

The Art of Giving

Professor Paul Woodruff

Assistant Brian Battiste

Lecture/discussion, Tuesdays 3:30-5:30, UTC 1.118

Discussion, Friday 1-2:00 or 2-3:00, MAIN 220E

Office hours

Woodruff, Tuesday 10-11:00; Wednesday 3-4:00,
or by appointment, 475-7000. Office is in FAC 302.

Battiste, Friday 12-1:00 and 3-3:30, after class,
or by appointment.

Changes new in version 1.3. No mid-term exam. There will be some in-class quizzes instead, and these will affect your participation grade. Second paper deadlines are pushed back by a week; same for library assignment.

This course could change your life. Thanks to the foundation that supports our giving, we will be able to apply philosophy to decisions in real life—decisions about how best to direct philanthropic giving. We will embrace the decisions from two directions. First we will ask what values we most want to support in our philanthropy, and for this question we will study theories of value from several different traditions, focusing on how generosity is understood in those traditions. Second, we will study the effectiveness of various organizations in delivering the values we seek to support.

Each student will serve on a committee. Through a series of debates, we will arrive at a conclusive decision before the end of the course. Only students who have attended regularly will vote. The instructors will not vote.

The reading for this course has been kept to a minimum. Your main work as a student is not to read and master material, but to engage in the conversation, both written and oral, that will lead in the end to our momentous decision.

Structure

The course meets for two hours on Tuesdays. The first hour Tuesday will be given to lecture/discussion. The second hour, after a brief break, will consist of either class discussion or visiting speakers. On Fridays, the class is divided in half for discussions sections with the teaching assistant. The Friday classes will be devoted to discussion, oral presentations, and planning for research or debates.

Objectives

By the end of the course you should understand how generosity is understood, and why it is valued, in a number of ethical traditions. At the same time, you will have developed a rubric for evaluating the effectiveness of charitable organizations and applied that rubric in the real world. During the process, you will have sharpened your skills in argument and debate through weekly blogs, oral presentations, short papers, and debates.

I hope you come to love philosophy. If you are a lover of philosophy, you will become a seeker of truth for life. You should see how some philosophical arguments could make a difference to the way you live.

And, most of all, I hope that at the end of the course you will feel ready to take your place in a society that depends in so many ways on the generosity of its members.

Preliminaries

Calendar of due dates. You will have a blog comment due each week (except for the exam week) until week eleven.

First paper (250, one page), January 20; revised, February 3.

Blogs, almost every week. See below.

Oral Presentations, first round, January 27 or February 3.

Start research on charitable organizations, February 10.

Second paper (500, two pages), February 17; revised March 2. Values.

Library assignment, March 9.

Third paper (1000, four pages), March 23; revised April 6. Research.

Debates, April 10 to the end of semester. Every student presents at least once.

Gems assignment, April 20.

Self assessment (of your work on the blogs), May 4.

ULS report, May 4.

Final exam, May 9. (Refreshments will be served.)

May 9. Ceremony for presenting checks.

Other important dates. February 1, last day to drop for a refund. April 2, last day to drop without penalty except for severe non-academic reasons (requires dean's approval); last day to change to pass/fail.

Handouts. You are responsible for reading the handouts relating to each assignment before doing that assignment. These will be posted on Blackboard.

Papers. See the handouts on writing philosophy and on avoiding plagiarism (Blackboard). All three papers are to be revised; grades will be given only on revision.

Readings. All readings are fairly short; they are in the photocopied packet.

Blogs. The blogs will be kept on Blackboard, one for each discussion section. See the prompts on the calendar, which consist of statements by the gadfly. Each week (except for exam weeks) you will write a 100-200 word comment. In your comment you must both (a) disagree with either the gadfly or with a fellow student, and (b) must either detect a flaw in the reasoning of the statement with which you disagree, or you must provide evidence against that statement.

