



Compassion

Andrew Fiala, Ph.D.

afiala@csufresno.edu

April 6, 13, 20, 27

3 - 4:30 p.m

1

Course Description

- Dr. Fiala will consider the virtue of compassion. Based upon ideas he is developing in a new book on the topic, Fiala will look at the role of compassion in religious and philosophical traditions. He will lead participants in a discussion of the importance of compassion in the contemporary world. The course will consider the limits of compassion as well as how compassion is related to other emotions and values, such as kindness, benevolence, empathy, and love.

2

Course Plan and Outline

- April 6: Introduction: *The Three Mountains*. The Problem of defining compassion, love, and other emotions. The critique of compassion. Application: Intrusive Compassion.
- April 13: Compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and justice. Theological Implications. Social justice and distributive justice. Applications: racial justice, immigration, etc.
- April 20: How far does compassion extend? Cosmopolitan compassion and the expanding circle. Application: nonhuman animals.
- April 27: Problem: "compassion fatigue." Self-compassion. Stimulating compassion. Nature, Art, Literature, and Religion. Application: education/training for compassion.

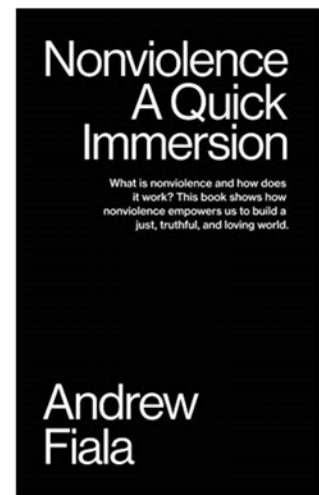
3

Fiala Introduction

- www.andrewfiala.com
 - Join my email list!
- Follow on Facebook/Twitter: @PhilosophyFiala
- Amazon Author Page: <https://www.amazon.com/Andrew-G.-Fiala/e/B001IXOBAS>
- Fresno Bee: <https://www.fresnobee.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/andrew-fiala/>



<https://andrewfiala.com/simplicity/>



<https://andrewfiala.com/nonviolence-a-quick-immersion/>

4

The Ethics Center

<http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/ethicscenter/>

- Facebook: @FresnoEthicsCenter
- Youtube Videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjOKzXxhqDstH73nE3-YauA>
- Thursday, April 22
 - 9-10:00 AM: Islam and Nonviolence
 - Dr. Tom Woerner-Powell, University of Manchester
 - Dr. Amine Tais, Fresno State
 - Dr. Veena Howard, Fresno State
 - 3:30-5:00 PM: Youth Dialogue about Race in the Central Valley
 - Mr. Brandon Gridiron, Visalia Unified School District
 - Youth Voices, including Elizabeth Rocha Zuñiga, Fresno State ASI President
 - With Fresno's Civic Education Center

5

Fiala On Compassion: Fresno Bee, April 4, 2021

<https://www.fresnobee.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/andrew-fiala/article250369106.html>



6

Fiala On Compassion: Fresno Bee, April 4, 2021

<https://www.fresnobee.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/andrew-fiala/article250369106.html>

- **Pope Francis once said that compassion is the language of God. Let's seek it this Easter**
- Compassion is celebrated by most of the world's moral traditions. Compassion is the source of human connection. Some think it even goes beyond that. Pope Francis once said that compassion is the language of God. But philosophers worry that compassion is too passive, subjective and melancholic.
- The Dalai Lama is an important voice of compassion. He explains that as compassion grows, we develop "both genuine sympathy for others' suffering and the will to help remove their pain." Compassion is more than passively feeling the other's pain. It is also an active response that wants to alleviate suffering.
- Buddhist teachings about compassion are often oriented around suffering. A colleague of the Dalai Lama's, Thupten Jinpa, explains, "At its core, compassion is a response to the inevitable reality of our human condition— our experience of pain and sorrow."

7

Fiala On Compassion: Fresno Bee, April 4, 2021

<https://www.fresnobee.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/andrew-fiala/article250369106.html>

- This is obviously important in a world that includes far too much pain. If we were all more concerned with the suffering of others, the world would be a better place. And while this focus on suffering can seem gloomy, the Buddhists connect compassion with tranquility and happiness. The Dalai Lama says, "The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes."
- This may seem paradoxical. But it is only a paradox if compassion is understood as shared suffering. Melancholic compassion is only half of the story. Compassion is also at play in laughter and love-making. Compassion shares joy as well as tears.
- To keep compassion too tightly bound to suffering and grief is like having Good Friday without Easter. The point of the Easter story is not to wallow in the darkness, but to re-emerge into the light.

