

Eddy Hernandez
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The Paideia School

Where is the Love?

Course Description:

This course is designed to explore the biological and spiritual motivations for compassion and love towards others. Our class will discuss why we act with compassion for others by evaluating theories of nature versus nurture, the psychology and neurological development of individuals, and teachings of religion that guide altruistic behavior.

The course poses a series of questions that will guide our discussions and readings:

- How does individual biology, brain development and genetic makeup influence the ability to love with compassion? Can this behavior be learned?
- Is there a gap between what religion teaches us about compassionate love and what happens in everyday life? What hinders us from being altruistic - how does fulfilling basic survival needs conflict with giving to others?
- Can we find compassion within each other and how can we evaluate good acts as altruistic?
- Do intellectual teachings and religious discussions provide us with the tools to develop ourselves into altruistic individuals? What are the possibilities, as individuals, to create change within both ourselves and our communities?

The first half of the course will focus on readings and on creating an intellectual base for defining altruism in our communities. We will cover writings by Sorokin, B. Allan Wallace, Diane Ackerman and Stephen Post, among others, to look at the scientific development of individual compassion. We will also study basic writings on compassion in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhist teachings.

The second half of the course requires students to find altruistic acts within their community. Students will be required to observe volunteer/altruistic works at two different organizations or institutions. They will observe and evaluate how and why compassion can be manifested in practical situations – this will include 2 days of observation/volunteerism a week, journal entries and an interview with the person each student shadows. These observations will answer the course’s fundamental questions of compassion and love in practice.

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Student requirements:

- **Class Participation** – Students are required to do each assigned reading and participate in discussion. This class is focused on student involvement and participation.
- **Daily Journal** – Each night students must keep a journal of compassionate and/or in-compassionate actions he or she observes. The journal entry should be as detailed as possible. Students will share their observations and journal entries in class discussions. Journals will be peer reviewed at the end of each week.
- **Mediations** –A significant portion of the class will involve meditation and thoughtful individual reflection. Each student will be asked to bring a poem, piece of art, song or saying that reflects some of his or her own feelings on altruistic love. Each student will lead one morning meditation session to begin the class.
- **Observation** – Each student is required in the second half of the session to observe altruism in practice. For three days of the week, students will be required to shadow someone who works in a compassionate and altruistic field. Some suggestions for observation are; doctors or nurses, volunteers at Project Open Hand, directors of Youth Pride, Hands on Atlanta, and RISA. The observation site is at the choice of each student but must be approved by both the students and the teachers.
- **Evaluation** – As a group the class will create evaluation methods for the site observations. The class will decide on what will be the best way to find and evaluate altruistic behavior in practice. These evaluations will include journal entries and a final interview with the person on site. At the end of the observation, students will share their findings with the class.
- **Self-evaluation** – Three times during the length of the course, students will be asked to formally evaluate their own development as altruistic and compassionate individuals. Although the class itself is designed for self-evaluation and thoughtfulness, periodic formal evaluation lends itself to identifying personal growth.

Grading

Students as a group will decide what grades will be based on and how they will be assigned and evaluated. This will be done to practice trust and fairness in our classroom. Regardless of the student grading rubric, the class must always maintain levels of respect for others and be a safe learning environment.

