Does kindness have a history? How have human beings conceived of benevolent behavior toward others differently across time and place? The so-called “Golden Rule” of treating others as one would be treated is present in the ethical philosophies of all of the world’s major religions, yet humans have found it perpetually difficult to live together in peace, to tolerate cultural difference, and to provide for public welfare. In this course, we will explore the history of thought about benevolent behavior from the ancient world, through the Middle Ages, and into the present. We will read recent studies concerning the evolutionary biology of altruism (is there a “kindness gene”?), sociological studies of gender difference (is hostility a male trait?), and anthropological studies of how culture regulates conduct. We will study the rise of the modern state and the ways in which ideals of social welfare have changed over time. And as part of the course, students will also conduct individual studies of how “kindness” is enacted and organized throughout the New York metropolitan area and world today, with the opportunity to combine research with service.

Required Texts (available at the NYU Bookstore)

Further readings will be posted on the course website.

You will be expected to bring all readings to class in either hard copy (most preferable) or electronic form (notebook computer).

**Grading and Course Requirements**

As this is a seminar, students will necessarily be active participants in the course. Students are expected to come to class each week having read all assignments carefully and completely, ready for friendly and lively discussion. During the semester, each student will write two short 3-5 page essays and a final essay project. Students will also post one question to the discussion board each week and will be responsible for leading the discussion once during the semester.

Discussion questions and answers (due Sunday nights) and discussion leadership  15%
Two 3-5 page (12 pt font, double-spaced, 1” margins) essays  20%
12-15 page (12 pt font, double-spaced, 1” margins) final project  35%
Participation  30%

* Your participation grade includes attendance, preparation, oral presentations, and active participation in classroom discussion.

**Discussion Questions and Answers:** Good scholarship begins with good questions. Thus we will continually discuss and practice the art of asking strong analytical questions in this class. Each week, NO LATER THAN SUNDAY NIGHT AT 2AM, each student will prepare and post an analytical discussion question, written in complete sentences, about that week’s primary reading. Each week’s question, posted on-time, will count for 1% of your overall grade, so this is an important part of your coursework! Questions should be thoughtful, provocative, and should present a genuine puzzle. They should be, in other words, questions that invite discussion rather
than fact-finding (if you can find the answer to your question by looking it up, look it up and ask a different question!). Discussion questions should also include a few sentences of information explaining how the readings lead to the formulation of the question and even identifying passages that might be fruitful to explore in consideration of the question.

Discussion Leadership: Beginning a few weeks into the semester, it will be the job of two students to lead discussion each Tuesday. Discussion leaders must read all of the discussion board questions and formulate an opening statement (one to three sentences, usually) that is designed to provoke discussion. By “provoke,” I mean a contentious (but respectful, of course) argument that directly engages the material of a given week and sparks a lively discussion, often by challenging common or “natural” modes of thinking. As with your discussion board questions, make sure that your provocations lead from or suggest a question or series of questions that could produce a multitude of “correct” answers. It takes time to devise a thoughtful provocation. It requires anticipating how a discussion will flow and why. So if it’s your week, don’t leave this to the last minute!

Essays: Each student will write two 3-5 page essays for the course. In all of the essay assignments, I will expect you to practice the traditional essay form: that is, I will expect you 1) to introduce an argument that answers an analytical question (implied or explicitly stated); 2) to defend that argument with explicit reference to evidence; and 3) to conclude by explaining how that argument contributes to a broader understanding of the particular concepts, themes, problems, and texts that are at issue in the essay. I will provide further instruction in class, but the shorter essays will ask you to analyze readings from the class in juxtaposition.

Final Project: For the final 12-15 page (12pt font, double-spaced, 1” margins) project, each student will conduct a study of a modern philanthropic organization, critiquing the way that it defines and enacts "kindness" in its self-presentation (its self-definition and advertising) and in its daily operation. We will discuss this assignment in much further depth in class, but for now, you should know that you will have great flexibility in this assignment and that I will encourage (and assist) you to tailor the assignment to your own interests. You may study a large or small organization. You may investigate from afar (through library and/or archival research) or from within (through volunteerism, interviews, case study). I would hope that at least some if not most students will study local Manhattan philanthropic organizations in conjunction with their own interests in public service. All final projects, regardless of specific focus, will involve answering the question of how we should understand and “read” modern philanthropy in light of the long history of thought about kindness that we will investigate in this class.

A Note on Human Subject Research

If, for example, you wish to conduct interviews as part of your final essay project, you must receive approval from the University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subject Research before you begin. For the kind of research that I will ask you to conduct in this class, the process should be very smooth; but it requires energy and takes time, so you will need to act quickly. I will help you with this. For more information, please consult the NYU Research with Human Subjects website: http://www.nyu.edu/research/resources-and-support-offices/getting-started-withyourresearch/human-subjects-research.html.
Attendance and Late Papers

In order to experience the course in full, you are expected to attend every class meeting (I'll try my best to make it worth your while). If it happens, however, that you must miss a class due to illness or some other legitimate conflict, please contact me ahead of time. Note that even legitimate absences should be kept to a minimum. Excessive absences will result in a penalty to your participation grade. More than five unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

Late papers may be docked one letter grade for every 24 hours that they are late. I have designed assignments to be challenging, but eminently doable; thus if you find that you are struggling to meet deadlines, do not hesitate to contact me for help. There is no shame in doing so (in fact, it's the whole point of taking a class) and often I will be able to help you to streamline your process and to work more efficiently.

