

Moral Behavior: Sentiment, Evolution, and Psychology  
Gallatin, NYU  
IDSEM-UG1423  
Fridays, 3:30-6:10, 1 Washington Place, Room 601

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Emotions and sentiment have always been a problem for moral philosophy. Aristotle found emotions useful for the development of character but not as the Good in itself. Kant went even farther and considered all emotions as unnecessary and even dangerous for moral actions. But other thinkers, such as the British Moralists, have tried to understand the importance of emotions in moral motivations and they actually developed systems of morals based on emotions. In this course we will first develop a philosophic conception of moral action. Next we will consider how evolution has shaped the debate over the cause, significance, and status of actions and sentiments commonly considered as moral. Finally, we will read contemporary social psychology on the acquisition of moral sense and the causes of destructive behavior. Our main, but not exclusive, texts will be Kant's *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*, Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning The Principles Of Morals*, and Frans de Waal's *Primates and Philosophers*.

### **Learning Goals:**

1. Students will gain an introductory knowledge of the methods, assumptions, and results of classical and modern moral psychological theories. Students will be able to discuss the classic authors' results and assumptions in comparison with the modern authors.
2. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the methods, assumptions, and results of the course's authors in discussions and in writing assignments.

### **Required Readings\***

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin. Hackett Publishing. 1999.

de Waal, Frans. *Primates and Philosophers*. Princeton University Press. 2006.

Hirsch, Fred. *Social Limits to Growth*. Harvard University Press, 1976.

Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning The Principles Of Morals*. Hackett Publishing. 1983.

Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge University Press. 1997.

Miller, Arthur G. (Editor). *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil*. Guilford Press. 2004.

\* Note: All required readings have been ordered at the New York University bookstore.

Hirsch ebook: <http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:2054/lib/nyulibrary/reader.action?docID=10985637>

### **Course Requirements:**

- 1) Attendance: Attendance is mandatory.
- 2) Papers: Your written work should be a genuine attempt to fulfill the paper topics. If I find your paper not to be a genuine attempt I will tell you. All papers must be handed in. No late papers are accepted. There are no extensions for papers. Papers must be typed and double-spaced. All papers should be sent as a PDF file. See paper requirement options below.
- 3) Class Participation: This class is a seminar so regular participation is required. A seminar class won't work if you don't participate in discussions. Each day of class students will come prepared to discuss the text assigned to be read by that day.
- 4) Being prepared to discuss the text entails bringing questions about the text to class. Students are required to bring two questions to class every day. These questions are to be written down and handed in at the end of class.

### **Grade Breakdown:**

Class participation: 25%

Paper grades: 75%

### **Paper Requirement**

There are two options that fulfill the paper requirement. You can choose either one.

**Paper requirement option A: one term paper**

Requirement A is a 5000-word term paper on a topic of your choice relevant to the course. All papers must be handed in by Friday, May 15th, at 6pm. Papers are due by email. A 300-word description of your topic is due no later than Friday, April 17, at 6pm. Please send your topic descriptions to my email address.

**Paper requirement option B: three papers**

Requirement B is three papers each 1600-words in length.

Paper 1 is due on Friday, March 13th. Papers are due by email.

Paper 2 is due on Friday, April 10th. Papers are due by email.

Paper 3 is due on Friday, May 15th. Papers are due by email.

**Topic for paper 1 requirement B**

Discuss the relationship between virtue, the good, human nature, and pleasure and pain in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

**Topics for paper 2 requirement B**

Select one:

1. Discuss the role of sentiment in Kant's and Hume's moral theories.
2. Argue why or why not Aristotle's virtue ethics is superior to either Kant's or Hume's moral theory.
3. What is Hume's theory of human nature and how does it differ from either Aristotle's or Kant's theory of human nature?

**Topics for paper 3 requirement B**

Select one:

1. Compare deWaal's evolutionary moral theory with the work of Aristotle, Kant, or Hume (pick one).
2. Discuss Hirsch's moral critique of modern capitalism in light of the work of Aristotle, Kant, or Hume (pick one).
3. Compare any article from the Miller volume with the work of Aristotle, Kant, or Hume (pick one).

**Gallatin Statement on Academic Integrity:**

"As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction in accordance with the Student Discipline and Grievance Rules of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study."

The above statement and additional information can be found at the following link:

<http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.htm>

**Schedule of Readings**

1/30, first day of class, Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> : Books 1 and 2	3/27, no class, I'll be attending a conference.
2/6, Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> : Books 3, 5 and 6	4/3, Kant, <i>Grounding</i> : pages 1-67
2/13, Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> : Books 7, 8 and 9	4/10, de Wall: pages 3-80
2/20, Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> : Book 10	4/17, de Wall: pages 83-181
2/27, Hume, <i>Enquiry</i> : pages 13-119	4/24, Miller: chapters 3, 5, 11, 13, and 14
3/6, Hume, <i>Enquiry</i> : pages 13-119	5/1, Hirsch: pages 1-114
3/13, Kant, <i>Grounding</i> : pages 1-67	5/8, Hirsch: pages 115-190
3/20, no class, spring break	