

## PSY 324: Moral Thought and Behaviour

### Syllabus and Schedule

Summer 2023

Time: Mondays and Thursdays, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

Location: SSH 1084

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: Xiao Min Chang  
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Office hour: Thursdays 2pm-3pm  
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#### 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.** 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 a 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. 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.

### May 8: Introductory Lecture

no readings

### May 11: Origins of Morality

Podcast interview with Philip Petit on “The Birth of Ethics” from *Philosophy Bites*:  
[https://hwcndn.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](https://hwcndn.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.**

### May 15: 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.**

### May 18: 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.**

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

May 22: 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.

May 25

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

May 29: 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.

June 1 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.

June 5: 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.

June 8: 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.

June 12: 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.

June 15: 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.

June 19

**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>

## **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.