structure and meaning from complex and nuanced texts. It's hard work sharpening your ability to do this kind of reading, especially since we'll be covering 50-80 pages each week. But the skill is *incredibly* valuable.
- **New ways of writing.** A lot of the learning in this class will take place by writing—you'll have 'skeleton outlines' on the readings due every Tuesday, out-of-class writing assignments almost every week, we'll do lots of in-class writing, and there'll be a major paper (with a draft stage) toward the end of term. The writing in the course—like the stuff we'll read—will range from

theoretical reflection to autobiography; and the writing you'll do will span all the way from the loosest free-writing to the tightest, multiple draft, analytical argumentation. As we explore these different modes of writing, you'll get to reflect on the process as well as the product, which may itself alter the kind of writing you do, and how much you like it (it's been my experience that a lot of us have pretty twisted relationships to writing, or at least to academic writing).

- **A sense of your potential for scholarly voice.** As I've already noted, there's no pat set of theories out there about the issues we'll study. We will individually and collectively be figuring out what our questions are, how to address them, and what answers we can come up with in the space of 14 weeks. This process—in its messiness, its tentativeness, its exhilaration, and its demands—is what it means to be a researcher and a scholar. See if you like it!
- **New perspectives on your own experience.** We'll be dealing with questions of poverty, compassion, etc., in the third person (as an 'it' to be studied) and also in the first person (noticing, for example, the thoughts and emotions and bodily sensations we experience when we encounter suffering). This first-person approach is challenging: a lot of us are better at spinning stories about our lives and experiences than we are at dropping the stories for long enough to notice what's actually going on, right this second. We'll experiment with different ways of glimpsing our present experience, and of noticing what takes us away from this; and we'll work, as the term progresses, to figure out how to integrate these first- and third-person modes of inquiry.
- **A clearer understanding of who you are in relation to others.** This is the overt work of the course—getting clearer on how we are connected to the world's poor, what we feel toward them, how we think about them, what we might be moved to do for and with them. And at another level, the thirty or so people in *Philosophy 368* will constitute a community of inquiry, and you'll get to notice who you are with the rest of us, how our interactions enable (or maybe obstruct) your learning, what scares or stimulates or fulfills you about being in these conversations, and so on. Which brings us right back to the first bullet point: that I hope this course will help you develop a more active and reflective sense of how you learn, and who you are as a learner.

Course requirements

Weekly writing— 40%

There will be two kinds of weekly writing:

- Each Tuesday at the beginning of class, you'll submit a 'skeleton outline' of each of the week's readings that gives an overview of its central content and structure. These outlines can be written up in point form, or as idea maps, or in whatever way communicates your understanding. They must not exceed two pages. There'll also be an extra bit added to each of these Tuesday assignments: perhaps a brief comparison of the week's readings, or a reflection on what the process of reading/writing was like for you.
- I will assign and collect one further piece of writing each week: sometimes this will be something you write in class, sometimes it will be something I assign between classes. We'll experiment with different formats for this part of the writing, and the class will have a say in which ones are most useful in developing your thinking and communicating your best ideas.

I will give you constructive feedback on the weekly writing assignments—we'll experiment here, too, with the kinds of feedback that are most helpful to you. To keep things manageable for me, I certainly won't be giving precise grades on each piece of work; rather, I'll give you a ✓-, ✓, or ✓+.

You will get a grade for your term's worth of Weekly Writing at the end of the term, based on a portfolio of **all** the weekly writing you've done over the term (you'll hand this in on Thursday, April 6th).

Here are the standards I'll apply in grading your portfolio of weekly writing:

4.0: You've wowed me. You submitted all of the assignments, and they show charitable, careful, insightful, intelligent engagement with individual readings, and with course themes. You've developed your ideas over the term in light of what we've read and talked about in class. And you've improved your writing, taking my feedback seriously.

3.7: Still pretty wow, but there might be one or two missing assignments, and/or a few of the assignments may be good rather than great.

