



Compassion

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April 6, 13, 20, 27
3 - 4:30 p.m

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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.

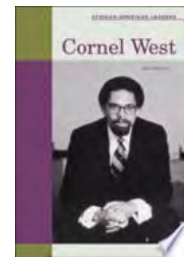
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Cornel West: Socrates vs. Jesus Getting muddy

- Socrates didn't have as much compassion as he should have. He was arrogant. He never cries. He never sheds one tear. Jesus wept. That's a big difference. People who never cry never love deeply. Socrates lived too much in the mind. Questioning is very important, but you have to wed the spirituality of questioning with the spirituality of loving, and if they don't go hand in hand, you're missing something.
- **We're all in the muck and mud together.**
We're all in the funk together.
 - Cornel West in Morrison, *Cornel West* (interviews)

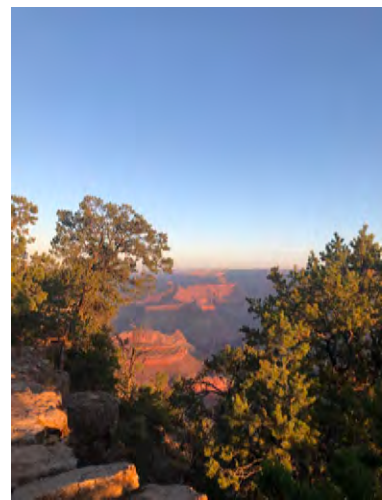


Cornel West
b. 1953



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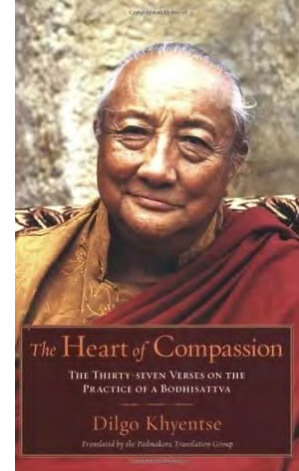
The Cosmic Vantage Point



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Buddhist Wisdom

- Over countless lifetimes you have been dragged into samsara, this vicious ocean of existence, and carried away by strong currents of attachment and aversion. Attachment and aversion are very cause of samsara, the very reason for our endless wandering in the circle of existence.
- When you look into it, it is obvious that there are no such things as permanent enduring friends or enemies. Are not all relationships temporary?
- Every single being must have been your mother at least once. Down to the tiniest insect.
- When you think about this state of affairs, a feeling of great compassion naturally arises.



Dilgo Khyentse
The Heart of Compassion

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Christian/Jewish Wisdom

Wisdom of Sirach, Chapter 18

- What are human beings? Of what use are we? The good that we do—the evil that we do—what does it all mean? If we live a hundred years, we have lived an unusually long time, but compared with all eternity, those years are like a drop of water in the ocean, like a single grain of sand.
- That is why the Lord is so patient with us, why he is so free with his mercy. He looks at us and knows that we are doomed to die; that is why he is so willing to forgive us.
- We can show compassion to someone we know, but the Lord shows compassion for all humanity. He corrects us; he disciplines us; he teaches us. Like a shepherd tending sheep, he brings us back to himself. He will have compassion on us if we accept his guidance and are eager for him to show us where we are wrong.
 - Quoted in part in Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*



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Schopenhauer: Metaphysical Mystery of Compassion (*The Basis of Morality*, 1840)

- Three fundamental springs of human conduct
 - Egoism, Malice, Compassion.
- Three motives
 - One's own wellbeing
 - Others' woe
 - Others' wellbeing.
- Kind acts?
 - To help oneself (egoistic kindness)
 - To vex another
 - To help another



**Arthur
Schopenhauer
1788-1869**

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Schopenhauer: Mystery of Compassion

- My motive is egoistic as soon as it is anything other than the purely objective desire of simply knowing, without any ulterior purpose, that my neighbor is helped, delivered from his distress and need, or freed from his suffering. If such an aim—shorn, as it is, of all subjectivity—be really mine, then, and then only, have I given proof of that loving-kindness, *caritas*, *ἀγάπη*, which it is the great and distinguishing merit of Christianity to have preached.



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Schopenhauer: Mystery of Compassion

- This, however, presupposes that to a certain extent I have become identified with the other, and consequently that the barrier between the ego and the non-ego is, for the moment, broken down.
- It is then, and then only, that I make his interests, his need, his distress, his suffering directly my own; it is then that the empirical picture I have of him vanishes, and I no longer see the stranger, who is entirely unlike myself, and to whom I am indifferent; but I share his pain in him, despite the certainty that his skin does not enclose my nerves. Only in this way is it possible for **his** woe, **his** distress to become a motive **for me;** otherwise I should be influenced solely by my own.
- This process is, I repeat, **mysterious.** For it is one which Reason can give no direct account of, and its causes lie outside the field of experience. And yet it is of daily occurrence. Every one has often felt its working within himself; even to the most hard-hearted and selfish it is not unknown.



