# The Moralities of Everyday Life

**PSY 410S          Winter 2022          Monday, 5-7PM**

How is it that we are capable of transcendent kindness—and unspeakable cruelty? How do we explain people's strongly held opinions about abortion, gay marriage, affirmative action, eating meat, and torture? How do evolution, culture, and religion conspire to shape our moral natures? These are among the most important—and exciting—questions around, and they are the focus of this course. We will explore the modern science of moral belief and moral action, drawing upon disciplines such as cognitive science, neuroscience, economics, and philosophy. We will look at research from the lab, from the community, and from the battlefield; we will discuss babies, monkeys, and psychopaths; we will debate claims about moral differences between men and women, liberals and conservatives, Christians and Muslims. We will explore issues such as prejudice and bigotry, sexuality and purity, and punishment, revenge, and forgiveness.

The lectures and readings will be accessible to a general audience; no special background is needed. But participants should be prepared to keep up with the readings, and be comfortable thinking about and debating ideas from a variety of fields.

## Do I need to read this syllabus?

Sorry, you do. Besides the obvious details that you really need to know—like where we're meeting and how long the reading responses are—it contains some information about the course that might dissuade some of you from taking it. Better to find out now!

## Who is the professor?

Me. Professor Paul Bloom. My email is Paul.Bloom@utoronto.ca. My webpage is paulbloom.net. Office hours by appointment.

## Where will we meet?

The class is currently scheduled to meet in person, in SS 2101. However, for the first month of class, we will meet virtually on Zoom, because, well, there's a pandemic. Following U of T policy, the classes (including the Zoom classes) will meet 10 minutes after the hour, so the class will actually be from 5:10 – 7:00 PM.

Here is the Zoom link: https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/85353682811

## Where can I find the readings?

In this dropbox folder right here (I'll add the readings to the folder a couple of weeks ahead of time)

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/c969bfyitjrao7q/AACYnkuVqD2XaQ3onegVtlX6a?dl=0

The background readings will be in a sub-folder called "Background"; the Week 1 readings will be in a sub-folder called "Week 1", and so on.

## Tentative Schedule — subject to change

Background:

Prior to the class of Jan 17 (and ideally before Jan 10) please read the following, as these readings will provide essential psychological and philosophical background:

- Rachels, J. (2006). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, excerpt
- Pinker, S. (2008). The Moral Instinct. *New York Times*
- Bloom, P (2013). *Just Babies*, excerpt
- Le Guin (1973). The ones who walk away from Omelas

Jan 10          Introduction to the class

No additional readings

Jan 17        Moral Foundations

- Harris (2010). Science Can Answer Moral Questions; TED Talk
  https://www.ted.com/talks/sam_harris_science_can_answer_moral_questions?language=en
- Haidt (2008). The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives; TED Talk
  https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_the_moral_roots_of_liberals_and_conservatives?language=en
- Haidt, J. (2007). The new synthesis in moral psychology. *Science*
- Pizarro, D. A., & Bloom, P. (2003). The intelligence of the moral intuitions: A comment on Haidt (2001). *Psychological Review*

Jan 24        The Empathy Debate

- Bloom, P. (2017). *Against Empathy*, excerpt
- [Discussion of "Against Empathy" in *Boston Review*, read target article, commentaries, and reply]
  *https://bostonreview.net/forum/paul-bloom-against-empathy/*
- Zaki, J. (2018). Empathy is a moral force. *Atlas of Moral Psychology*

Jan 31        The Dehumanization Debate

- Kteily, N. S., & Bruneau, E. (2017). Darker demons of our nature: The need to (re) focus attention on blatant forms of dehumanization. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*
- Over, H. (2021). Seven challenges for the dehumanization hypothesis. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*
- Bloom, P. (2017). The root of all cruelty. *New Yorker*
  https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/11/27/the-root-of-all- cruelty

Feb 7        Fairness

- Bloom, P (2013). *Just Babies*, excerpt
- Starmans, C., Sheskin, M., & Bloom, P. (2017). Why people prefer unequal societies. *Nature Human Behaviour*
- Eagleman, J. and Tomasello, M. (2019). Children's sense of fairness as equal respect. *Trends in Cognitive Science.*

Feb 14        Signaling

- Jordan, J. J., & Kouchaki, M. (2021). Virtuous Victims, *Science Advances*.
- Anderson, R. A., Kamtekar, R., Nichols, S., & Pizarro, D. A. (2021). "False positive" emotions, responsibility, and moral character. *Cognition*
- Everett, J. A., Pizarro, D. A., & Crockett, M. J. (2016). Inference of trustworthiness from intuitive moral judgments. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*

