PSY 324: Moral Thought and Behaviour

Syllabus and Schedule
Fall 2023
Time: Tuesdays, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
Location: SSH 1072

Prerequisites: PSY201H1/ ECO220Y1/ EEB225H1/ GGR270H1/ POL222H1/ SOC202H1/
STA220H1/ STA238H1/ STA248H1/ STA288H1/ PSY201H5/ STA215H5/ STA220H5/
PSYB07H3/ STAB22H3/ STAB23H3/ STAB57H3, and PSY220H1/ PSY220H5/ PSYB10H3/
SOC213H1 Exclusion: PSYD14H3

Note: Material on this syllabus is subject to change

Professor: Dr. Jason E. Plaks
Office: 4003 SSH
Office hour: by appointment
Email address: jason.plaks@utoronto.ca

TA:
Office:
Office hour:
Email address:

Course Description:
This third-year undergraduate course primarily involves reading and discussion of
seminal articles on the psychology of morality. The instructor will also deliver a short
lecture at the start of each session. A key emphasis of the course will be on identifying
specific psychological processes that lead people (a) to adopt the moral positions they do,
(b) to translate their moral positions into action, and (c) to communicate their moral
positions to others. Students will read seminal articles from a range of disciplines,
including social psychology, cognitive neuroscience, animal behavior, philosophy, and
evolutionary psychology. Students will gain: (a) thorough background knowledge on the
main issues and debates in the field and (b) critical reading and writing skills necessary
for understanding and communicating complex ideas.

Course Format and Requirements:
Grades will be based on the following components:
1. Reaction papers: 25%
2. Class participation (verbal): 25%
3. Assignment #1 Mid-term 'long answer' term test: 25%
4. Final Paper (Research Proposal): 25%

1% penalty per day of lateness.

1. To foster thoughtful, exciting, and worthwhile discussion, students are asked to prepare reaction papers to the weekly readings. This request is designed to get students to think about the readings, while ensuring that everyone has something to contribute during class discussion. Students have some freedom to decide how to complete this assignment. Spend some time highlighting the main points of the readings, but most of the paper should do other things: e.g., connect these main points, critique a study or its findings (or the authors' interpretation of the findings), consider/discuss/develop new ideas, and/or propose a new study. **You should write something about each reading.** The goal should be to demonstrate that you really understand the material. To this end, students are encouraged to bring in relevant material from other courses. Details are as follows:

- Papers should be **submitted to Packback before the start of class.**
- Papers should be 250 words max.
- Papers will be graded on a scale ranging from 1-30. Packback's AI marks the grammar/structure/flow. I mark the content. See the Packback rubric.

2. The course will be structured as much as possible to foster high level, intellectual, **respectful** dialogue among the students on the foundational moral issues that come up in the readings. A significant portion of the course mark will be based on the instructor's assessment of the quantity and quality of each student's contribution to the discussions.

3. For Assignment #1, students will be asked to write in class 2-3 'long answer' responses to questions posed by the instructor. These questions will ask students to compare, contrast, and synthesize different theorists' approaches to understanding a contemporary moral issue. Responses will be marked for correctness, clarity, and intellectual rigor.

4. For Assignment #2, students will write a 10-12 page literature review/research proposal. Students will propose new studies to test specific hypotheses that address a lacuna in the literature. The instructor will provide more specific instruction about the nature and format of this paper after the midpoint of the semester.

Missed Test Policy:
If you miss the mid-term test, you must declare your absence on ACORN within one week. A Verification of Illness form is also accepted, or a College RO letter, or Accessibility letter. You must also email me and the TA to schedule a time/place to take the makeup.

Course website information
Course readings are available in PDF form on the Quercus site for the course.

TOPICS AND READINGS
Boldfaced items are required.
Regular-type items are available for additional enrichment.

Sep 12: Introductory Lecture
no readings

Sep 19: Origins of Morality
Podcast interview with Philip Petit on "The Birth of Ethics" from *Philosophy Bites*:
https://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/2/1/6/216ca4288bd45785/Philip_Pettit_on_the_Birth_of_
Ethics.mp3?c_id=35171321&cs_id=35171321&expiration=1608840041&hwt=eb7cfe
d984941cf7908713addf7652dd

Tomasello, M., & Vaish, A. (2013). Origins of human cooperation and morality.
***Annual Review of Psychology*, *64*, 231–55.**

Sloane, S., Baillargeon, R., & Premack, D. (2012). Do infants have a sense of
fairness? ***Psychological Science*, *23*(2), 196–204.**

Sep 26: Emotion / Reason (a)
Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist
approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review. 108*, 814-834

Pizarro, D.A., & Bloom, P. (2003). The intelligence of moral intuitions: Comment on
Haidt (2001). *Psychological Review, 110,* 197-198.

Oct 3: Emotion / Reason (b)
Giner-Sorolla, R.G. & Chapman, H.A. (2017). Beyond purity: Moral disgust toward
bad character. *Psychological Science, 28 (1),* 80-91

Cameron, C.D., & Payne, B.K. (2011). Escaping affect: How motivated emotion
regulation creates insensitivity to mass suffering. *Journal of Personality and Social*
***Psychology, 100*, 1-15.**

Srinavasan, A. (2018). The aptness of anger. *Journal of Political Philosophy, 26,* 123-144.

Oct 10: Understanding 'Harm'

Schein, C., & Gray, K. (2018). The theory of dyadic morality: Reinventing moral judgments by redefining harm. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*.

