

Instructor: J. Neil Otte (jeffotte@buffalo.edu)
Class Room: #
Fall 20--

PHILOSOPHY 350: PHILOSOPHY AND MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Course Description

It was not too long ago that most philosophers in the English-speaking world paid little attention to empirical research in psychology. This is highly surprising, considering how much overlap there is between psychologists who are interested in the cognitive processes underlying moral behavior and the philosophical ethicist's analysis of moral behavior. However, in the last few decades, there has been a feverish interest in empirical approaches to moral psychology among psychologists, cognitive scientists, and philosophers, which has brought philosophical theorizing about how we *should* behave together with experimental work regarding how people *in fact* behave in moral contexts. This course will introduce you to some of the major themes and findings in this work, as well as the historical philosophical thought that makes this work exciting. A prerequisite for this course is at least one prior philosophy course or written permission from the instructor. Coursework will include readings, participation on a discussion forum, online reading quizzes, one research paper (8-10 pages), and two exams.

Required Readings

No textbook required. All readings will be posted to UB Learns.

Recommended (but Not Required) Reading

[The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#): This is a valuable tool for clarifying ideas, but should *not* be used as a source in papers. Wikipedia can be very good, but the Stanford Encyclopedia is curated by experts and its articles are edited by philosophers. This is also true of the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#).

Learning Outcomes

COURSE GOALS	METHOD OF EVALUATION
Demonstrate comprehension of important articles in moral psychology	Weekly Online Quizzes and Exams
Actively analyze and critique textual arguments	Online participation
Develop clear, original criticisms of the arguments and positions we read.	Assignments, Papers
Acquire the ability to critical read both scientific and philosophical texts	Online and in class participation

Why Philosophy?

I find a majority of students love philosophy, but increasingly, I encounter students who forego majoring because they are worried about paying student loans and getting a job. Contrary to their reputation, philosophy undergraduates do very well on the job market compared to many other majors. See [this link](#) for further information about pursuing philosophy. You don't need to choose between studying what you love and getting a job.

Grade by Percentage

40%	Participation, Assignments, and Quizzes
15%	Exam 1
20%	Exam 2
25%	Paper

Grading Scale

A = 92-100%
A- = 90-91%
B+ = 88-89%
B = 82-87%
B- = 80-81%
C+ = 78-79%
C = 72-77%
C- = 70-71%
D+ = 68-69%
D = 60-67%
F = 59% and below

Online Reading Quizzes

Every article we read will be accompanied by an online reading quiz. These quizzes are meant to ensure that you are reading carefully, and to help you focus on the main issues and arguments in the text. Some quizzes may ask you to provide a definition from the text, while others might ask you to spell out the author's argument in your own words.

Examinations

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. These will cover only the material within those periods. A week in advance, you will receive a list of possible short answer essay questions (twenty to twenty-five questions). You will need to prepare answers to these, and I recommend you work with others. On the day of the exams, you will not be able to use any preparation. The exams will present you with five of the possible questions from the list and you will need to answer four (i.e. you will need to choose one answer to leave blank). This means each answer will be worth 25% points. Answers should be clear, concise, and complete.

Paper

Students will need to write one research papers of 8-10 pages (not including the reference page). These papers can criticize one of our authors, or articulate an original argument on the basis of the evidence. You will need to run your topic by me in advance. The paper will need to use [MLA format](#) and include a separate page for references. See the paper topics and instruction handout for more details.

Accessibility Resources

Students who require accommodation should contact me within the first three days of the session, so that we can make appropriate arrangements with the accessibility office. To contact Accessibility Resources, please follow [this link](#).

Academic Honesty

As the world is increasingly online, it has become very easy to present the words and ideas of others as our own. This can be particularly tempting in an online course like this. *Resist this temptation*. All student work may be scanned by online plagiarism checkers, which are remarkably good at catching plagiarized work. Students who are discovered to have plagiarized will be dealt with according to the university's academic integrity policy. In particular, no work that includes plagiarism will be graded or allowed to be made up, and evidence of plagiarism may be grounds for filing a report with the academic integrity office. It is your responsibility to know what plagiarism is and to avoid it. There will be no exceptions. To educate yourself on what counts as plagiarism, please visit [this link](#) or reach out to me if you have specific questions. For more information on the University at Buffalo's policy on academic integrity, visit [this link](#).

Course Schedule

September

Week One – *Reason and Sentiment*

Read: Hume, “A Treatise of Human Nature”; Kant, “Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals”

Week Two – *Non-Cognitivism and Anti-Realism*

Read: Ayer, Ch. 6 of *Language, Truth, and Logic*; Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values”

Week Three – *Cognitivism and Realism*

Read: Smith, “Moral Realism”; Railton, “Moral Realism”

Week Four – *Introduction to Trolleyology*

Read: Greene, J. “The Secret Joke of Kant’s Soul”; Green, J. Guy Kahane, “On the Wrong Track: Process and Content in Moral Psychology”; Cushman and Greene, “Finding Faults: How Moral Dilemmas Illuminate Cognitive Structure”; Greene, J. et al., “Cognitive Load Selectively Interferes with Utilitarian Moral Judgment”

October

Week One – *Introduction to Dual-Process Models in Cognitive Science*

Read: Kahneman, Daniel, “Thinking, Fast, and Slow”; De Neys, “Dual Processing in Reasoning”; Bavel et al. “Evaluation is a Dynamic Process”

Week Two – *Disgust*

Read: Leon Kass, “*The Wisdom of Repugnance*”; Martha Nussbaum, “*Danger to Human Dignity*”

Week Three – *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*

Read: Knobe, “Free Will and the Scientific Vision”; Nahmias & Morgan, “A Naturalistic Vision of Free Will”

Week Four – *Principlism*

Read: Uhlmann, Pizarro, and Ditto, “The Motivated Use of Moral Principles”; Harmann, “Moral Reasoning”
Moral Psychology: Empirical Approaches (SEP article) [Link](#);

November

Week One – *Amoralists and Motivational Internalism*

Read: Nichols, S., “How psychopaths threaten moral rationalism”; Wiech et al., “Cold or Calculating?”; Bartels and Pizarro, “The Mismeasure of Morals”

Week Two – *Moral Foundations Theory*

Read: Haidt, J., “The Righteous Mind”; Haidt, J. The emotional dog and its rational tail”; Graham et al., “When Morality Opposes Justice”

Week Three – *Liberals and Conservatives, Race and Gender*

Read: Jost et al., “Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition”;

Week Four – *Character vs. Situation*

Read: Aristotle, “Virtue Ethics”; Doris, J. “Persons, situations, and virtue ethics”; Annas, J. “Comments on John Doris’s Lack of Character”; Doris, J. “Lack of Character”; Sometimes I’m wrong guest post by Doris [link](#)

December

Week One – *True Intentions, True Selves, Self-Deception*

Read: Knobe J., “*Intentional Action and Side Effects in Ordinary Language*”; Starek and Keating, “Self-Deception and Its Relationship to Success in Competition”; Knobe Video on True Self [\[Link\]](#) ; Barrett et al. “Small-scale societies exhibit fundamental variation in the role of intentions in moral judgment.” [\[link\]](#)

Week Two – *Folk Ontology: Objectivity, Relativism, or Pluralism?*

Read: Goodwin and Darley, “*The Psychology of Meta-ethics*”; Sarkissian, Park, Tien, Wright, and Knobe. “Folk Moral Relativism.”; Beebe and Sackris, “Moral Objectivism Across the Lifespan”; Wright, J. “The meta-ethical grounding of our moral beliefs.”

Final Exam Due the Last Day of Class

Paper Due - TBA