

**LAN 312: NEH Enduring Questions Course: What is Empathy?
Cultural & Scientific Understandings of Empathy
Dr. Margarete Landwehr, Dept. of Languages and Cultures
Spring 2015: Wed. 4:25-7:10; Room TBA
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Course Description: What is empathy? Is it an innate human trait, can it be learned or nurtured through art, or does it consist of nature and nurture? Philosophers, religious leaders and artists have discussed empathy as charity, compassion, and sympathy. Researchers in evolutionary biology, neuroscience & developmental psychology explore if empathy is uniquely human or not. We shall examine the social and ethical implications of answers to the question What is empathy? in Eastern and Western religion, philosophy, literature and film as well as in the social sciences and sciences. Comparing different, but mutually enriching definitions of empathy of various eras, cultures, and fields constitutes a key approach in this course, which is divided into four units: 1. Eastern philosophy & religion, 2. Western philosophy & religion, 3. the sciences (evolutionary biology & neuroscience) & social sciences (psychology), 4. film & literature (drama, poetry, prose) with a focus on the role of narrative art in nurturing empathy. There are no prerequisite courses or technological expertise needed for this course. Please note that this is also a **writing emphasis course and interdisciplinary course**.

Course Objectives:

1. To think and write critically on a variety of texts from various fields.
2. To refine one's writing skills with both informal and formal writing assignments.
3. To polish one's public speaking skills in class discussions, debates, and presentations.
4. To develop compassionate listening skills and thoughtful responses to novel opinions.
5. To apply material learned on empathy to daily situations & political & social issues.
6. To develop tolerance & understanding for alternative life-styles, different religions, cultures, races, genders, classes, ethnicities & unconventional political & social views.
7. To recognize bias & critically re-examine values and opinions towards self and others.
8. To recognize objective vs. subjective thinking and to balance the two.
9. To nurture creativity and original insights towards artistic texts, self and others.

Required Texts:

Anand, Mulk Raj. Untouchable. (Indian novel, New York, Penguin)
de Waal, Frans. The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society
Hansberry, Lorraine. A Raisin in the Sun (American play, New York: Random House)
Livaneli, O. Z. Bliss (Turkish novel, New York: St. Martin's Griffin)
Miller, Arthur. Death of a Salesman (American play, Arthur Miller)

Readers with poems, essays, articles, stories (Student Dynamic Bookstore and on D2L)

Recommended Text: Empathy: Philosophical & Psychological Perspectives Eds. Amy Coplan & Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011).

Course Structure & Evaluation: The course will have a seminar format with brief lectures and a focus on collaborative learning through student-centered discussions and presentations. Weekly reading assignments will vary from 50 to 150 pages; the amount of reading depends upon the texts' difficulty. Written assignments include answers to questions on texts, essays, a presentation summary and two research papers. The class shall go on a **field trip** either to a performance (a film, play, etc.) or appropriate museum. **Attendance Policy:** Since this is a seminar which consists of student discussions, regular class attendance is crucial and required. As per the student catalogue, one week of classes, in this case, one three-hour class, will constitute an unexcused absence. Excused absences include a serious illness, family emergency, or religious holiday. Please comply with the excused absence policy in the **WCU Undergraduate Catalog** for university sanctioned events. If you have special circumstances that require your missing a class, please speak with me. Cell-phone use and texting is not allowed in class.

Grading:

25% Homework assignments: One-page reaction papers with critiques of readings

25% One classroom presentation and a brief written summary (3-4 pages)

25% First research paper (8 pages) & five-minute presentation. With data from your own discipline you will answer the question: What is empathy? OR: You will formulate a definition of empathy and apply it to a current political or social issue.

25% Second research paper (8 pages) & presentation: Apply what you have learned about art's role in eliciting empathic responses in readers/viewers to a discussion of an optional reading/film. OR: You may conduct an approved service learning project or community-based research. You will write a report on your experience and apply relevant class/research material. OR: You may combine both options into one paper.

Please note: If you miss an assignment, or fail to hand in an assignment, your grade may be lowered. If you anticipate that you cannot hand in an assignment on time, speak with me before the assignment deadline in order to receive a possible make-up.

ACADEMIC POLICIES

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT: If you have a disability that needs accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), please contact the Office of Services for Student Services (223 Lawrence Center; 610.436.3217; ossd@wcupa.edu).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY extends beyond plagiarism. Please refer to the Undergraduate Catalog for university policies on academic integrity and dishonesty or consult with me.

For questions regarding the **No-Grade Policy**, **Sexual Harassment**, and the **Student Code of Conduct**, refer to the Undergraduate Course Catalogue, the Rams Eye View, or the University Web Site. Improper conduct in any of these areas will not be tolerated and may result in ejection from class. (WCU Emergency telephone number: 610.436.3311.)