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Compassion Fatigue

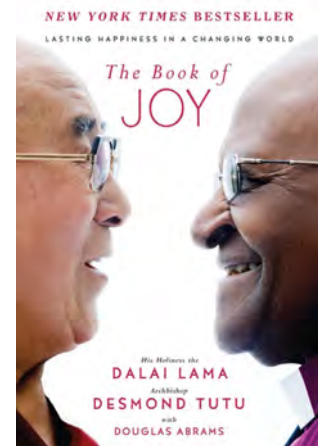
- For ordinary people:
 - Ex. witnessing suffering/trauma on the news
- For professional care-givers
 - Medical, Psychologists, Police, Educators, etc.
- For victims and their friends & family
 - The circle of "victims" expands
- Related to PTSD (and Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder)
 - From viewing/hearing/witnessing other people's trauma
- Treatment/Response: self-knowledge, institutional support, managing exposure, self-care
 - Cf. Charles R. Figley, *Compassion Fatigue: Coping With Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder*



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Happiness = Compassion for others

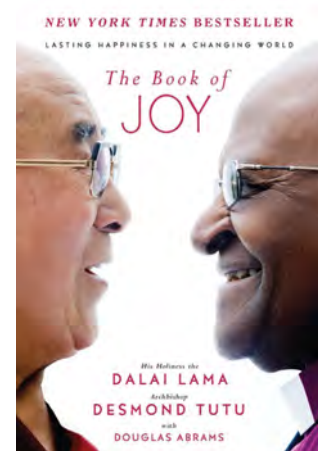
- Dalai Lama: The more time you spend thinking about yourself, the more suffering you will experience. The incredible thing is that when we think of alleviating other people's suffering, our own suffering is reduced. This is the true secret to happiness.
- Archbishop Tutu: Each time I have acted compassionately, I have experienced a joy in me that I find in nothing else.



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Fear of Compassion

- Douglas Abrams: We fear compassion because we're afraid of experiencing the suffering, the vulnerability, and the helplessness that can come with having an open heart.
- People are afraid that if they are compassionate they will be taken advantage of, that others will become dependent on them, and that they won't be able to handle others' distress.
- Many people are also afraid of receiving compassion from others because they are afraid that others will want something in return or that they will at least feel indebted. Finally, many people are even afraid of being self-compassionate because they are afraid they will become weak, that they will not work as hard, or that they will be overcome with sadness and grief.



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Fear of Receiving compassion

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_open_yourself_up_to_receiving_help

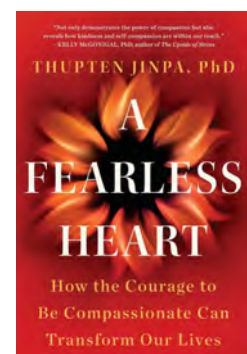
- Receiving compassionate support may challenge a person's sense of alignment with social or cultural norms around keeping a stoic grip on one's emotions, or being seen as individually self-sufficient, "together," or "low-maintenance." Receiving compassion inherently involves an acknowledgment of personal vulnerability, which may make it harder to "hold it together" or (if things get emotional) add shame to the equation. Some may also avoid feeling like a burden, obliging others to waste their precious time and energy.
- Finally, some people are less inclined to talk about personally humiliating or defeating experiences—times that feel like proof of our absolute failure. For them, disclosing these feelings feels too risky; they fear that sharing personal difficulties is more likely to worsen, rather than improve, how they feel.
- Graciously receiving compassion is a skill, one well worth developing.



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Self-Compassion

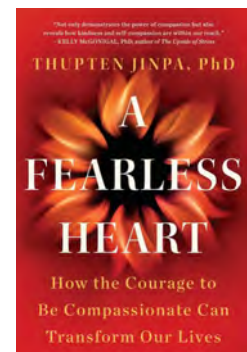
- Lack of self-compassion manifests in a harsh and judgmental relationship with ourselves. Many people believe that unless they are critical and demanding, they will be failures, unworthy of recognition and undeserving of love.



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Self-Compassion

- Self-compassion is every bit as critical to our happiness as our compassion for others, if not more, yet for many people it feels alien and uncomfortable.
- Self-compassion is totally different from narcissistic self-absorption. Truly self-compassionate people take care of themselves while being attentive to the feelings and needs of those around them.
- Self-compassion allows us to see our difficulties within the larger context of shared human experience.



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Fiala: Self-Care and Self-Cultivation

<https://andrewfiala.com/beyond-self-care-cultivating-an-active-and-engaged-self/>

- Self-care is a common theme for 2021. One wellness website said: “focus on yourself this New Year’s Eve” and “indulge in these self-care strategies as you enter 2021.” The article recommended “allowing yourself to indulge in a night of luxurious me-time.”
- Sometimes the self-care movement offers clichéd common sense about hygiene and mindfulness. Yes, we should drink more water, be present, and take walks in nature. But this often becomes sappy, self-indulgent pampering—an apology for sleeping late or over-eating. And self-care is often merely a marketing ploy for spas, lotions, and chocolate.