Requirements and grading breakdown

Blog 20%
 Participation (includes in-class quizzes) 10%
 Oral presentations (individual and in debate) 10%
 First paper of 250 words (short, diagnostic) 5%
 Second paper of 500 words (ethics) 5%
 Third paper of 1000 words 15%
 Library assignment 5%
 Self-evaluation (based on blogs and oral presentations) 5%
 Gems assignment 5%
 ULS report 5%
 Final exam 15%

Nasties

Attendance. You may miss one class without penalty. After that, unless you have an excuse, you will be docked two points out of a hundred on your final grade for each unexcused absence. These add up quickly. After two unexcused absences you will lose your right to vote.

Deadlines. Unless you have an excuse, you will be docked two points out of a hundred on your final grade for each day you are late with a paper (draft or final version), blog comment, or oral presentation. Be careful; they add up quickly. We will, however, be reasonable about excuses. Illness, family problems, and so forth make for valid excuses. But you can wear out an excuse; a given elderly relative is allowed to die only once a semester.

Grading. Assignments will be graded pass/fail for the blog comments. Papers and exams will earn letter grades, which will later be converted to numbers for purposes of averaging. Letter grades on assignments will correspond to numbers as follows: A+, 98; A, 95; A-, 92; B+ 88, B, 85; B- 82. For the final grade, I am not allowed to give an A+. I will determine the precise cutoffs for final course grades on the basis of class performance.

Using other people's words or ideas. If you use words or ideas that are not your own, in any paper or presentation, you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism. Un-cited paraphrases are plagiarism. Plagiarism gets you into deep trouble.

Gizmos. The use of laptops, phones, and other gizmos for non-class related purposes will not be tolerated. If you are texting, gaming, or otherwise distracted you will be asked to leave and you will be marked absent from the class. Cell phones should be put away during class; laptops may be used for note taking or, with permission, looking something up for the benefit of the whole class.

University Policies

The course will respect all religious holidays. Let me know if this affects your attendance or other work in the course.

If you have a disability, the course will adapt to your needs in accordance with University policy. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259. Again, let me know if this affects you.

Class materials will be posted on Blackboard, including advice on how to complete assignments. You will be responsible for announcements made on Blackboard and those sent to your email address.

About the Professor

Paul Woodruff is a philosopher and translator. He rows a single on Lady Bird Lake, builds furniture, plays the cello, and indulges in administration as a dean in his spare time. His main interests in philosophy are ethics and leadership, which he approaches first through ancient texts and then through applications to today's problems. His latest book, *The Ajax Dilemma: Justice, Fairness, and Rewards*, uses an ancient story to illustrate solutions to a problem we have today—how to keep an organization running smoothly when some members receive large bonuses or other rewards.

Calendar for the Art of Giving

1. Tuesday, January 17. Generosity in the classroom.

Basic concepts: character, virtue, generosity, benevolence, altruism, selfishness, egoism.

Altruistic behavior in other primates.

Students request committee assignments, first and second choices.

Readings: Press clippings. Thucydides on human motivation. (These will be handed out in class.)

Blog 1: Gadfly says, “All students care about is grades. Professors who think students actually want to learn are deluding themselves. Even more foolish are the professors who imagine that students would voluntarily contribute to discussion in class. In fact, when students speak up in class, they are not doing so out of generosity; they are showing off, vying for higher grades, or trying to put down the competition.”

Friday, January 20. Introductions, discussion of entrance essays and other ideas students bring to the course. Organization of the four committees in each discussion section.

Committees will do research and develop arguments for debate. Each student will join one of the following committees, at least four students to each committee; all members of each committee must be in the same discussion section:

A. Social causes

1. Poverty
2. Social Services
3. Disaster relief/War regions
4. Human rights / Disabilities

B. Arts, Education, and Environment

5. Arts (theater, music, museums, etc.)
6. Education
7. Environment / Animal rights
8. Medical Research

TURN IN. First paper. (250 words, one page), due at time of discussion section. In your opinion, is generosity natural to human beings? Or must it be forced on them? Give reasons for your opinion.

2. January 24. Confucian benevolence; controversy over human nature.

We begin with the classical Chinese tradition because that will carry us some distance away from the intellectual baggage we bring from the European tradition. The main figure is Confucius (Kong Tze) as interpreted by Mencius (Meng Tze) and his successors.