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

A. Informal Writing Assignments:

25%: Discussion questions/essays: Written assignments for required readings will be given in class and posted on D2L and may consist of questions on readings and/or essay topics such as comparing/contrasting readings. Essays will require one typed, double-spaced page. Answers to questions & essays will be discussed in small groups and/or debated in class. Essays will also be collected, graded, and returned to students. Students may revise essays and must hand revisions to the instructor no later than one week after graded first versions are returned. **Rationale:** Questions and essay topics should provoke students to read and think critically about texts, to formulate in their own words what they have learned, to apply their insights to their own lives or fields of study, and to prepare them to share discoveries with fellow students in class discussions and debates.

25%: Classroom presentation & written summary: Students will choose a research topic from a list of suggestions that is related to their fields of study, that will be shared with the class and that will serve as a springboard for discussion and/or debate. A three to five page typed, double-spaced summary with at least two scholarly sources will serve as the foundation of the presentation and will be due the day of the presentation. Scholarly sources must include one source not taken from the internet and can include journal articles or scholarly books. (Wikipedia and similar online sources do not count as a scholarly source.) Presentations must be given on assigned dates. Late presentations and delays in handing-in summaries may lower your grade. Summaries may be revised after the instructor has returned them with comments. Revised summaries are due a week after the instructor has returned a graded summary. Students must discuss a topic and scholarly sources with the instructor at least one week before the presentation.* Presentations should last no longer than five minutes, should supply some new information that has not been discussed previously in class, and should spur questions and classroom discussion. Another five minutes shall be allowed for questions and discussions. Powerpoint presentations and You-Tube video clips are encouraged, but not required. Your grade will not be impacted with such additions to presentations. Grading is based on the organization, clarity, and originality of the presentation. Well-researched and clearly presented talks and well-written summaries with new material will receive high grades. **Rationale:** The research project allows the student to apply what has been learned in class to his or her field of study and to deepen his/her knowledge of empathy in his/her area of expertise. The written assignment allows the student to learn how to write a succinct and eloquent summary of the student's findings and should prepare the student to research and write his/her formal research papers. The class presentation allows the student to practice public speaking and to prepare for presentations of his/her research papers.

B. Formal Writing Assignments: (MLA, Chicago Manual or AP Style may be used.) Papers shall consist of 8 typed, double-spaced pages of 12 pt. with one-inch margins and at least three scholarly sources. A cover page does not constitute one of the 8 pages. At least one source should not be from the internet. Scholarly sources are articles or books from sources such as university presses. I do not consider Wikipedia a scholarly source. Research topics/projects must be discussed with the instructor at least **two weeks before deadlines.*** I encourage all students to confer with me on the progress of their papers. Students may show me rough drafts. A grading rubric will be provided. Papers shall be graded on content and style and should consist of original research, be clearly organized and written with no punctuation, grammar, or spelling mistakes. Students shall share their findings with classmates in presentations, which should focus on new information that has not already been discussed. Please review university policy on plagiarism. Sources of specific information should be indicated in footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography. **Rationale:** Assignments shall help students refine their writing and public speaking skills by organizing their thoughts & reformulating what they have learned in their own words.

25% First Research Paper: With data from their own discipline (psychology, literature, etc.) students will answer the question: What is empathy? They may incorporate material discussed in class, but must also include original findings. OR: A definition of empathy will be applied to a current political or social issue. OR: Students may combine the two options. Papers are due the 8th week of the semester. Research papers may be revised and handed in a week after first versions are returned. **Rationale:** This assignment has both intellectual and practical goals as it allows students to deepen their knowledge of their discipline by expanding what they have learned in their area of expertise and/or applying their knowledge to a current event that interests them.

25% Second Research Paper: Students may examine the role of art in eliciting empathic responses in readers/viewers in a discussion of an optional reading or film. OR: They may conduct a service learning project or community based research approved by the instructor, advisors, and administrators that should begin no later than the first 2-3 weeks of the semester. They will write up a report on their experience and apply relevant research material (ex. theories of the role of empathy in pedagogy, if they are teaching volunteers or psychological theories of empathy if they are involved in social work) to their findings. Papers are due the time/date of the scheduled exam time. **Rationale:** This assignment enables students to apply what they have learned to a deeper understanding of an artistic text or to a real-world situation in which they are interacting with others.

*If you cannot attend the instructor's office hours to discuss your research or presentation topic or service project, you may make an appointment or call the professor (ext. 2465) during her office hours to discuss your topic. If you anticipate not being able to meet an assignment deadline, please speak with the instructor before the assignment is due.

