

What Is Morality?
PHIL 457F
Spring 2014
Meets Tues, 1:40-4:40 in DC 122

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Texts:

There is only one book to buy for this course: Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*. It is available at the bookstore. All other readings are on electronic reserves. You must always have a copy of the day's reading with you in class. For readings that are available electronically, either print or bring a laptop so you can refer to the reading in class.

Course Description:

What is morality? This course will consider both empirical and philosophical responses to this question, as well as the relationship between the two. We will focus on the question of whether morality could be something that humans have constructed through our evaluative judgments and other evaluative activities, and if so, how best to conceive the process of construction.

Course Objectives:

- To familiarize students with some contemporary work in philosophical ethics and some contemporary interdisciplinary work in moral psychology.
- To have students develop their own original, critical thinking about each of the covered topics.
- To have students learn and practice philosophical skills; these skills include understanding difficult texts; analyzing, constructing, and responding critically to arguments; engaging in conceptual thinking; developing, articulating, and defending their own positions both verbally and in writing; thinking in complex and original ways.
- To advance students in their ability to write excellent papers according to the norms of the discipline.

This course satisfies the Composition ("C") General Education Requirement.

Learning Outcomes: Students in C courses will demonstrate

1. The ability to write effectively and coherently, in ways appropriate to the discipline and the level of the course.
2. The ability to revise and improve their writing in both form and content.

This course satisfies the Humanities ("H") General Education Requirement.

Learning Outcomes: Students in H courses will demonstrate an understanding of human experience through the study of literature or philosophy.

Course Requirements:

Class preparation and participation:

Please avoid scheduling travel, appointments, etc., to conflict with class time. Email me before class time if you are ill and will be missing class. You may be absent twice without this affecting your grade. These permitted absences are intended to cover illnesses and emergencies. More than two absences will result automatically in failure of the course, unless you 1) provide adequate documentation showing that all absences were due to illness or emergency, and 2) turn in (via email) a two page summary of, and original response to, the day's reading, OR complete the writing exercise that was done in class on the day that you missed, due by the following class meeting.

Please do not use an electronic device (phone, laptop, etc) in class for any purpose other than referring to the day's reading, completing the writing exercises, or taking notes; do not even have other windows open on your screen.

Do give serious attention to the *quality*—not just the quantity—of your participation in discussions. If you find it difficult to speak in class discussions, please come talk to me about this *during the first week or two of the semester*, and we will devise a plan for practicing this kind of speaking.

Weekly writing exercises: Part of each class meeting will be spent on writing exercises, and these writing exercises will sometimes be shared out loud in class (either in small groups or as presentations to the whole class). Sometimes written work will be assigned to complete before coming to class. Depending on the exercise, I may either grade the exercise without feedback, give feedback in writing, or meet individually with students to discuss the exercise. In general, it will not be possible to complete the exercise unless you have done the reading carefully. Students who need extra help on writing—as evidenced by their writing exercises—will be required to visit the Writing Center throughout the semester.

Seminar paper: A 3,000 word (plus or minus 25 words) seminar paper is required. The paper will be due in stages, with revision required, as indicated on the syllabus. Students will receive verbal feedback on a preliminary draft before completing the final version; some students will also be required to visit the Writing Center to improve the seminar paper. More information about the seminar paper will be distributed part way through the semester.

Grading:

50% weekly writing exercises.

50% seminar paper.

The final grade may be raised or lowered by a plus or minus (e.g. from a B- to a B, from an A- to a B+, etc) depending on the quality of class participation.

Academic Honesty: I follow the Philosophy Department policy on academic honesty (see separate sheet); furthermore, any student who plagiarizes or commits any other form of academic dishonesty will receive an F for the course. Students are responsible for being familiar with, and abiding by, the Student Academic Honesty Code.

Schedule

Tues, Jan. 28

Frans de Waal (video):

http://www.ted.com/talks/frans_de_waal_do_animals_have_morals.html

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (video):

<http://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/664356>

Paul Bloom (video): <http://edge.org/conversation/a-new-science-of-morality-part-5>

Patricia Churchland (video)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_PtnBacAP0

Tues, Feb. 4

Frans de Waal, chapter 4 (pages 84-117) of *The Age of Empathy*.

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, chapter 1 (pages 1-32) “Apes on a Plane,” in *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*.

Patricia Churchland, chapter 4 (pages 83-120) “The Brains Behind Morality” in *Touching a Nerve*.

Tues, Feb. 11

Before you do the reading, go to <http://www.yourmorals.org/> and (unless you object to doing so) take several of the questionnaires, including the “Moral Foundations Questionnaire.”

Jonathan Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment.” *Psychological Review* 108 (4) (2001): 814-834.

Jonathan Haidt and Selin Kesebir. 2010. “Morality.” In S. Fiske, D. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey, Eds., *Handbook of Social Psychology, 5th Edition*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. Pgs. 797-832.

Tues, Feb. 18

Street, Sharon. 2006. “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value.” *Philosophical Studies* 127: 109-166.

Tues, Feb 25

Christine Korsgaard, “Morality and the Distinctiveness of Human Action,” (pages 98-119) in *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved* (by Frans de Waal, edited by Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober).

Paul Bloom, chapter 5 (pages 131-157) “Bodies” in *Just Babies: The Origins of good and Evil*.

Martha Nussbaum, chapter 6 (pages 137-160) “Compassion: Human and Animal” in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. This chapter is *not* on electronic reserves, but it is available as an ebook through the BU Library.

Tues, March 4

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pages 11-22 and 46-53 (§3, §4, §9).

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, §10 (pages 29-32).

Street, Sharon. 2008. "Constructivism About Reasons." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3: 207-245.

Tues, March 11

Margaret Urban Walker, chapter 3, (pgs. 49-75) "Authority and Transparency," in *Moral Understandings*. [If you are reading the Second Edition of this book, chapter 3 will be pgs. 55-82].

Margaret Urban Walker, chapter 7 (pgs. 103-116) "Seeing Power in Morality: A Proposal for Feminist Naturalism in Ethics," in *Moral Contexts*.

Tues, March 18

Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*. Introduction, Part I (chapters 1-3) and Part II (chapters 4-5).

Tues, March 25

Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*. Part III (chapters 6-8) and Part IV (chapters 9-10).

Tues, April 1

Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*. Part V (chapters 11-12).

Tues, April 8

Paper abstracts due. Send the abstract to me via email *before* class time.
In class: peer review of abstracts; I will be away giving a talk.

Tues, April 15: no class.

Tues, April 22

Joseph Raz, chapter 13 (pages 321-366) "Incommensurability" in *The Morality of Freedom*.

Philip Tetlock. 2003. "Thinking the Unthinkable: Values and Taboo Cognitions," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 7 (7): 320-324.

1,000 word "practice" draft of seminar paper due.
Consultations on drafts begin.

Tues, April 29

Harry Frankfurt. 1982. "The Importance of What We Care About." *Synthese* 53 (2): 257-272.

Martha Nussbaum. 2000. "The Costs of Tragedy: Some Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis." *Journal of Legal Studies* 29(2): pgs. 1005-1036.

Last day of consultations on drafts.

Tues, May 6

3,000 word seminar paper due via turnitin *before* class time.
Presentations in class.