Second hour. Discussion: Theories of education in Mencius and his opponents.

Readings: Selected analects, chapters from Mencius, etc.

Blog 2. Gadfly says (human nature), “Thucydides is right. Human beings are moved by ambition, avarice, and fear—nothing else. All the rest is mere pretense, as we see when times are hard. When people are struggling for bare necessities, as in time of war or plague, they expose their real motivations; then they do nothing except out of fear, ambition, or avarice.”

Friday, January 27. Presentations, start first round: Topic: Your views on the human nature issue as framed in the classical Chinese tradition. 90 seconds each, half the class. Committees identify their research agenda.

3. January 31. Mohism and the controversy over universal love.

Second hour. Discussion: Which of our eight values (represented by the committees) are most strongly supported by Confucian ethics?

Readings: Selections from A.C. Graham and Philip Ivanhoe.

Blog 3. Gadfly says, “If generosity is really a good thing, then we should be generous in every way we can. Giving to your own family or community is not generous at all, but rather an extended sort of selfishness. To a truly generous mind, all needy people are equal.”

Friday. Presentations: Topic: Your views on the controversy over human nature or on the Mohist controversy (universal love versus local benevolence), 90 seconds each.

TURN IN. First paper, revised (250 words, one page); due at time of discussion section.

4. February 7. Buddhism and the Art of Giving.

Buddhism sets a high value on generosity. By giving, you acquire merit, which will help you to a better future in the cycle of rebirth and death.

Second hour. Discussion: What kinds of giving does Buddhism value most highly? How does that reflect on our eight values?

Readings: Selections from Buddhist texts and commentaries.

Blog 4. Gadfly says, “Take away Buddhist metaphysics (belief in the cycle of rebirth and death) and you have no reason in Buddhism to be generous, because there would be no point in acquiring merit.”

Friday, February 10. Research experts from the library will visit the Friday classes and work with the teams. See research guide.

START RESEARCH. Each committee selects charitable organizations to study and assigns them to its members. This research begins by reviewing a number of organizations that support the goals of the committee. Members will do some research and return on February 17 prepared to choose four or five organizations for serious study and assign them to committee members.

The next step is the library assignment (due March 2). The research process will culminate in the third paper, which will support the debate over grand decision. So the research must be done well. See guidelines.

5. February 14. Justice.

In the ancient Greek tradition, justice was the master virtue, just as ren (benevolence) was the master virtue in Chinese thought. Hence the great debates about justice. Justice seems to require that individuals sacrifice their own interests for the common good. Must this be forced on people? Or can it be based on character, as Socrates holds?

Readings: Hesiod and Protagoras on justice. Socrates chooses justice over life.

Second hour. Discussion as a class on the number and sizes of gifts, and the vote required for each one.

Blog 5. Gadfly says, “Protagoras correctly implies that justice is second nature to us. Lions are born with teeth and claws; that is their first nature. We are not born with sufficient tools for survival, but we have the capacity to learn, and that is our first nature. What we all must learn is our second nature, and high on the list of things we must all learn is justice. Those who cannot learn justice must be killed.”

Friday, February 17. As a committee, discuss the organizations that have been under review and make final assignments to committee members.

Discussion in sections about the structure of our decision: How many gifts to make? One or as many as four? Maximum and minimum gifts? How big a majority of the class should each gift require?

Each section will vote on these questions from a list of alternatives provided by the instructor.

Each committee will discuss this question: Should they focus on local, national, or international charities?

TURN IN: Second paper (500 words), first draft due, February 17. See list of topics.

6. February 21. The attack on justice.

Because justice calls for us to curtail our own interests, some ancient thinkers thought that justice was pure foolishness. A more recent thinker, Nietzsche, asks us to consider who benefits, and who suffers, when society adopts a moral stance. He thinks the weak benefit and the strong suffer, and that, he believes, is unhealthy.

Second hour. Visiting speaker.

Readings: Callicles, Thrasymachus, and Nietzsche.