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Fiala: Self-Care and Self-Cultivation

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- Ideally, we would weave these ideas together by connecting self-care with self-cultivation.
- *Care* is rooted in a kind of worry. A care-free person has no worries. When we care for something, we worry about it. The problem of self-care is that it is a kind of worrying about the self. It can be onanistic and self-absorbed.
- *Cultivation* is much more affirmative and dynamic. When we cultivate something, we grow it. Cultivation is related to “culture.” Culture is a dynamic process that is the result of labor, interaction, and imagination.



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Fiala: Self-Care and Self-Cultivation

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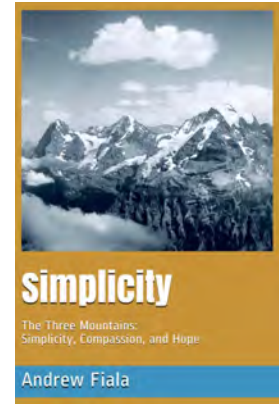
- So here is what I propose for the new year. Instead of retreating to the bathtub, let's put our hands to work.
- Learn. Teach. Create. Make music. Do science. Love your neighbor. Fight for justice. Pursue wisdom. These are the goods of a fully human life. The challenge of 2021—and of life in general—is to cultivate a self that loses itself in inspired and engaged activity.



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Cultivating Compassion: Simplicity, Self-Sufficiency, and Strength

- 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.
- Compassion grows when we know that everyone deserves to discover a hidden rainbow. Every child of nature needs a chance to glow.



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The Compassionate Brain

Our compassionate interconnection is wired into our brains and reinforced through evolutionary processes. Breastfeeding releases oxytocin, the love hormone. The baby learns to love its mother through this organic connection. The mother's hormones are also stimulated. Something similar happens when we witness the suffering of others—and when we witness acts of compassion. This explains why compassion is contagious. It also explains how tears and laughter connect us. Laughter also releases oxytocin, as does weeping.

Compassion is the active communication of the social brain. It is a wonder of nature that allows us to sing and dance on this rock hurtling through dark and empty space.



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Joyful Abundance: Growing Wider

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

Compassion is a widening. It is an opening in the fullness of the world that makes room for something new. Sometimes wisdom makes us sharper. But it should also make us wider. Compassionate wisdom enwidens.



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Joyful Abundance: Growing Wider

I do not refuse you my hand, or prefer
 others before you,
 I do not say one word against you.
 My spirit has passed in compassion and
 determination around the whole earth,
 I have looked for brothers, sisters, lovers,
 and found them ready for me in all lands.

Whitman, Salutation

Compassion is a circle, not a line. It is open and receptive, not pointed and intrusive. The spirit of compassion says, "widen your circle of concern." Begin with the simplicity of self. Open your arms to the birds and worms nearby. Embrace the trees and flowers. Welcome and hold the things that come within your circle.



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Wonder and the Sublime

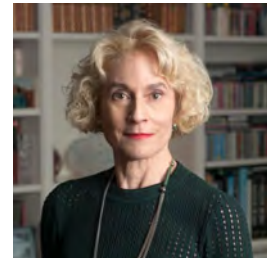
- Losing oneself in transcendence
- Analogy with Compassion
- Kant: “Beauty is the Symbol of Morality”
 - Aesthetic experience overcomes egoistic desire and point of view
- Kant: Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.
 - Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*



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Wonder and Compassion

- Wonder plays an important part in the development of a child's capacity for love and compassion. Children whose capacity for this response to the world is strengthened through imaginative play have a more robust capacity for non-possessive love, and for bringing distant others into their system of goals and plans.
- Wonder helps move distant objects within the circle of a persons' scheme of ends.
 - Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* (54)



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Learning Compassion through animals and art

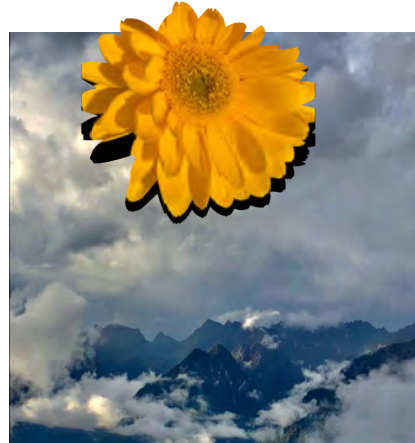
- Compassion for animals is intimately connected with goodness of character, and it may be confidently asserted that he, who is cruel to living creatures, cannot be a good man. Moreover, this compassion manifestly flows from the same source whence arise the virtues of justice and loving-kindness towards men.
 - Schopenhauer



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Conclusions

- Difficulty defining compassion
 - Empathy, Pity, Sympathy, Kindness
- Multiple traditions
 - Buddhist, Christian, Evolutionary, Philosophical
- Competing values
 - Self-care, compassion fatigue, justice, reason
- The Power of Art, Religion, Philosophy
 - Courage, Curiosity, And Compassion
 - Simplicity, Compassion, and Hope



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

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