

**Philosophy 5: Evil
Kindness Assignment
Fall Quarter, 2018**

There will be no lecture on November 30, and no reading is assigned for that day. Instead, you should complete the Kindness Assignment.

The assignment

Spend a full **ninety minutes** between the end of class on Wednesday, November 28, and the beginning of class on Monday, December 3, **doing some act or acts of kindness for one or more people who would not otherwise receive that kindness from you during that time.**

That's it.

Recipient examples: The recipient of your Kindness could, for example, be a parent or sibling who you are normally too distracted to give extended help or attention. Or it could be a friend who is going through a hard time, or a stranger in need, or someone from your religious community or your dorm who could use some kindness.

Activity examples: The Kindness could involve helping them with something in a collaborative way, the two of you together; or actively and lovingly listening to them as they talk about their troubles; or taking some unusual special time with them doing something that they enjoy, making sure that their needs and desires take priority over yours. It doesn't count as fulfilling the assignment if it's something you might normally do anyway. **It must be special and unusual.**

Consent and nonsexuality

The recipient of your kindness must **explicitly consent in advance**, understanding that this is an assignment for this class. They should not be surprised after the ninety minutes to learn that your motives in acting kindly were not what they seemed to be.

Also, your act of kindness must be **entirely nonsexual**. Spending ninety minutes wooing someone to whom you are sexually attracted does not count as fulfilling this assignment. To avoid this possibility, I ask that the recipient not be someone you are sexually attracted to.

Err on the side of caution here. If there's any chance that the recipient would interpret what you are doing as exploitative, flirtatious, misleading, or creepy, do something else.

Grading

Your Kindness Assignment will not be graded. I am asking you to do it on your honor.

The Kindness Assignment is required, but neither your TAs nor I will check to see if you have fulfilled this requirement before assigning your course grade.

I hope that you will take this assignment seriously. I, Professor Schwitzgebel, will also complete the assignment.

Do not tell me or your T.A. anything about what you have done for this assignment. You will not be asked about it in section. I want you to do it privately, for no external reward.

There will be a page on the final exam in which you will be invited, but not required, to describe what you did for this assignment and what, if anything, you learned from it. I will read all 400 students' answers to this question, and I will invite your TAs also to do so. However, we will not read your answers until *after*

the final grades have been submitted for the course.

To consider

1. How do you feel about the fact that there is no formal accountability or reward for completing this assignment?
2. How do you feel about spending ninety minutes in this way?
3. How do your answers to 1 and 2 fit with your understanding of the moral psychological views of Mengzi, Xunzi, Doris, and Staub?
4. Later in the course we will be discussing the question of whether the world has a “moral order” in the sense that morally good people tend to prosper and morally bad people tend to suffer. When we come to that part of the course, please also think about how your answers to 1 and 2 fit with this issue.

Alternative assignment

If you feel that this assignment is too emotionally burdensome, or if for some other reason you would prefer an alternative assignment, you may instead watch the PBS documentary “Ghosts of Rwanda” about the Rwanda genocide (runtime 120 minutes). This video is widely available for purchase or rental, and I have requested to have it available on reserve at Rivera Library.