3.3: Means 'very good'. You're not only taking the assignments seriously and getting just about all of them in, but are capturing the important details of readings in your skeleton outlines, and showing thoughtfulness and insight in your reflections. Reading your work, I have the sense of someone who's taking the course absolutely seriously, developing their ideas as the term proceeds, and improving their writing based on feedback.

3.0: You're doing the work, with focus and skill. Your skeleton outlines show that you've done the reading pretty carefully, and your other assignments show thoughtfulness. This grade might go to someone who worked super-hard but took a while to gain the requisite skills in philosophical reading and clear, focused writing. Or it could go to someone who has great reading and writing skills but is doing some coasting. Or it could go with someone who's great on the third-person inquiry but slacks on the first-person, or vice versa.

2.7: There are more than isolated problems here. You've been doing good work but missing more than a few assignments. Or I've pointed to significant areas for improvement in your work and you haven't found ways to address these. Or you're being casual in your skeleton outlines and/or other weekly work, so that you're not showing the requisite care in reading or reflection.

2.3 - 0.0: I'm not shy about using these grades! If you miss multiple assignments, please don't be surprised if you're in this zone. Or you could also end up in this zone if my feedback on assignments indicates real problems, and you don't find ways to improve your work.

Oh, and one more important thing: your weekly writing will only be accepted if you submit it in person, in class, when it's due. For stuff that you're writing at home, this means in the first ten minutes of class. (I'm not a monster, and will accommodate genuinely extenuating circumstances—but you need to communicate these circumstances to me in a timely way, so that we can make alternate arrangements.)

Please feel free to talk to me at any point during the term if you want help in improving your written work, or aren't sure how you're doing. I'm genuinely happy to support you in doing your best work: come to see me early and often!

Participation — 25%

You won't be able to learn about the stuff we're studying if you keep quiet. You need to read, write, and listen, but you also need to add your perspective to our classroom dialogues in order to figure out what you think and feel, where you stand, how this comes across to other people, and what questions and challenges it provokes.

This class also involves a lot of activity that's not about talking: on-the-spot writing that then gets shared, for example, or different experiments with observing our internal processes in silence. We're doing this stuff because I consider it important in coming to grips with our subject matter, which involves connecting scholarly material with the texture of our own moment-to-moment lives; it'll be important that you participate in these aspects of the class, suspending disbelief for long enough to see what they're like.

So to do well in this part of the course you'll need to:

Show up! Your participation grade will suffer if you don't show up for every class, on time: this is a basic course expectation. I'll of course make allowances for illnesses, personal duress, and so on, but you need to bring such situations to my attention promptly.

Be an active and informed participant in our conversations. This will be a highly participatory class, as a big group, in smaller groups, and in pairs. If you're quiet or shy, you'll need to navigate this and find contexts where you're able to share your views (I'm glad to support you in figuring out how to do this, and also suspect that our work as a class bringing attention to our own experiences may show you new things about your quietness). On the other hand, if you're a talker, you'll need to bring awareness to the flow of conversation and how you can be a good listener too (and yes, I think that learning how to be more mindful of your moment-to-moment experience may show you new things about what moves you to talk, and what it feels like to hang back).

Be respectful and kind. If you haven't realized it already, this is an unconventional philosophy course. It asks you to look at parts of yourself that you may not be comfortable with and to engage with aspects of the world—starvation, trauma, indifference, cruelty—that can be deeply upsetting. And not just on your own: our dialogues in the classroom will be about this stuff. So it's crucial that we cooperate to make our classroom a space where we're supported in doing this

work—where people aren't at risk of being mocked or attacked or slapped down. Being a good participant means doing your part to build this kind of supportive community.

Please feel free to talk to me at any point during the term if you want feedback on the quality of your participation.