Feb 21        Family Day, no class

Feb 28          Morality and religion

- Bloom, P. (2012). Religion, morality, evolution. *Annual Review of Psychology*
- Shariff, A., Mercier, B. (2020). The evolution of religion and morality


March 7         Morality and politics

- Haidt (2012). The righteous mind [excerpts]
- Van Bavel, J. and Pereira, A. (2017). The Partisan Brain: An identity-based model of political belief
- Crockett, M. J. (2017). Moral outrage in the digital age. *Nature Human Behavior*


March 14            A case-study for moral psychology: Driverless cars

- Awad, E. et al. (2018). The Moral Machine Experiment. *Nature.*
- Other readings TBA

March 21            TBA:
                   The topic for this class will be decided by the class. Possibilities include:
                   Anger
                   Disgust
                   Apologies
                   Moral Psychology and Criminal Law

March 28            Moral improvement

- Singer, P. (2015). The logic of effective altruism. [also read commentaries and author reply], *Boston Review*
  https://bostonreview.net/forum/peter-singer-logic-effective-altruism/
- Pinker, S. (2014). The surprising decline in violence. TED talk.
  https://www.ted.com/talks/steven_pinker_the_surprising_decline_in_violence?language=en
- MacFarquhar, L. (2015). *Strangers Drowning,* excerpt.

April 4            Final presentations


## What do I need to do?


1. You need to send in reading responses. Before every class except for the first one and the last one, participants will submit a 200-250 word comment about the readings. This comment will be a

response to a question raised in the previous class and should be sent to me by email, to paul.bloom@utoronto.ca (no attachments, please). It is due by Sunday at noon. Your comments will demonstrate to me that you have done the readings, and, more important, will help structure the discussion we have during class.

2. You need a final *project/presentation*. I will provide more details about this later in the course, but the general idea is that it should be the sort of thing you could submit to a journal or to a granting agency, such as a theoretical critique or a series of proposed experiments. For certain sorts of final projects, particularly those that involve empirical work, collaboration is encouraged. The final class will be devoted to presentations of these in-progress projects.

3. You need to *talk*. Seminar participants are expected to ... participate. You should participate in the discussion every time we meet. (Having said this, I understand that serious crises and unavoidable obligations do occur—please try to let me know in advance if you need to miss a seminar meeting.)

Participants should also be aware that I intend to ask them for their opinions and arguments. I may ask a specific individual to expand on a point made in the comment that he or she sent in, for instance. I'll note also that I expect participant's contributions in class to reflect a careful reading of the assigned materials. If you haven't done the readings, don't show up. (As Wittgenstein was reputed to have said: No tourists!)

All of this might be a factor when deciding whether to take this course.

## Evaluation

Reading responses = 30%, participation = 30**%**, final = 40%.

Late reading responses will have a deduction of 20%. No reading responses will be accepted after Monday at noon.

## Something to think about

Seminar participants will likely express different positions about sensitive topics, including those that revolving around domains such as sex, violence, religion, politics, and race. You might be shocked at some of the views that your fellow students have! I expect seminar participants to exhibit a high degree of intellectual charity when it comes to views that they disagree with, and to engage in civil, productive, and good-humored discussion. The discussion should be interesting, fun—and kind. If you have a low tolerance for disagreement about serious issues, again, this seminar may not be for you.

## I hope there's a party

Such a good idea! I'm going to try to arrange it, perhaps at a restaurant, or a park, or at my house (living in Roncy, not far from campus). The obvious concern is Covid; we need to see what the situation is regarding large gatherings.

## When we meet in person, can I have my laptop or phone open, so I can check my email, go on social media, and shop for shoes?

Sorry, no. I appreciate the temptation—I'm often peeking at my phone during talks—but it's rude, both to me and to the people around you.

## Other Stuff

### *Accessibility Needs*
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) (accessibility.utoronto.ca) at the beginning of the academic year. 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 medical 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 condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

### *Writing*
As a student here 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/.

### *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism*
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 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 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 http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai  and http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/

### *Other Resources*

Student Life Programs and Services (http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/)
Academic Success Services (http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/asc)
Counselling and Psychological Services (http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc)

## This is a wonderful syllabus, but I still have questions

No worries – email me: Paul.bloom@utoronto.ca