8

Fiala On Compassion: Fresno Bee, April 4, 2021

<https://www.fresnobee.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/andrew-fiala/article250369106.html>

- Compassion shares “passion” or emotional experience with others. Our passions are not only negative. Grief, mourning, and despair are certainly important emotions. But wonder and delight are also powerful experiences. Compassion moves us to share the passions of the other person, in sadness and in joy.
- Compassion feels good because we are social beings. The receptiveness of compassion is wired into our brains by evolution. As social beings, we enjoy sharing in play, poetry, music, and in the rituals of social life. We do better when we do things in common. Compassionate activity overcomes loneliness and despair. It also allows us to share in playful fun.
- One recipe for happiness is found here: if you want to be happy, hang out with happy people who are doing happy things. Happiness — like sadness — is contagious.

9

Fiala On Compassion: Fresno Bee, April 4, 2021

<https://www.fresnobee.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/andrew-fiala/article250369106.html>

- Compassion is only melancholic when it is confused with pity. Pity dwells in the negative. We don't pity people who are doing well. Pity is reserved for the suffering.
- The philosopher Immanuel Kant warned against pity. Compassionate pity can “infect” us with the suffering of others, he said. If I suffer because another person is suffering, the result is simply more suffering.
- Compassion is better understood as a natural urge to help those who suffer. And while this urge can lead us to act, Kant thought it was insufficient. Sometimes our compassionate urges prevent us from doing our duty. This occurs, for example, when mercy prevents us from punishing those who deserve to be punished. Kant thought that compassion had to be guided by justice.
- A similar problem holds for the famous Golden Rule. Love of the neighbor is important. But this does not mean you ought to give the neighbor anything he wants. Love without justice is blind. But justice without mercy is cruel.

10

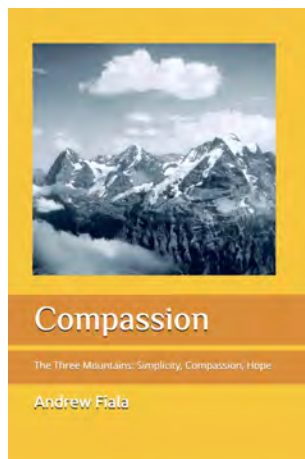
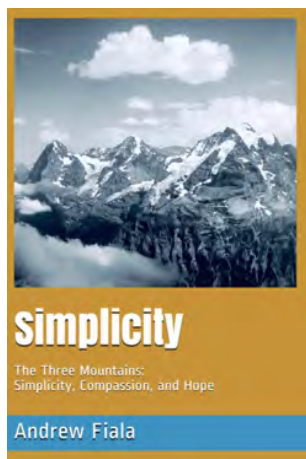
Fiala On Compassion: Fresno Bee, April 4, 2021

<https://www.fresnobee.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/andrew-fiala/article250369106.html>

- A further problem occurs when compassion becomes intrusive. Sometimes we want companionship in our suffering. We cry better (and laugh better) in the company of friends. But sometimes, we simply want to be left alone.
- Of course, compassionate people understand all of this. Truly compassionate people have a knack for knowing what is needed. They hold us when we need to cry. They offer laughter when the time is right. They leave us alone when we need solitude. And they try to connect justice and mercy in a world where suffering is common.

11

My Work on *The Three Mountains*



There are three mountains:
Simplicity, compassion, and hope.
Explore them and you will live well.
(Tao Te Ching, #67)

Simplicity

Wander in simplicity and blend in with the vastness (Chuang Tzu).

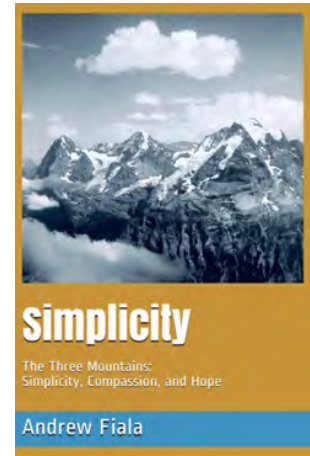
Compassion

The more you give, the more you have (Lao Tzu).