Schedule: Part I: What is Empathy? Answers from Eastern Religion, Philosophy & Art Week I: Introduction to the course, outline of basic questions on empathy, overview of definitions of empathy, and of similarities/differences in the works to be discussed. **Chinese Philosophy:** Essays, Chinese thinkers: Confucius & Mencius. **Buddhism: Film excerpts:** “The Buddha: Story of Siddhartha” (Dir. David Grubin, PBS)

Week II: Buddhist Philosophy, Indian Poetry & South Korean Film

Mahayana Buddhism: “Karuna” (compassion)

Dalai Lama: (& Howard Cutler) “The Value & Benefits of Compassion” Art of Happiness

Rabindranath Tagore: Poetry: “I” and Love Songs.

Film excerpts: “10 Questions for the Dalai Lama” (Dir. Rick Ray, Tibetan Buddhism)

“Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter” (2003, S. Korean, Dir. Kim Ki-duk, Buddhist fable)

Part II: What is Empathy? Answers from Western Religion & Philosophy (with appropriate texts from Western Fiction, Poetry & Film)

Week III: Western Religions

Jewish Philosopher: Martin Buber: Excerpts from I & thou

Christianity: The New Testament: Deuteronomy 6:5; John 13:35; Corinthians: Chapt. 13 & Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Mother Teresa: “On Love” from No Greater Love

Literature: Parzival (excerpts, medieval German epic on search for the Holy Grail)

Sebald’s “Paul Bereyter” (The Emigrants, stories of Jewish refugees from the Holocaust)

Islam: the Koran & Rumi’s **poetry:** “Only Breath,” “Force of Friendship,” “Say I am You”

Film excerpts: “Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet” (Dir. Michael Schwarz)

Week IV: Western Philosophers (with history and film)

Arendt, Hannah: (German/Jewish philosopher) Excerpts: “Eichmann in Jerusalem”: “the banality of evil,” lack of empathy & “sheer thoughtlessness” p. 323-4, 339, 365, 379

Hume, David: Excerpt from A Treatise of Human Nature (English)

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques: Excerpts from Emile, Book IV p.144-49. (French Romanticism)

Smith, Adam: “On the Propriety of Action: Of Sympathy,” The Theory of Moral Sentiments. pp. 1-7 & 34-37. (English)

Scheler, Max: Excerpts from The Nature of Sympathy: “fellow-feeling”: definition: pp.12-19, 39-41; its innate nature & critique of Darwin: 130-4.

Schopenhauer, Arthur: “The Virtue of Loving-Kindness,” in “The Foundation of Ethics,” On the Basis of Morality. (German)

Unamuno, Miguel de: “Love, Suffering, Pity and Personality” & “Faith, Hope & Charity,” in Tragic Sense of Life. (Spanish/Basque philosopher/writer/poet)

Film excerpts: “Hannah Arendt” (Dir. Margarethe von Trotta)

Part III: The Sciences: Evolutionary Biology & Neuroscience & Social Sciences

Week V: Biology/Evolution: Excerpts from The Expression of Emotions in Man & Animals (1862) & “A biological Sketch of an Infant” Mind: Quarterly Review of Psychology & Philosophy Vol. 11 (1877): 286-94. (Charles Darwin)

Excerpts: The Age of Empathy: Nature’s Lessons for a Kinder Society (Frans de Waal)

“A Feeling Brain”: the limbic system & emotional contagion: p. 65-69

“Empathy Needs a Face”: mirror neurons: 78-83; Chapter 4: “Someone else’s shoes”

Chapter 5: “The Elephant in the Room”: VEN neurons, elephants, dolphins

Week VI: Psychology:

Ch. 2: “Empathy, its arousal & prosocial functioning” & Ch. 3: “Development of Empathic Distress” in Empathy & Moral Development (Martin Hoffman)

“Empathy, Imitation & the Social Brain” (Decety/Meltzoff) & “Understanding Empathy: Features & Effects” (Coplan), in Empathy: Philosophical & Psychological Perspectives

Excerpts: In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory & Women’s Development (Gilligan)

Week VII: Neuroscience: Mirror neurons, emotional contagion & perspective-taking

“Two routes to empathy: Insights from Cognitive Neuroscience” (Alvin Goldman)

“Neural Mechanisms for Empathy in the Primate Brain” (Iacoboni): super mirror neurons

Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives, Eds. Amy Coplan & Peter Goldie

Film: “The Lives of Others” (German, von Donnersmarck, art’s role in inspiring empathy)

Week VIII: Midterm Paper presentations and discussions

Part IV: The Arts: Can Empathy be learned?

