

Course: Moral Psychology

Instructor: Brandon Ashby

2. Textbooks and reading materials

Required:

T. Nadelhoffer, E. Nahmias, & S. Nichols (eds.) (2010) *Moral Psychology: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Recommended but optional:

Robert Sapolsky (2017) *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*, New York: Penguin Press.¹

All other required reading will be made available as PDFs on the course website.

2. What is Moral Psychology?

Moral psychology is the study moral thought, feeling, and behavior. As a discipline, moral psychology has deep historical roots within philosophy, but it now lies at the intersection of philosophy and other cognitive sciences including psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology. As we shall see, philosophers routinely make empirically testable claims when discussing moral psychology. And psychologists often look to philosophical theories to guide their research. In the last few decades, there has been a good deal of profitable collaborations between philosophers and psychologists.

Besides the standard goals of a philosophy course—teaching you how to identify, interpret, examine, criticize, and proffer arguments—this course will teach you about how you and others think about right and wrong, good and evil. You will get to examine the possible and likely mechanisms of moral judgment that lie beneath the conscious veneer of the reasoning we perform and the emotions that we feel. As a result, you will become more aware of the biases that influence moral thinking. This will give you the opportunity to identify and attempt to compensate for those biases. If all goes according to plan, this course will not only introduce you to some fascinating ideas and research, but also make you a more discerning moral agent.

3. Assignments

- Micro-exams, worth 40% of your final grade.
- Essays, worth 50% of your final grade.
- Syllabus quiz, worth 2.5% of your final grade.
- Discussion forum questions, worth 7.5% of your final grade.

3.1 Micro-exams:

You will have a micro-exam every week. Micro-exams can cover any course material (lectures, readings, in-class discussions) presented in the last four weeks of the course. You will have two attempts to take each micro-exam. You will receive the highest score of your two attempts. I drop your two lowest micro-exam scores. Micro-exams will be

¹ Note, if you are an auditory learner, there are audiobook versions of *Behave* available for purchase online.

worth 40% of your final grade. Micro-exams will be administered online via the course website. You will be able to see what questions you got wrong on a micro-exam, but you will not be told the answers to the questions.

3.2 Essays:

You will have three essays over the course of the term. Each will be 2500 words in length. You will have the option of submitting a draft of each paper before you submit it for a final grade. The essays are worth 50% of your final grade and are evenly weighted.

I do not drop any essay scores. However, if you are satisfied with the grade that you receive on your first two essays, then you have the option of applying your combined score on your first two essays to your third essay. In other words, do well-enough on your first two essays and you don't have to do the third. I do this to encourage you to work hard on your first two essays and polish them.

3.3 Syllabus quiz:

You will have a quiz on the syllabus and the structure of the course at the end of your first week of term. It is worth 2.5% of your final grade.

3.4 Discussion forum questions:

The class will be divided into two groups. You'll get your group number on the first day of class. For every reading, one of the two groups will be required to post or upvote three questions about that reading on the course website. Discussion forum questions will be worth 7.5% of your final grade. Your questions must be uploaded before 11:59PM the day before we discuss that reading in class. Your questions will be listed anonymously. Only I will be able to see your names attached to the questions. So, do not worry about asking "dumb" questions in front of the other students.

4. Course Schedule

Note: readings listed in the footnotes are recommended but not required.

Week 1: Reason vs. Passion, Part 1²

- Textbook: Samuel Clark, 'Selections from *A Discourse of Natural Religion*', pp. 11-20.
- David Hume, 'Selections from *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Morals*', pp. 32-37.
- Textbook: Immanuel Kant, 'Introduction to *groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*' pp. 37-40.
- Course website: Michael Gill, (2007) "Moral rationalism vs. moral sentimentalism: Is Morality More Like Math or Beauty?" *Philosophy Compass*, 2(1): 16-30.
- [Micro-exam 1](#)

Week 2: Reason vs. Passion, Part 2

- Textbook: Michael Smith, 'Selections from *The Moral Problem*', pp. 64-72.
- Textbook: Shaun Nichols, 'How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism: Is it Irrational to be Amoral?', pp. 73-84.

² Optional: Robert Sapolsky, (2017) 'Morality And Doing the Right Thing, Once You've Figured Out What That Is' in his *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*, New York: Penguin Press, pp. 478-520.