12

From *Simplicity*

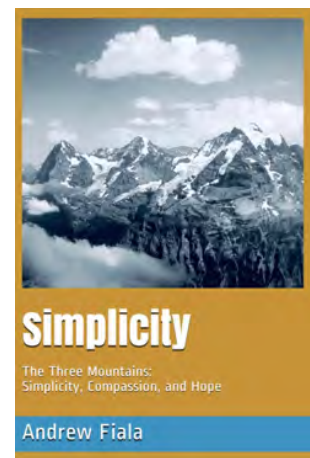
- It is easy to find beauty, joy, and inspiration in my part of the world. Here there are magnificent peaks and wild waterfalls. To watch the sunset across the ocean is a wonderful thing. But a backyard fountain can also charm. You could go to Israel and jump in the Jordan River. I prefer Yosemite Falls to holy water. But the essence is the same. I am lucky to have the Sierra Nevada in my backyard. But wonder and joy can be found in a city park. The goal is to find a connection to the whole that helps us glow, whether that is the singing of the birds, the buzzing of the bees, or the laughter of children.



13

From *Simplicity*

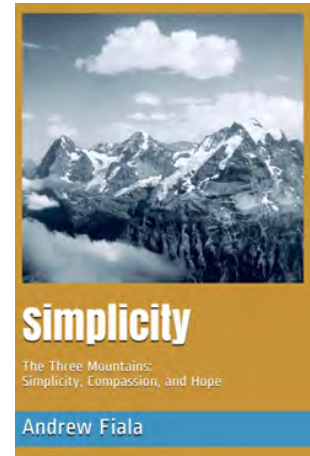
- From the summit of simplicity, we notice a problem in the world. Access to the joys of life is not fairly distributed. Some of us sit on the beach and watch the sun set. Some enjoy life, without fear of war and want. But some are sick, dying, and impoverished. Children are murdered by their parents. Homeless refugees shiver in the cold. To glow under these circumstances seems selfish. Let's share the warmth and shed some light.



14

From *Simplicity*

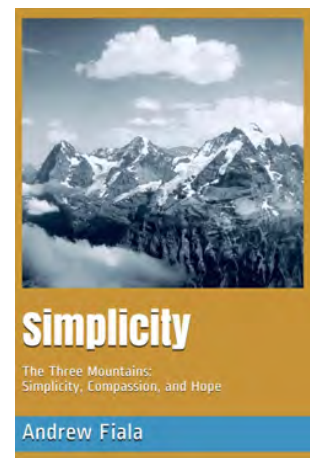
- Once we find the simple pleasures, compassion dawns. There is injustice in a world that unfairly distributes safety, food, health, and joy. When these unjust distributions are the result of human greed and indifference, they ought to be remedied. That's a story for a different book.
- The world remains indifferent to our suffering. The forest fire does not care whose cabin it burns. The coronavirus is not malicious. Nor does the wind care whose kite it plays with. We live in a world that is beyond our control. We can change a few things, adjust our ropes, and pull a few strings. But the changes we make are small and incremental. We can even change ourselves to an extent.



15

From *Simplicity*

- Lasting change requires perseverance, patience, and hope. From the mountain, the river, and the wind we learn the power of persistence. But the river and the wind are poor guides for moral improvement. They merely flow without a care for human need and justice. To direct that flow in the right direction requires compassion for those who suffer, through no fault of their own, under fires, floods, and fevers. Compassion grows when we know that everyone deserves to discover a hidden rainbow. Every child of nature needs a chance to glow.



16

A point of view... Joyful abundance is as important as shared suffering

The Spirit of Compassion sat on Vulture Peak and taught about nothingness. The *Heart Sutra* does not record the weather that day. But I picture it as raining. I see the monks sitting miserably in a rain storm, soaked to the bone. Thunder rumbles on high as they unlearn fullness and embrace the void.

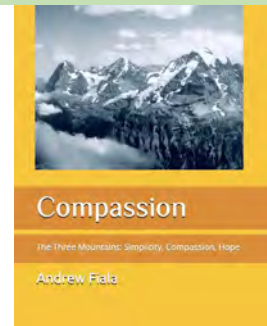
The compassionate spirit says, "everything is empty."
A sudden downpour strikes.

