

It is routinely claimed that we cannot understand another person's pain. Pain is supposedly the most subjective of feelings. And yet another claim about pain is often made: we attribute pain to other people on the basis of their appearance, assuming that people with physical and mental disabilities experience a lifetime of suffering. This presentation explores the role of pain and suffering as motive forces in discrimination, asking how the belief that others are in pain justifies unequal treatment and violence. We will look at a number of case studies having to do with the attribution of pain to others, including cases involving controversial medical interventions, wrongful birth, and euthanasia.