Roets, A., Bostyn, D.H., De keersmaecker, J. *et al.* **(2020). Utilitarianism in minimal-group decision making is less common than equality-based morality, mostly harm-oriented, and rarely impartial.** *Scientific Reports,* **10, 13373.**

Crockett M. J., Kurth-Nelson Z., Siegel J. Z., Dayan P., & Dolan R. J. (2014). Harm to others outweighs harm to self in moral decision making *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences,* 111(48), 17320-17325.

Oct 17
ASSIGNMENT #1 Mid-term: Written in exam booklets during normal class time.

Oct 24: Psychological Utilitarianism and Deontology (a)
Greene, J. D., Sommerville, R. B., Nystrom, L. E., Darley, J. M., & Cohen, J. D. (2001). An fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in moral judgment. *Science*, **Vol. 293, 2105-2108.**

Bago, B. & de Neys, W. (2019). The intuitive greater good: Testing the corrective dual process model of moral cognition. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 148,* **1782-1801.**

Kurzban, R., DeScioli, P., & Fein, D. (2012). Hamilton vs. Kant: Pitting adaptations for altruism against adaptations for moral judgment. *Evolution and Human Behavior,* 323-333.

Oct 31 Psychological Utilitarianism and Deontology (b)
Podcast on Kant's Categorical Imperative from *In Our Time* **on the BBC: https://podtail.com/en/podcast/in-our-time-philosophy/kant-s-categorical-imperative/**

Kahane, G., Everett, J., Earp, B., Caviola, L., Faber, N., Crockett, M., Savulescu, J. (2018). Beyond sacrificial harm: A two dimensional model of utilitarian psychology, *Psychological Review, 125,* **131-164.**

Conway, P., Goldstein-Greenwood, J., Polacek, D., & Greene, J.D. (2018). Sacrificial utilitarian judgments do reflect concern for the greater good: Clarification via process dissociation and the judgments of philosophers. *Cognition, 179,* **241-265.**

Robinson, J.S., Joel, S., & Plaks, J.E. (2015). Empathy for the group versus indifference to the victim: Effects of anxious and avoidant attachment on moral judgment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 56,* 139-152.

Nov 7
NO CLASS – UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY

Nov 14: Character and Virtue Ethics
Everett, J.A.C., Pizarro, D. A. & Crockett, M.J., (2016). Inference of trustworthiness from intuitive moral judgments. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 145,* 772-787.

Plaks, J.E., Robinson, J.S., & Forbes, R. (2022). Anger and sadness as moral signals. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 13,* 362-371.

Goodwin, G.P. (2015). Moral character in person perception. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 24,* 38-44.

Nov 21: Intentionality and Responsibility (a)
Malle, B. F., & Knobe, J. (1997a). The folk concept of intentionality. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 33,* 101-121.

Leslie, A., Knobe, J. & Cohen, A. (2006). Acting intentionally and the side-effect effect: 'Theory of mind' and moral judgment. *Psychological Science*, 17, 421-427.

Nov 28: Intentionality and Responsibility (b)
Young, L., Camprodon, J., Hauser, M., Pascual-Leone, A., Saxe, R. (2010). Disruption of the right temporoparietal junction with transcranial magnetic stimulation reduces the role of beliefs in moral judgments. *PNAS*, *107*, 6753-6758.

Plaks, J.E., McNichols, N.K., & Fortune, J.L. (2009). Thoughts versus deeds: Distal and proximal intent in lay judgments of moral responsibility. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 35,* 1687-1701.

Dec 5: The Cultural Context of Morality
Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B.A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96,* 1029-1046.

Rai, T. S., & Fiske, A. P. (2011). Moral psychology is relationship regulation: Moral motives for unity, hierarchy, equality, and proportionality. *Psychological Review*, *118*, 57-75.

ASSIGNMENT #2: RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE

Writing:
As a student at the University of Toronto, you are expected to write well. The university provides its students with a number of resources to help them achieve this. For more information on campus writing centres and writing courses, please visit http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/.

Students with Disabilities or Accommodation Requirements

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the academic year by visiting http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as/new-registration. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will assess your situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your needs or condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

Academic Integrity

All students, faculty and staff are expected to follow the University's guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty when writing assignments, collaborating with fellow students, and writing tests and exams. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism—representing someone else's work as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Speak to me or your TA for advice on anything that you find unclear. To learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at http://www.writing.utoronto.ca. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity and http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca

Use of Generative artificial intelligence tools is prohibited.

The knowing use of generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the completion of, or to support the completion of, an examination, term test, assignment, or any other form of academic assessment, may be considered an academic offense in this course. [NOTE: I have tested how well ChatGPT answers the questions I typically assign to students, and it has produced mostly nonsense. Thus, the use of a generative AI tool is not only against course rules, but is likely to give you a poor mark!]

Specific Medical Circumstances

If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. You can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI. For more information on the VOI, please see http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Mental Health and Well-being

As a student, you may experience challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation, financial concerns, family worries and so forth. These factors may affect your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate fully in daily activities. Everyone feels stressed now and then – it is a normal part of university life. Some days are better than others, and there is no wrong time to reach out. There are resources for every situation and every level of stress.
There are many helpful resources available through your College Registrar or through Student Life
(http://studentlife.utoronto.ca and http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/feeling-distressed).
An important part of the University experience is learning how and when to ask for help. Please take the time to inform yourself of available resources.