It also says, "everything is connected."
Lightning flashes.

The monks are laughing in the rain.
Everyone gets wet. Everyone dies. The river keeps flowing.
Don't get too attached. Share some warmth.
Enjoy the mud between your toes.

*What widens within you?
What waves and soils exuding?
What rivers are these?
What forests and fruits are these?
What are the mountains called
That rise so high in the mists?*

Walt Whitman, *Salutation*



17

Compassion: Chapters

- 1 Cultivating Compassion
 - Growth
- 2 Sharing the Wine
 - Li Po and Jesus's first miracle
- 3 The Tears of Odysseus
 - Tears, Laughter and the Ocean within
- 4 On growing Wider
 - Whitman: "what widens within you?"
- 5 Modesty
 - Lao Tzu: "The ocean waits, listens, and receives."
- 6 Getting Wet
 - Dalai Lama: "Compassion moistens the heart."
- 7 The Generous Juniper
 - Saint Francis, Brother Juniper, and Junipero Serra
- 8 The Thread of Life
 - Darwin's Spiders: The fragile webs that hold us together
- 9 Hermit Mountain
 - Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*: "How long will your mind be chained to the earth?"
- 10 The Song of Rivers
 - Plato: "When music was born, some men were so overcome with delight that they sang without eating, drinking, or sleeping."

18

Compassion: Chapters

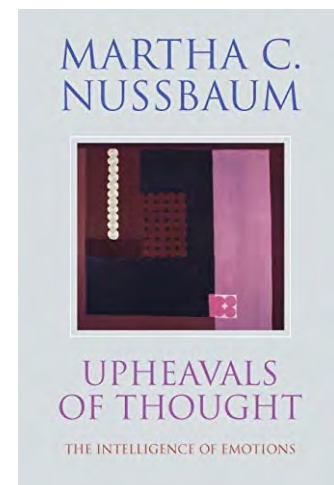
- 11 Liquid Pneumatology
 - John Muir: “We all flow from one fountain soul.”
- 12 The Great River
 - Lao Tzu: We live at the mercy of rivers.
- 13 The Un-empty Bag
 - Pu-Tai (Budai): Happy is the belly that gives
- 14 In the Garden
 - Epicurus: It is better to give than to receive.
- 15 Compassionate Abundance
 - Horace: The gods have blessed me with more than I desire.
- 16 Hospitable Emptiness
 - Plato: emptiness is the wetnurse of becoming.
- 17 The Song of San Francisco
 - Saint Francis: thanks and praise to Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and Mother Earth
- 18 Bearing Witness
 - Ansel Adams: seeing, revealing, and witnessing beauty and suffering
- 19 The Dreamscape
 - Chuang Tzu: if this is a dream, let’s make it a good one
- 20 Seeing Connection
 - Jesus: He saw the suffering man and had compassion
- 21 Hopeful Laughter
 - Chuang Tzu: laugh, forget, get along, and laugh again

19

A Resource:

Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001)

- Martha Nussbaum (b. 1947)
- Professor University of Chicago
- New Yorker Interview (2016):
- “*What I am calling for is a society of citizens who admit that they are needy and vulnerable.*”
 - <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/25/martha-nussbaums-moral-philosophies>

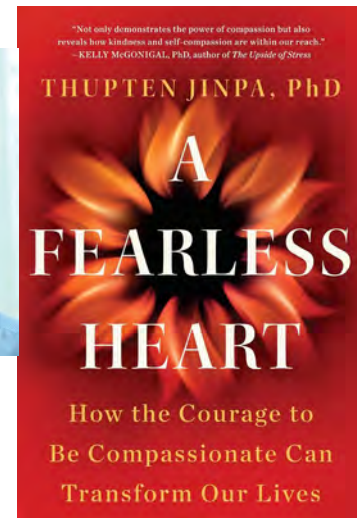


20

A Resource:

Thupten Jinpa, *A Fearless Heart: How the Courage to Be Compassionate Can Transform Our Lives* (Penguin 2015)

- Thupten Jinpa (b. 1958)
- Founder and Chairman of Compassion Institute
 - <https://www.compassioninstitute.com/teachers/dr-thupten-jinpa/>
- “When we feel kind and compassionate toward someone, when we are connected with another’s pains and needs, we feel most alive as human beings. We feel energized...”
- In the midst of compassion we are stripped of all the categories and labels that we have constructed about ourselves to individuate us from others, and our humanity is revealed.”