- Course website: Joshua May, (2018) Ch. 2 of *Regard for Reason in the Moral Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 27-53.
- [Micro-exam 2](#)

Week 3: Moral Motivation

- *Course website: Michael Smith, (1994) Ch. 3 of *The Moral Problem*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 60-91.
- Course website: Adina Roskies, 2003, “Are ethical judgments intrinsically motivational?” *Philosophical Psychology*, 60(1): 51-66.
- Course website: Michael Gill, (2018) “Hume on Moral Motivation” in P. A. Reed & R. Vitz (eds.) *Hume’s Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Psychology*, London: Routledge.
- Course website: Marco F. H. Schmidt & Michael Tomasello, (2012) “Young children enforce social norms” *Current Issues in Psychological Science*, 21(4): 232-236.
- [Micro-exam 3](#)

Week 4: Altruism and Egoism, Part 1³

- Textbook: Plato, ‘Selections from *Republic*’, pp. 93-97
- Textbook: Thomas Hobbes, ‘Selections from *Leviathan* and *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*’, pp. 97-102.
- Textbook: Joseph Butler, ‘Selections from *Human Nature and other Sermons*’, pp. 103-110
- Textbook: Francis Hutcheson, ‘Selections from *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*’, pp. 111-116
- Textbook: C. Daniel Batson, ‘How Social an Animal: the Human Capacity for Caring’, pp. 117-123.
- [Micro-exam 4](#)

Week 5: Altruism and Egoism, Part 2

- Textbook: Robert Trivers, ‘The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism’, pp. 124-134.
- Textbook: Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, ‘Summary of *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*’, pp. 135-147.
- Textbook: Barry Schwartz, ‘Why Altruism is Impossible...and Ubiquitous’, pp. 148-160.
- [Micro-exam 5](#)

Week 6: Moral Learning⁴

- Course website: Peter Railton, (2014) ‘The Affective Dog and its Rational Tale: Intuition and Attunement’, *Ethics*, 124(4): 813-859.
- Course website: Fiery Cushman, (2013) ‘Action, Outcome, and Value: A Dual-System Framework for Morality’, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 17(3): 273-292.
- [Micro-exam 6](#)

³ Optional: Robert Sapolsky, (2017) ‘Us Versus Them’ in his *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*, New York: Penguin Press, pp. 387-424.

⁴ Optional: Robert Sapolsky, (2017) ‘Adolescence; Or, Dude, Where’s My Frontal Cortex’, ‘Back to the Crib, Back to the Womb’, & ‘Back to When You Were Just a Fertilized Egg’ in his *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*, New York: Penguin Press, pp. 154-265.

Week 7: Agency and Responsibility, Part 1

- Textbook: Aristotle, 'Selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*', pp. 239-245.
- Textbook: Thomas Reid, 'Selections from Essays on the Active Powers of Man', pp. 246-250.
- Course website: P. F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', in his *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, London: Routledge, pp. 1-28.
- Textbook: Daniel M. Wegner and Thalia Wheatley, 'Apparent Mental Causation: Sources of the Experience of Will'
- [First Essay is Due.](#)
- [Micro-exam 7](#)

Week 8: Norms⁵

- Course website: Cristina Bicchieri & Hugo Mercier (2014) 'Norms and Beliefs: How Change Occurs' in M. Xenitidou & B. Edmonds (eds.) *The Complexity of Social Norms*, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing: pp. 37-54.
- Course website: Cristina Bicchieri & Peter McNally (2018) 'Shrieking Sirens: Schemata, Scripts, and Social Norms. How Change Occurs', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 35(1): 23-53.
- [Micro-exam 8](#)

Week 9 Agency and Responsibility, Part 2

- Textbook: Eddy Nahmias, 'Agency, Authorship, and Illusion', pp. 276-287.
- Textbook: Alfred R. Mele, 'Scientific Skepticism About Free Will', pp. 295-306.
- Course website: Terry Horgan, 'Injecting the Phenomenology of Agency into the Free Will Debate', in D. Shoemaker (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*, Volume 3, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 34-61.
- [Micro-exam 9](#)

Week 10: Punishment⁶

- Course website: J. L. Mackie, (1982) 'Morality and the Retributive Emotions', *Criminal Justice Ethics*, 1(1): 3-10.
- Course website: Robert Frank, (1988) Ch. 3 of *Passions Within Reason*, New York: Norton.
- Course website: Ernst Fehr & Simon Gächter (February 2002) 'Altruistic Punishment in Humans', *Nature*, 415(6868): 137-140.
- Course website: Benedikt Herrmann, Christian Thöni, & Simon Gächter, (March 2008) 'Anti-Social Punishment Across Societies', *Science*, 319(5868): 1362-1367.
- Ernst Fehr & Urs Fischbacher, (2004) 'Social Norms and Human Cooperation', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 8(4): 185-190.
- [Micro-exam 10](#)

⁵ Optional: Robert Sapolsky, (2017) 'Hierarch, Obedience, and Resistance' in his *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*, New York: Penguin Press, pp. 425-477.