Blog 6. Comment on a or b. Gadfly says, (a) “When the weaker and poorer people band together, they have the power to force the rich and strong to hand over some of their wealth and power for the general good. This is theft, but it is most successful when people are made to believe that it is only justice, and that it is therefore a good thing.” (b) “The Athenians were right to kill Socrates, if he was really teaching young people to value justice ahead of their own lives. Young people will not survive or prosper unless they put themselves first, putting a value on justice only insofar as it is useful to them.”

Friday, February 24. Discussion of the attack on justice.

7. February 28. Aristotle and generosity

Aristotle is the ancestor of all modern theories of virtue ethics. Virtues are qualities of character, or, as Plato would say, beauties of the soul. Of these, an important one for Aristotle is generosity. Aristotle believes that in order to live a flourishing life, you need to be able to develop all of the basic virtues. In order to do that, you need to live in a community that encourages the practice of those virtues.

Second hour. Discussion: What sort of values in giving does Aristotle support?

Reading: Selections from the *Ethics*.

Blog 7. Gadfly says, “Character-based ethics rests on a mistake. In order to acquire a generous character, you have to do generous things. But none of the things you do can be truly generous unless you already have a truly generous character. So you cannot get started on the road to generosity.”

Friday, March 2. Committees develop rubrics for evaluating organizations. See guidelines.

TURN IN: Second paper, final draft due March 2.

8. March 6. Kant and philanthropy

Kant's famous idea is the categorical imperative—a moral command that is binding on any rational being quite apart from any consequences that may flow from following the imperative. We shall see that a good Kantian must be generous owing to what Kant called an “imperfect duty.” (A perfect duty, for example, would be the duty to tell the truth.)

Second hour. Discussion: What sort of values in giving does Kant support? Visiting speaker.

No Blog. Relaxed discussion sections.

TURN IN: Library assignment no later than March 9.

Spring break, March 12-17. Be safe.

9. March 20. Utilitarianism and generosity

Utilitarianism claims that all ethical decisions should be made with a view to the consequences they will have for the happiness of the greatest number of people.

Second hour. Discussion: What sort of values in giving does Utilitarianism support?

Readings: Selections from J. S. Mill, Peter Singer, and Richard Kraut.

Blog 8. Gadfly says, “Charity does not begin at home. Your only obligation is to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. If you could save ten people from starving by cutting the nutrition level of your own children to the minimum for survival, you should do so. If you could save six lives by harvesting the organs of your healthy 18-year old son, you should do so.”

TURN IN: Third paper (1000), first draft, March 23. Choose a charity (in consultation with your committee) and defend your choice. See guidelines.

10. March 27. Capabilities theory

Capabilities theory offers a radical new rationale for justice.

Second hour. Discussion: What sort of values in giving does capabilities theory support?

Readings: Selections from Nussbaum and Sen.

Blog 9. TBA

11. April 3. Justice and generosity.

Second hour. Discussion: Does justice require that we be generous? Must we suppress our competitive drives in order to be just?

Readings: Selections from Woodruff, *The Ajax Dilemma*.

Blog 10. TBA

TURN IN: Third paper (1000), revised, April 6.

Friday, April 6. Each committee chooses, on the basis of the student's research, one organization to champion in the debate next Tuesday. Preparation for debate. In each of the initial debates, each member of the committee should play a part. Assign roles.

12. April 10. Presentations and debate

Each committee will present a case for (a) its kind of charity and (b) the organization it has selected on the basis of its research.

Committees will draw for their opponents in a series of four two-way debates that will take up the full two hours on Tuesday. Each team has a total of ten minutes, which they may spend any way they wish in presentation, rebuttal, or Q and A. Losing teams will be assigned to join the winners in beefing up their arguments for the next round.

Friday, April 13. Committees develop their debate strategies for the next round, choosing effective spokespeople. No need for everyone to speak in the next round, but everyone should help.

13. April 17. Presentations and debate

Two debates. Longer time limits. Again, losers join winners for beefing up the case.

TURN IN: Gems assignment, April 20.

14. April 24. Final debate. Decision day.

The surviving teams debate.

15. May 1. The meaning of life. Summing up.

TURN IN: Self-assessment, ULS report, May 4.

Final exam. Wednesday May 9, 9-12 AM.

Presentation of checks, TBA.