21

Compassion Defined

Painful awareness of other’s suffering

- Aristotle: “compassion/pity (*eleos*) is a kind of pain excited by the sight of evil, deadly or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it.” (*Rhetoric* 1385b)
- Martha Nussbaum: “Compassion is a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person’s underserved misfortune.” (*Upheavals of Thought*)
- Thupten Jinpa: “At its core, compassion is a response to the inevitable reality of our human condition—our experience of pain and sorrow.” (*A Fearless Heart*)

22

Compassion Defined Universal Altruism

- Dalai Lama: “True compassion is not just an emotional response but a firm commitment founded on reason. Therefore, a truly compassionate attitude towards others does not change even if they behave negatively....”
- Whether people are beautiful and friendly or unattractive and disruptive, ultimately they are human beings, just like oneself. Like oneself, they want happiness and do not want suffering. Furthermore, their right to overcome suffering and be happy is equal to one's own. Now, when you recognize that all beings are equal in both their desire for happiness and their right to obtain it, you automatically feel empathy and closeness for them. Through accustoming your mind to this sense of universal altruism, you develop a feeling of responsibility for others: the wish to help them actively overcome their problems.”
 - <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/compassion-and-human-values/compassion>



23

A place for compassion in philosophy, psychology, and European ethics?

PROBLEM: Western Individualistic social ontology

- Atomic individualism = psychology and social ontology
- Focus on Abnormal psychology = diagnoses and treatment of pathologies
- Natural law and natural rights = negative rights
- Kantian ethics = obedience to moral laws
- Utilitarian ethics = rational calculus of consequences (hedonic calculus)
- Ethical focus on rules, rationality, impartiality, objectivity, and equality
- Legal system based upon retributive justice (lex talionis)

24

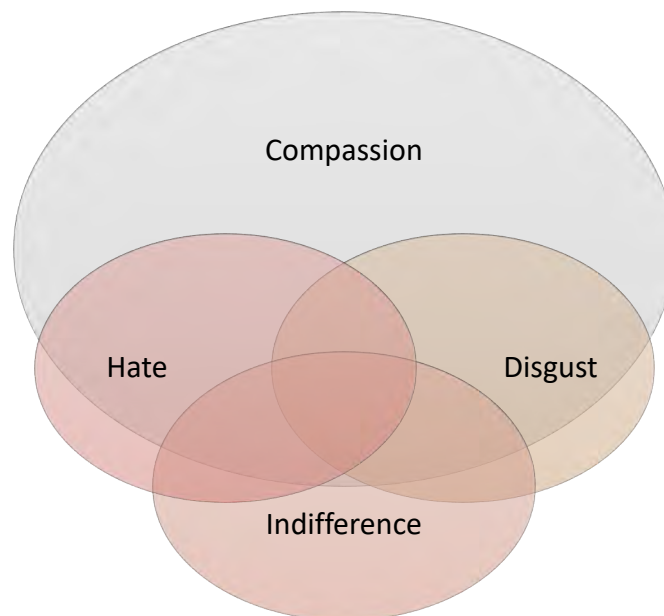
Compassion as the “other” of the prevailing model

- Social ontology and social psychology of interconnection and interdependence
- Positive psychology = habits/character traits for flourishing/happiness
- Care ethics
- Feminism
- Disability, Dependence, Relationality
- Natural law and “positive rights”
- Responsiveness and responsibility (vs. duty/utility)
- Equity (recognizing difference) vs. equality (treating as same)
- Restorative justice, preventative care, rehabilitation