Final Paper — 35%

The course focuses on a *big* question: how philosophical discussions of obligations to distant others relate to questions of compassion, of our relationship to our own and others' suffering. I want you to have a chance to pull together your thinking into a serious analytical essay, and to get lots of feedback as you figure out how to structure and communicate your ideas.

So the final paper will have three stages:

- On Thursday, March 2nd, you will submit a 'preview' of your planned essay (maximum 500 words): this preview will lay out the position for which you'll argue (your 'thesis'), two arguments you'll construct in support of your thesis, specifics from stuff we've read in the course that will be especially relevant, and questions you have about how to proceed. This essay preview should be no more than 500 words; it can be in point form if you like.
- On Thursday, March 23rd, you'll submit a draft of your essay, building on your preview and the advice you've had from peers. The draft (maximum 2500 words) should be a real essay: complete sentences and paragraphs, citations, etc. I'll get the draft back to you—with feedback—by March 30th.
- On April 11th, you'll submit the final version of your essay (maximum 3500 words).

I will assign a grade to the ensemble of preview, draft, and final version: it's important that you make the most of each stage, and your grade will reflect how seriously you've taken all three stages.

Calculation of final grade

You will get a grade out of 4.0 for each of the above three components (weekly writing, participation, major paper), and a final grade point value will be calculated arithmetically using the above percentages for each assignment.

The final grade point mark will be converted to letter grades for reporting, using the university scheme (e.g. A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, B+ = 3.3, etc.), with cutoffs for rounding up or down (and for distinguishing between A and A+) to be decided on a class-wide basis by me at the end of term.

A participation checklist (for your reference)

- I come to class prepared—having done the reading really carefully and reflected on it.
- I take part wholeheartedly in class activities even when these are unfamiliar. I'm willing to give the prof and the class the benefit of the doubt—to imagine that I could learn from things that don't come easily to me, or that at first seem puzzling or silly.
- I listen to all contributions carefully, even if I don't agree. And I *seem* to be listening, too!
- I ask for clarification if something is unclear.
- I'm willing to take risks—in how I think about things and how I experience things. And I recognize that others are taking risks, and do my best to treat them with respect and kindness.
- I'm careful not to be perceived as attacking others for their ideas; so I criticize ideas rather than people, and do it in a measured way.
- I speak to the whole group whenever possible, rather than making things a conversation with the prof, or some other particular participant.
- I am aware of my body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and eye contact as means of communication.
- I don't hold back from voicing my opinion because I feel that I am too advanced for the class OR because I feel that everyone else in the class knows more than I do.
- I don't interrupt others while they're speaking.
- I do my part to keep discussion moving and building. I try to tie my contributions to points that have already been made, for example, and don't ignore the thread of discussion in order to say what I planned to say all along.
- I don't have private conversations during group discussions.
- I tie my contributions to class readings when appropriate, and engage charitably with those readings.
- I try to be succinct and focused in my contributions, rather than rambling on.
- I take seriously ideas that seem frighteningly or ludicrously radical, unfamiliar, or heretical OR that seem unduly conservative, parochial, or timid OR that come from perspectives very different from my own.
- I acknowledge that aspects of my own experience and perspective might shape my response to particular positions and class activities in ways that are not yet fully clear to me.
- I change my mind if there seems good reason to do so.

Some initial advice on analytical writing

Be clear

Please please please write as clearly as possible. Avoid jargon, long words, and convoluted sentences. Don't try to sound sophisticated or 'philosophical': convey what you have to say as explicitly and unambiguously as you can. One way to test the clarity of your sentences is to read them aloud: if a friend or brother or sister or parent were listening, could they follow easily? If not, consider being more succinct and to the point. Keep sentences and paragraphs relatively short.

And feel free to write in the first person; it saves words and improves clarity.

Be charitable

Before you agree or disagree with someone's ideas—whether they belong to the author of a reading or to an imagined critic of the reading—you have to make clear the structure of their ideas (or rather, those of their ideas that are relevant to your own). *I cannot emphasize this strongly enough*: you have to engage carefully with the arguments of authors whose work you use. You should be able to imagine these authors listening to you and having reason to take you seriously, rather than saying "Did you even *read* my work?!"