Gallatin has a strong policy on students' taking incompletes, based on two essential premises: (a) students should take incompletes only for good reasons (“I haven't finished yet” is not a good reason), and (b) students should meet deadlines for completing the required work. If a grade of incomplete is absolutely necessary, the student must request the incomplete in writing (on a form called Request for a Grade of Incomplete) well before the end of term.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Citations

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

A further note: plagiarism often involves intentionally trying to pass off the words or ideas of other people as your own. But some plagiarism actually happens by accident through incomplete note taking and/or sloppy citation. Note well: *both* kinds of plagiarism, intentional and unintentional, result in the same penalty, which is possible disciplinary action. Thus, you must never allow accidental plagiarism to happen to you. You must work hard to cite every word and every idea that is not your own. Watching out for plagiarism is actually a very good way to gauge how analytical your writing is. If you find yourself wanting simply to retell what other people have written, it’s likely that you’re not being analytical enough in your thinking. This is a good time to seek help from me about how to approach your subject from a stronger critical angle.

In citing sources, you may use either University of Chicago or MLA citation style. The former is preferred by most professional historians. The latter is the chosen style of most professional literary critics. Neither citation style is better than the other, but most writers have a clear preference for which one they like to use. The only two rules are that you must use one of these citation styles, and that you must ONLY use one of these styles. You may not mix and match.
Schedule of Classes and Major Assignments (CS = reading available on the course website)

1/23  Introduction to the Course

1/25  Lon L. Fuller, “The Case of the Speluncean Explorers” CS

UNIT ONE: THE CLASSICAL INHERITANCE

1/30  Aeschylus, Oresteia

2/1   Plato, Republic Bk II (excerpt) CS
      Oakley, Evil Genes (excerpt) CS

2/6   Seneca, On Clemency I, 1.2 CS
      Marcus Aurelius, Meditations Bks 1-2, 7-12

2/8   Stephen Greenblatt, “Culture” CS
      Traphagan, “Altruism, Pathology, and Culture” CS

2/13  Exodus 20
      Leviticus 19
      Gospel of Matthew

2/15  Peter Singer, “The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle” CS

FIRST 3-5 PAGE ESSAY DUE SUNDAY 2/19

UNIT TWO: THE MEDIEVAL INHERITANCE

2/20  PRESIDENT’S DAY – NO CLASS

2/22  Augustine, Against Faustus (excerpt) CS
      Augustine, On the Sermon of the Mount (excerpt) CS

2/27  Sulpicius Severus, The Life of St. Martin

2/29  Prudentius, “Psychomachia” CS

FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE FRIDAY, 3/2

3/5   Astronomer, Life of Louis the Pious CS
      Dhuoada of Septimannia, A Handbook for William, her son (excerpt) CS

3/7   Admonitio Generalis of 789 CS
SPRING BREAK

3/19 Qur’an: selected verses from Sura 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 60 CS
Documents for The Peace of God CS
Documents for the First Crusade CS

3/21 Jonathan Riley-Smith, “Crusading as an Act of Love” CS
Adolf Tobeña, “Suicide Attack Martyrdoms” CS

3/26 Bonaventure, The Life of St. Francis
Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica 2.1.108.4 CS

3/28 Jacques Le Goff, Your Money or Your Life chapters 1 and 2 CS

4/2 Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron excerpt CS
Geoffrey Chaucer, The Tale of Melibee CS

4/4 Catherine of Siena, Letter 74 to Pope Gregory XI CS

SECOND 3-5 PAGE ESSAY DUE FRIDAY, 4/6

UNIT THREE: ANCIENT CONUNDRUMS IN THE MODERN WORLD

4/9 Niccolo Machiavelli, Mandragola

4/11 Frans de Waal, Our Inner Ape, chapter 2 CS

4/16 Gotthold Lessing, Nathan the Wise CS
Voltaire, Treatise on Tolerance (excerpt) CS

4/18 Susan Mendus, “My Brother’s Keeper: The Politics of Intolerance”

4/23 Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment (film)
Stanley Milgram, Obedience (film)

4/25 Philip Zimbardo, The Lucifer Effect (excerpt) CS

4/30 Frans de Waal, The Age of Empathy: Lessons for a Kinder Society

5/2 Steven Pinker, “The Moral Instinct” CS
Steven Pinker, The Better Angels of our Nature (excerpt) CS
EPILOGUE: THE AVATARS OF MODERN KINDNESS

5/7    Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium*
       or
       Mohandas Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*
       or
       Mother Teresa, *No Greater Love*

FINAL PROJECT DUE FRIDAY, 5/11