Week IX: Introduction to Drama (with the novel and film)

Theory of Tragedy: Aristotle, Poetics; Schiller, “Stage Considered as a Moral Institution”

Greek Tragedy: Excerpt from Philoctetes (tragedy, Sophocles)

A “**Middle-Class**” **Tragedy:** Death of a Salesman (Arthur Miller) (**film:** Schloendorff)

The African-American Experience

Literature: A Raisin in the Sun (play, Lorraine Hansberry)

Film: “Crash” (Dir. Paul Haggis; Academy Award for Best Picture, 2005)

Optional Film: “A Raisin in the Sun” (Dir. Daniel Petrie) & “Crash” (2004, Paul Haggis)

Optional Readings: Fences (play, August Wilson), Native Son (novel, Richard Wright;

1986 film, dir. Jerrold Freeman) Beloved (novel, Tony Morrison; 1998 film, Demme)

To Kill a Mockingbird (novel, Harper Lee); film (Dir. Robert Mulligan); Uncle Tom’s

Cabin (Harriet Beecher Stowe); Huckleberry Finn (Mark Twain aka Samuel Clemens)

Week X: Introduction to Poetry: The Experience of the Child (with prose and film)

Romantic theorists: Wordsworth, Coleridge & **Shelley:** “Defense of Poetry” (excerpts)

Poems: Walt **Whitman:** “Song of Myself” in Leaves of Grass; Cesar **Vallejo** (Peru):

“Today a Splinter Entered her”; **Maya Angelou:** “The Rock Cries Out to Us Today”

Pablo **Neruda** (Chile): “20 Love Poems: “I like it when you’re quiet,” “El Fugitivo: XII: To everyone, to you,” 100 Love Sonnets: XVII: I don’t love you as if you were a rose,” “October Fullness,” “Insomnia”.

Film: “City of God” (Brazil, Rio favelas, Dir. Fernando Meirelles/Katia Lund, 2002)

Optional Readings: Novels: Oliver Twist, Hard Times, “A Christmas Carol” (Dickens)

I know why the caged Bird sings (autobiography, Maya Angelou)

Optional Films: “Oliver Twist” (Dir. R. Polanski, 2005); (Dir. David Lean, 1948)

“Wings of Desire” (Wim Wenders, German); “Central Station” (Brazil, Walter Salles)

“Rabbit-Proof Fence” (2002, Phillip Noyce; aboriginal children in Australia)

Weeks XI-XIV: Introduction to Prose (with Philosophy & Film)

Week XI: Oppressed Classes & the Colonized

Literary Theory: George Eliot (Critical Essays)

Henry James (“Preface to ‘The Princess Casamassima’ in The Art of the Novel),

Philosophy: Martha Nussbaum: “The Narrative Imagination,” Cultivating Humanity)

Novel: Untouchable, Mulk Anand (caste system) **Film:** “Salaam Bombay,” Mira Nair

Optional Readings: “A Painful Case” & “The Dead” (stories, Dubliners, James Joyce, Irish)

“The Death of Ivan Ilych” and “Master and Man” (short stories, Leo Tolstoy, Russian)

Optional Films: “Red Beard” (1965, Dir. Akira Kurasawa; doctor learns compassion)

“Gandhi” (1982, Attenborough, colonialism); “Ali, Fear Eats the Soul” (Dir. Fassbinder)

“The Constant Gardener” (Fernando Mereilles, UK, the underprivileged in East Africa)

“The Year of Living Dangerously” (Australian, Peter Weir, poverty in Indonesia)

Week XII: The Gay & Lesbian Experience: Film (with Novels & Drama)

Theory: Excerpts, Susan Sontag’s Regarding the Pain of Others (on media images)

Film: “Far From Heaven” (Todd Haynes)

Optional Readings: Maurice (E. M. Forster), A Single Man (Christopher Isherwood),

Aimee & Jaguar (German novel about a lesbian couple during the Nazi era in Berlin)

Optional Films: “Maurice” (Dir. James Ivory), “Brokeback Mountain” (Dir. Ang Lee),

“Aimee and Jaguar” (Dir. Max Faerberboeck), “A Single Man” (Dir. Tom Ford).

Week XIII: Life as a Woman (where East meets West) (Novel, Film, Religion: Islam)

Bliss (Turkish novel, O.Zulfu Livaneli; “honor” killings); **Film:** “Bliss” (Abdullah Oguz)

Optional Readings: Reading Lolita in Tehran (Nafisi Azar) & Adam Bede (George Eliot)

Optional Films: “Adam Bede” (Giles Foster), “The Stoning of Soraya M.” (C. Nowrasteh)

“Head-On”/“Gegen die Wand” (Dir. Fatih Akin); “Persepolis” (Marjane Satrapi, Persian)

“A Death in Tehran” (Frontline (PBS)/BBC)

Week XIV: The Native American Experience: History, Prose, Film

Stories: “The World’s Greatest Fishermen” Love Medicine & “American Horse” (Erdrich)

Films: "Louise Erdrich," PBS; "Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee" (Yves Simoneau, HBO)

Optional Reading: Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee (Dee Brown)

Optional Film: "The New World" (Dir. Terence Malick)

Week XV: Paper presentations during assigned exam period & papers due

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