⁶ Optional: Vernon L. Smith & Bart J. Wilson, (Summer 2017) 'Sentiments, Conduct, and Trust in the Laboratory', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 34(1): 25-55.

Optional: Robert Sapolsky, (2017) 'The Evolution of Behavior' in his *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*, New York: Penguin Press, pp. 328-386.

Week 11: Moral Luck and Regret⁷

- Course website: B. A. O. Williams, (1976) 'Moral Luck', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 50: 115-135.
- *Course website: Rachana Kamtekar & Shaun Nichols, (2019) 'Agent Regret and Accidental Agency', *Midwestern Studies in Philosophy*, 0 (2019): doi.org/10.1111/misp.12112
- Course website: Liane Young, Shaun Nichols, Rebecca Saxe, (2010) 'Investigating the Neural and Cognitive Basis of Moral Luck: It's Not What You Do but What You know', *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, September; 1(3): 333-349.
- [Second essay is due.](#)
- [Micro-exam 11](#)

Week 12: Virtue and Character

- Textbook: Aristotle, 'Selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*', pp. 172-178.
- Textbook: Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett, 'Selections from *The Person and the Situation*', pp. 187-196.
- Textbook: John M. Doris, 'Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics', pp. 197-209.
- Textbook: Rachana Kamtekar, 'Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character', pp. 210-223.
- [Micro-exam 12](#)

Week 13: Personal Identity and Moral Belief

- Course website: Eric T. Olson, 'Personal Identity', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/identity-personal/>>
- Course website: Nina Strohminger & Shaun Nichols, (2015) 'Neurodegeneration and Identity', *Psychological Science*, 26(9): 1469-1479.
- Course website: Christina Starmans & Paul Bloom, (2018) 'Nothing Personal: What Psychologists Get Wrong about Personal Identity', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 22(7): 566-568.
- *Course website: Shaun Nichols, Nina Strohminger, Arun Rai, & Jay Garfield, (2018) 'Death and the Self' *Cognitive Science*, 42: 314-332.
- [Micro-exam 13](#)

Week 14: Moral Objectivity⁸

- Course website: Gilbert Harman (January 1975) 'Moral Relativism Defended', *The Philosophical Review*, 84(1): 3-22.
- Course website: Nicholas L. Sturgeon, (Spring 1986) 'Harman on Moral Explanations of Natural Facts', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 24(s1) Special Issue: Spindel Supplement: Moral Realism, pp. 69-78.
- Course website: Jennifer Cole Wright, Cullen B. McWhite, & Piper T. Grandjean (2014) 'The Cognitive Mechanisms of Intolerance: Do Our Meta-Ethical Commitments

⁷ Optional: Alice Gregory, 'The sorrow and the shame of the accidental killer', *The New Yorker*, September 11, 2017.

⁸ Optional: Hagop Sarkissian, John Park, David Tien, Jennifer Cole Wright, & Joshua Knobe, (September 2011) 'Folk Moral Relativism', *Mind & Language*, 26(4):482-505.

Matter?', in J. Knobe, T. Lambrozo, & S. Nichols (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Experimental Philosophy*, Volume 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Course website: Godfrey P. Goodwin & John M. Daley, (2008) 'The Psychology of Meta-Ethics: Exploring Objectivism', *Cognition*, 106(3): 1339-1366.
- [Micro-exam 14](#)

Week 15: Moral Intuitions⁹

- Textbook: Henry Sidgwick, 'Selections from *The Methods of Ethics*', pp. 315-320.
- Textbook: Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'The Trolley Problem', pp. 327-334.
- Textbook: Jonathan Haidt, 'The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment', pp. 343-358.
- Textbook: Joshua Green, 'The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul', pp. 359-372.
- Course website: Joshua May, (2018) Ch. 4 of *Regard for Reason in the Moral Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 81-106.
- [Third essay is due.](#)
- [Micro-exam 7](#)

Week 16: Fall/Spring Break [MOVE TO APPROPRIATE LOCATION]

- No assigned material.

⁹ Optional: W. D. Ross, 'Selections from *The Right and the Good*', pp. 321-326.

Mark Timmons, (2008) 'Toward a Sentimentalist Deontology' in W. Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.) *Moral Psychology*, Volume 3, Oxford, Oxford University Press: pp. 93-104.