

**What Is Morality?**  
**PHIL 605**  
Fall 2014  
Meets Tues, 1:40-4:40

Prof. Lisa Tessman  
Office: Library Tower 1215  
Office hours: Wed 9:40-11:40 or by appointment.  
Email: ltessman@binghamton.edu

**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 (through Blackboard) or accessible through the Binghamton University library as an ebook. Please have a copy of the day's reading with you in class (hard copy or on an electronic device).

**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 (and perhaps could only be) something that humans have constructed through our evaluative judgments and other evaluative activities, and if so, how best to conceive the process and the products 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 papers that will be accepted for philosophical conferences and that could be revised for eventual publication.

**Course Requirements:**

**Class preparation and participation:** Students are expected to prepare for, attend and participate thoughtfully in ALL seminar meetings. Please avoid scheduling travel (other than for academic conferences), appointments, etc., to conflict with class time. However, if you are ill please do not come to class (or to my office). Do email me before class time if you are ill and will be missing class.

Come to class prepared to:

- 1) explain the day's reading; and
- 2) say one original, smart thing that is relevant to the day's material; and
- 3) ask a question that is intended to prompt discussion, and say why your question matters.

Each student may have one day on which you come unprepared. Tell me at the beginning of class if it is your unprepared day. You are not allowed to speak in class on your unprepared day, but you may benefit from listening to others. You are expected to speak in class on all other days. Obviously, it is much better to *not* come unprepared on any day, but do take your one day if you need it. If you are absent, that day counts as your unprepared day.

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.

**Writing exercises:** Part of some class meetings will be spent on writing exercises, and these writing exercises will (usually) be shared in class. In general, it will not be possible to complete the exercises unless you have done the reading carefully, so if it is your unprepared day, you will be excused from the writing exercise.

**Seminar paper:** Seminar papers are expected to draw centrally on the course readings. If you would like to also draw on material not assigned in the class, please check with me first; in any case, the primary focus must be on assigned material. In some cases (depending on paper topic), I will recommend additional readings. The seminar paper has a strict 3,000 word limit—in other words, it is the typical length of a conference paper (i.e. a paper with a 20-minute reading time). The paper is due on the last day of class, and you will be expected to present your paper (or do a presentation based on your paper) to the class on that day. All papers should be sent to me by email—no hard copy needed. I encourage each of you to meet with me several weeks before the paper is due to start discussing your paper topic, and to continue to consult with me throughout the writing process, to whatever extent this is helpful to you. If you wish to coauthor your paper with another student in the class, please speak with me ahead of time about this.

**Grading:**

The grade is based on the quality of the seminar paper, but can be raised or lowered by as much as one full grade, based on the writing exercises and on class participation.

**Academic Honesty:**

Any student who plagiarizes or commits any other form of academic dishonesty will receive an F for the course.

NO INCOMPLETES WILL BE GIVEN UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES

## Schedule

### **Tues, Sept. 2**

Introductions

### **Tues, Sept. 9**

Frans de Waal, chapter 4 (pages 84-117) of *The Age of Empathy* (2009).

Frans de Waal, "Natural normativity: The 'is' and 'ought' of animal behavior." *Behaviour* 151 (2014): 185-204.

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*.

Watch on your own before class:

Frans de Waal (video):

[http://www.ted.com/talks/frans\\_de\\_waal\\_do\\_animals\\_have\\_morals.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/frans_de_waal_do_animals_have_morals.html)

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (video): <http://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/664356>

Patricia Churchland (video) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_PtnBacAP0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_PtnBacAP0)

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

### **Tues, Sept. 16**

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, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. Pgs. 797-832.

Jonathan Haidt, 2012. Chapter 11, "Religion is a Team Sport" in *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, pgs. 246-273.

### **Tues, Sept. 23**

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

Sharon Street, Forthcoming 2014. "Does Anything Really Matter or Did We Just Evolve to Think So?" In *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy*, eds. Alex Byrne, Joshua Cohen, Gideon Rosen, and Seana Shiffrin.

**Tues, Sept. 30**

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, 2006).

Paul Bloom, chapter 5 (pages 131-157) "Bodies" in *Just Babies: The Origins of good and Evil* (2013).

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.

Philip Kitcher, "Is a Naturalized Ethics Possible?" *Behaviour* 151 (2014): 245-260.

**Tues, Oct. 7**

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), pages 11-22 and 46-53 (§3, §4, §9).

John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001), §10 (pages 29-32).

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

Margaret Urban Walker, chapter 7 (pgs. 103-116) "Seeing Power in Morality: A Proposal for Feminist Naturalism in Ethics," in *Moral Contexts* (2003).

**Tues, Oct. 14**

Lenman, James. 2007. "What is Moral Inquiry?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary v 81: 63-81.

Street, Sharon. 2010. "What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?" *Philosophy Compass* 5 (5): 363-384.

Street, Sharon. 2012. "Coming to Terms with Contingency: Humean Constructivism About Practical Reasons." In *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*, edited by James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 40-59.

**Tues, Oct. 21**

Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (2013). Introduction, Part I (chapters 1-3), Part II (chapters 4-5), and Part III (chapters 6-8).

**MONDAY OCTOBER 27<sup>TH</sup>:**

**Guest speaker: Sharon Street**

**5:00-6:15 PM, Academic A G008**

***Please make every effort to attend.***

**Tues, Oct. 28**

Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*. Part IV (chapters 9-10) and Part V (chapters 11-12).

**Tues, Nov. 4**

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.

**Tues, Nov. 11**

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.

**Tues, Nov. 18**

Lisa Tessman, *Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality*, Introduction and chapters 1-2.

**Tues, Nov. 25**

Lisa Tessman, *Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality*, chapter 3.

**Tues, Dec. 2**

Lisa Tessman, *Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality*, chapters 6-7 and Conclusion (chapters 4 and 5 are optional).

**Tues, Dec. 9**

3,000 word seminar paper due via email *before* class begins.  
Presentations in class.