25

Compassion and its others

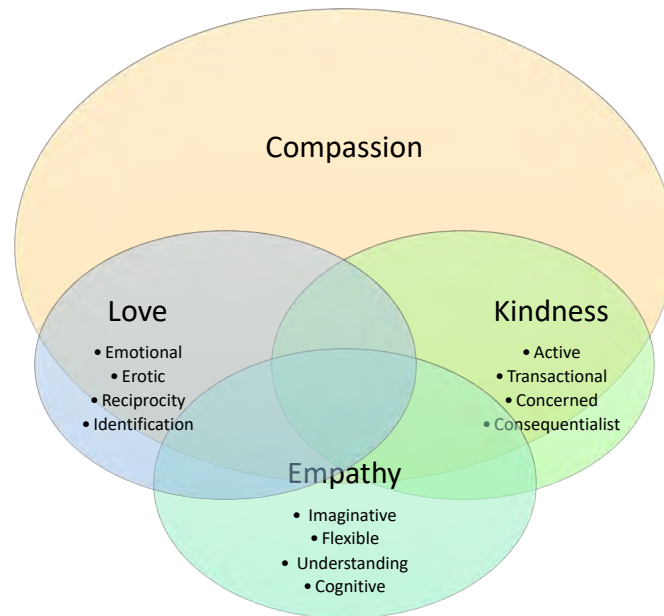
- Anti-compassion
- Drawing boundaries around the self
- Resisting broader social relation and identification
- OR: narrow self-other identification = us v. them



26

Compassion and its brothers

- Compassion
- Expanding the relational identity of the self
- Broad social relationality: cognitive, emotional, imaginative
- AND: broad group identification = beyond us v. them



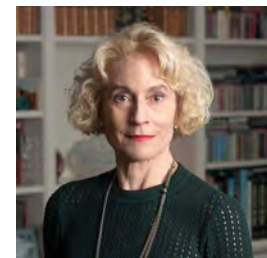
27

Nussbaum: Belief Conditions of Compassion

1. You believe that the suffering of the other is serious and not trivial
2. You believe that the person does not deserve to suffer
3. You believe that you understand what their suffering is like
4. You believe that you can suffer as well

Ways to be mistaken

1. The other may not mind the suffering (Ex. when the other is not concerned)
2. The other may deserve it (Ex. when the other is justly punished)
3. The imagination of the other's suffering fails (Ex. when the social conditions are quite different)
4. You imagine yourself to be invulnerable (Ex. when you think yourself superior to the other)



28

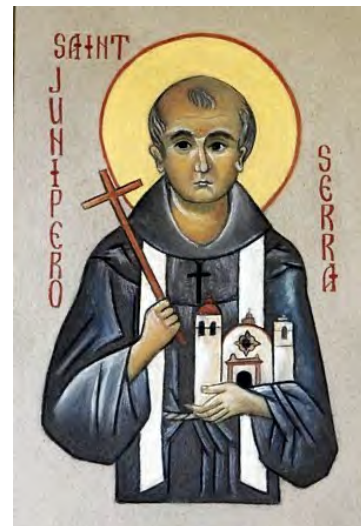
Nussbaum: The Eudaimonistic Judgment

- "Implicit in the emotion (of compassion) is a conception of human flourishing and the major predicaments of human life, the best one the onlooker is able to form."
- BUT: challenge of relativism
 - Different people/cultures value different things
- Ex. The colonizer's "compassion" for indigenous people who lack education, religion, etc.

29

Fiala, *Compassion* The Problem of Junipero Serra

- Overzealous compassion can be intrusive and cruel.
- When the Spanish arrived, the natives often welcomed them with food. The Spanish also came bearing gifts. The history of the state is hospitality and hostility, of promises made and broken.
- In Chumash territory in December of 1776, Father Serra was traveling through mud and cold rain near present day Santa Barbara. The streams were swollen and muddy. The Spanish were stuck and old Father Serra needed help. The Chumash saw his need. They were suspicious of the Spanish. But when someone is stuck in the mud, you help them.
- The natives picked Serra up and carried him through the muck and the rain. After the rescue, the Padre lived with the Chumash for several days. He reported, "I was not able to repay them for their compassion." And: "for me this served to deepen the compassion I have felt for them."
- Father Serra believed that one way to repay compassion was through sharing the good news of European and Christian civilization. Serra's compassion was expressed with whips and branding irons.



30

CONCLUSIONS

- Difficulty of Defining Compassion (related to empathy, kindness, love, etc.)
- Difficulty of compassion within Western Ethics
- Challenge/Problem of Negativity (dwelling on suffering)
- Challenge/Problem of Relativism and the Eudaimonistic Judgment
- Compassion is an art, not a science
- Compassion is responsive and responsible
- Compassion is not the only value that matters: justice, respect, toleration, etc.

