

The Moral Mind

Philosophy / Psychology 348

Fall 2014

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Course Description

What does it feel like to be a moral agent? What happens to us psychologically when we make moral judgments? What are the moral emotions and are they all reliable? Morality plays an important role in our lives and in our society as a whole, but there are many central questions about morality that still stand in need of good answers. In this course, we will examine some of the contemporary interplay between experimental psychology and moral philosophy. In particular, we will explore what philosophers can learn from psychologists and try to clarify the limits of empirical research into moral questions.

The course will be in roughly three sections. In the first section, we will focus on character-based approaches to ethics and recent critiques from Situationist psychology. We will ask questions about the difference between the emotional lives of virtuous people and vicious people, and whether robust, stable dispositions of character are possible. In the second section, which will take up most of the course, we will look at some recent empirical work regarding particular kinds of moral intuitions and moral emotions. Some psychologists and empirically minded philosophers have argued that we have good evidence to think that some sub-set of our moral judgments are bad. Are they right? If they are right, then we might have reason to think that there are empirical grounds to preferring one ethical theory to another. We will also focus closely on the emotions of shame and disgust, asking whether they have a role to play in our moral theorizing or whether they hold us back from making moral progress. In the final section, we will ask what it means to be a moral agent and how moral agents think of themselves over the course of their lives, asking if this is an important part of morality and how empirical psychology relates to these kinds of philosophical questions.

Required Text

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

You can get it from Amazon here:

http://www.amazon.com/Moral-Psychology-Historical-Contemporary-Readings/dp/1405190191/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1396212136&sr=8-3&keywords=moral+psychology

Course lectures and required readings:

1. Introductions and course admin

Reading: Syllabus for this course (posted on D2L)

2. Weakness of will and our complex minds: Why don't we do what we know is good for us?

Reading: Plato, selections from the *Protagoras* and the *Republic* (posted on D2L)

3. What are emotions? What does it feel like to be a good person?

Reading: Aristotle, selection from *Nicomachean Ethics* (chapter 19 in book)
Linda Zagzebski, "What an emotion is" and "Emotion and value judgment", from chapter 2 of *Divine Motivation Theory* (posted on D2L)

4. Do character traits exist? Ancient philosophy meets experimental psychology

Reading: Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience" (chapter 20 in book)
John Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics" (chapter 22 in book)

5. Responses: the complex psychology of virtuous agents

Reading: Rachana Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character" (Chapter 23 in book)

6. Let's talk about incest: the empirical psychology of moral intuitions

Reading: Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment" (chapter 37 in book)

7. "But that's disgusting!" – emotional reactions and moral judgments (part 1)

Reading: Martha Nussbaum, "Disgust and Our Animal Bodies", chapter 2 of *Hiding From Humanity* (posted on D2L).

8. "You should be ashamed" – emotional reactions and moral judgments (part 2)

Reading: Cheshire Calhoun, "An Apology for Moral Shame" (posted on D2L)

9. Rules are for schmucks: trolley problems and getting good consequences

Reading: Judith Jarvis Thompson, “The Trolley Problem” (chapter 35 in book)

10. Are most of our moral intuitions bad?

Reading: Joshua Greene, “The Secret Joke of Kant’s Soul” (chapter 38 in book)

11. Training and Habituating Our Moral Intuitions:

Reading: Allman & Woodward, “What are moral intuitions and why should we care about them? A neurobiological perspective” (posted on D2L)

12. Rule-following animals: social norms and morality (part 1)

Reading: Cosmides & Tooby, “Can a General Deontic Logic Capture the Facts of Human Moral Reasoning? How the Mind Interprets Social Exchange Rules and Detects Cheaters”, pp. 53–80 (posted on D2L)

13. Rule-following animals: social norms and morality (part 2)

Reading: [the rest of] Cosmides & Tooby, “Can a General Deontic Logic Capture the Facts of Human Moral Reasoning? How the Mind Interprets Social Exchange Rules and Detects Cheaters”, pp. 80–117 (posted on D2L)

14. Beyond the lab: what does autonomous moral agency feel like?

Reading: Christine Korsgaard, “The Authority of Reflection”, from *Sources of Normativity* (posted on D2L)

15. Moral agency and integrity of character

Reading: Cheshire Calhoun, “Standing for Something” (posted on D2L)

16. Conclusion: psychopaths and morality

Reading: R.J.R. Blair, “A Cognitive Developmental Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath” (chapter 7 in book).

Assessment

20% online quizzes on readings and lectures – each quiz closes weekly on Friday at 5pm.

30% first paper (between 1000–1500 words) – Due: Fri, October 3, 5pm.

45% second paper (between 1500–2000 words) – Due: Fri, Dec 12, 5pm.

No references or citations are to be used other than the ones I have provided without express permission. These are rich and complex texts – there is plenty there to engage with critically. Also, the word count is non-negotiable; if you go above or beyond the listed limits, you will receive a 0 for your paper. **There will be no extra credit or make-up papers**, so please don't ask for any. Mark your calendars for the quizzes, and do them ahead of time.

First paper topic:

Virtue ethicists think that ethics can be grounded in a plausible account of character traits. However, John Doris argues that evidence from empirical psychology undermines this account of character. Are his claims correct? If so, why? If not, why not? How could a virtue ethicist (like Kamtekar) respond to Doris?

(Hint: the empirical studies show *something* about our psychology; a really good paper will make clear *what is it* those studies show.)