The people whose work we read in this course are not fools: if your essays depict them as such, you probably aren't reading with adequate care. This isn't to say that you should agree with them; rather, it's to suggest that you should disagree with the fairest possible representation of their views. If your attribution of a view to an author is likely to be controversial, offer textual evidence for your interpretation.

Strong feelings about the subject at hand should motivate you to communicate all the more carefully and precisely. Sweeping claims and overblown rhetoric will weaken your writing.

There's no need to go beyond the course readings

If you do choose to go beyond the course readings in researching your writing, though, be very sure to credit your sources, and don't let other sources draw you away from engaging carefully and charitably with the assigned readings.

Use quotations and citations sparingly

You don't have space in the writing you'll do for many quotes from the text. If you're saying something about an author's argument that's likely to be puzzling or controversial, do be sure to give a page reference so that your reader can see whether they agree with your interpretation—do this by just putting the page number in brackets like this. [99]

Only quote the text (writing it out word for word) when you plan to make special use of a passage, or think your interpretation of the passage is likely to be especially controversial. When you quote the text, give a page reference in brackets like this. [99]

Use gender-neutral language

There is now a commitment in North American philosophy to the non-sexist use of language: you should reflect this in your use of pronouns. Use 'he' and 'man' when you want to refer to males, or to be true to the sexist language of a text — these terms can no longer be assumed to denote all humans. For more

about this, see the American Philosophical Association guidelines on the non-sexist use of language, which are on the web at: <http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/publications/texts/nonsexist.html>

Give yourself time to revise

Spend time editing successive drafts of your assignments (except when we're doing free writing!) Make your argument as succinct and organized as possible. Be sure to proof-read your final draft: missing words, misspellings, and poor syntax all serve to undermine the reader's confidence in the thoughtfulness of your position.

Format your work to help me give feedback

Here I'm talking about stuff you write at home:

1. **Double-space**, with 1" margins on all sides, and at least an 11-point font.
2. Include a word-count (you can just write it on).
3. Staple things, please.
4. Always keep your own copy of assignments.

Keep to the word limit

While I'll excuse your going slightly over (you can get away with as much as 10% extra), assignments that are substantially over length will be penalized.

Don't lose stuff!

The different kinds of written work will be evaluated together (the essay with its preview and draft, and the weekly work as a portfolio at the end of term). It would be very, very bad if you lost your written work before it was graded at the end of term: keep it in a safe place!

Avoid plagiarism like the plague

Plagiarism means representing someone else's ideas or words as your own: it can take the form of straightforward copying, paraphrasing, using another's ideas or structure of argument without attribution, sloppy citing or footnoting, and so on. Just to give a few examples:

- It is plagiarism if you copy something word-for-word without clearly indicating that these are someone else's words and citing the source.
- It is plagiarism if you paraphrase someone else's writing — rearranging or changing their words, but keeping some of the structure and ideas — without clearly indicating that these are someone else's ideas and citing the source.
- It is probably plagiarism if the details of the ideas you express in an assignment aren't yours and you don't let on whose they are.

The University of Alberta's Code of Student Behavior (Section 43.3) puts it like this: "No student shall submit the words, ideas, images, or data of another person as his or her own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, research project or assignment in a course or program of study." Penalties for plagiarism include failure in the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, and expulsion.

You have the responsibility to understand what constitutes plagiarism and to avoid it in all its forms. I want you to appreciate that plagiarism, gross or subtle, will not be tolerated in this course. If you are

unsure about whether a particular use of sources, manner of footnoting, form of collaboration, etc., might constitute plagiarism, I will gladly talk it over.

“The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.ualberta.ca/secretariat/appeals.htm) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.” [GFC 29 Sept 2003]

[Policy about course outlines can be found in Section 23.4(2) of the University Calendar.]