Second paper topic (choose ONE of the following):

1. We are disgusted by a lot of actions. Nussbaum thinks that this does not tell us anything about the moral status of those actions. Is she right? How could one of the people she argues against respond to her arguments?
2. Calhoun argues that shame is an important part of morality as a social practice *and* that we should not favor the moral status quo (especially when it is oppressive). Are these claims in tension? Why or why not? Is her position better than those positions she argues against?
3. Some consequentialists think that our deontological intuitions are bad and give empirically based arguments to support this view. Explain and evaluate their arguments, then explain how a deontologist could respond to these arguments. (Hint: use *either* the Railton/Berker/Allman & Woodward response *or* the Cosmides & Tooby response).
4. What are the limits of empirical testing with respect to our reflective moral agency? How might empirical studies help us understand agency? Is Korsgaard right to think that empirical studies can tell us very little about what she thinks is central to morality?

Note: Do *not* use material from the first topic in your second paper or you will receive an F. I will enforce this with draconian furor.

If you wish to challenge the grade you have received, you must wait at least **24 hours** from when the grade has been posted before you contact me, and **you must put forward your complaint formally in an attached Word Document or PDF**, explaining carefully and politely why you think you deserve a different grade. I would strongly suggest that, minimally, you follow one of the templates here: <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>. Appeals based on fallacious arguments are not looked upon kindly. Here are some examples of fallacious arguments: “I need an A to keep my scholarship”; “I need to pass this course to graduate”; “I did all the readings and watched all the lectures and did all the quizzes” – none of these have anything to do with the quality of work in your paper, so I will be entirely unpersuaded by these irrelevant pieces of information.

Late papers will **not** be accepted *under any circumstances* – it is unfair to the other students who got their work in on time, and students are more likely to get the work done on time if it is clear that there will be no exceptions (we’ll see why predictability and exceptionless rules are important later in the course). Also, **check your submissions**; if you submit the wrong paper, then that is what I will grade. It probably won’t get a very good grade if it has nothing to do with the course. Remember: papers are worth 80% of your grade, so it is crucial that you are careful with such an important submission. I wouldn’t leave it to the last minute if I were you – try to submit it a day ahead of time if you can and enjoy a stress-free Friday.

Hi psychologists!

This course may seem like it has a lot of philosophy in it. That’s because it does. You should know this from Day 1. But don’t be dissuaded by this! Psychologists are becoming increasingly interested in morality and what they can offer to debates that have traditionally been approached in philosophical ways. Philosophers have been doing this morality project for a while though, so we have some cool things to say and have fixed problems that you might find yourself worrying about. In that sense, it’s important for you to know about what philosophers do as interdisciplinary scholars. *However*, don’t feel like you’re at a disadvantage in this course – there are *lots* (let me reiterate: LOTS) of methodological and scientific issues with the psychological studies we will talk about. These are great things to focus on in your papers if you’re a psychologist. Often philosophers will just assume that the empirical evidence is good, but as empirical psychologists, you should be good at spotting when it’s not good because, e.g., the experiment was poorly designed and the data is thus unreliable. If you do a really great job of being a critical scientist, you will get an A for this course. Watch out for the hints I will drop throughout the course about good methodological points to focus on (e.g. when experiments didn’t have replicable results, or the data was presented in a statistically invalid way, or when the sample sizes are dangerously small).

Hi philosophers!

I expect you to get the empirical stuff right before you start working with the philosophical arguments, so no cutting corners! You cannot get more than a B for your papers if you mess up the psychological studies – they’re important. Don’t misrepresent what they’re saying.

Academic Integrity

The University has policies against plagiarism within the Student Code of Academic Integrity, and against threatening behavior by students. Any cheating, fabrication, or plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the work concerned or for the course, at my discretion, and I may recommend additional penalties ranging from making the infraction a permanent part of your academic record to expulsion from the University. All students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with these policies. Here is the relevant link:

<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/academicintegrity>

Students with disabilities

Students who are registered with the Disability Resource Center must submit appropriate documentation to the instructor if they are requesting reasonable accommodations. Please let me know *as soon as possible* if you require extra accommodations – I will not make changes after the first week. Here is a link to UA's DRC:

<http://drc.arizona.edu/>

You did it!

Because you made it to the end of the syllabus, you get a bonus prize. I like animal pictures and classical music. So, if you put a Word Document or PDF with your name on it in the dropbox under "Mystery Points" by the end of the first week (Friday, Aug 29, 5pm) with an awesome animal picture or a link to your favorite piece of classical music on youtube, you get 5% of your grade for free (notice this was missing from the grade breakdown). But what this also means is that I expect you to have read every word on the syllabus, so if you email me during the course with a question that is on the syllabus I am allowed to respond with "It's on the syllabus" and if you complain about something that I explained on the syllabus I am allowed to respond with "Well, on the syllabus I said clearly that I expected you to do X and you didn't do X".

Finally, there are 75 people enrolled in the class – please don't expect me to make an exception for you (how you would feel if you worked really hard to get good work done on time when you were busy, and then somebody else got an extension because they decided they were too busy?). In the interests of fairness, if I make any exceptions, I will need to make them for everybody and this will inevitably create a huge amount of work for me. I like trying to be a good teacher, but please try to be understanding in that it is difficult to be the sole instructor for a class of this size. So take responsibility for your own learning, be an adult, get the work done in accordance with the instructions I have set out, and I'm sure you'll be fine.

I hope you enjoy the course! ☺