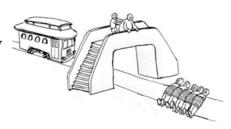# PSY 407 MORAL PSYCHOLOGY SEMINAR
Course Syllabus (CRN: ######)

COURSE DETAILS
Department of Psychology
University of Oregon
Spring 2022 day, times
Location of course

INSTRUCTOR
Sarah Dimakis, M.S.
sdimakis@uoregon.edu
Office hours TBD
Location Straub 461

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Moral psychology is the field at the intersection of mind, behavior, and ethics. Psychologists studying morality use psychological methods to study questions like:

- How do people judge which behaviors are morally right or morally wrong? Why do people and groups disagree?
- How do we form moral impressions of others?
- When do we absolve someone from blame, or think that they deserve praise for their actions?
- Are people capable of altruism, or do all actions ultimately serve the self?
- How do we lie, cheat, steal, and hurt others with a clear conscience?
- Is a belief in God necessary to be a good person?

This course is an introduction into moral psychology and therefore assignments do not presume prior knowledge, although prior experience reading psychology research is required. There are many ways to approach the study of moral psychology. This course draws most heavily from insights from *social psychology* research, and therefore most topics covered pertain to morality within social contexts, e.g., thinking about, reacting to, and judging the moral behavior and character of others. However, the course is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing from ideas and research from philosophy, behavioral economics, cognitive psychology, personality psychology, developmental psychology, neuroscience, biology, and other social science fields.

CLASS STRUCTURE

This is a seminar course, which means that there is a strong focus on conveying your ideas through speaking and writing. We will devote the first part of each class to a lecture on the important theories and findings concerning the weekly topic (about 60-70 minutes), take a 10-minute break, and then spend the remaining time discussing the assigned readings for the week. Discussion is sometimes instructor-led and sometimes peer-led. Most of the time, discussion will include an activity such as a demonstration of the phenomenon or a debate.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will be developing important skills that are valuable outside of university, like introspection, critical thinking, writing, and speaking. You will also be working to improve skills that are necessary to be a consumer and/or producer of research, like reading and critically evaluating psychology research, collaborating with peers, and communicating scientific findings. Upon completion of this course, you will be able to describe and identify important theories and research findings in moral psychology, read novel research in moral psychology from academic journals, and apply moral psychology theory and research findings to experiences in your life.

ESTIMATED STUDENT WORKLOAD

When you complete this course, you will earn 3 credits toward your degree. A three-credit course from the University of Oregon is equivalent to 90 hours of work across the term, or 9 hours per week for 10 weeks. You will spend 2 hours in class per week (for a total of 20 hours), 3 hours reading articles per week (for a total of 30 hours), 15 hours working on take home assignments (the midterm exam, reflections, and presentation/ class discussion preparation), and the remaining 25 hours writing your term paper.

REQUIRED READINGS

There is no assigned textbook for this course. All readings will be posted on Canvas at the beginning of the course. Occasionally the readings will be supplemented with short videos. Readings should be completed before the class date indicated on the schedule. Please devote at least **3 hours** every week to reading the assigned articles and an extra hour if you plan to write a reflection. You may want to read the shorter articles twice. It helps to block off time in your schedule dedicated to reading. Like any new skill, reading psychology articles is a difficult but rewarding experience that takes a lot of effort and practice to master! Here are some tips for reading scientific articles that will help you learn how to find and remember the most important information: https://tinyurl.com/yvrmzzzf

GRADING

Your course grade will be determined by the following assignments:

Midterm Exam	100 points
Term Paper	100 points
Reflections (5 total; 20 points each)	100 points
Lead Discussion	40 points
Class Participation	40 points
Term Paper Proposal	20 points
	= 400 points

The following grid provides the letter grade associated with each percent. Grade cutoffs are set so that there is no "rounding up," although I reserve the right to round up students who are very close to a grade interval and who have exceeded expectations in class discussions. I may assign an "A+" if a student demonstrates exemplary understanding of the material.

A 93-100%	B 83-86.99%	C 73-76.99%	D 63-66.99%
A- 90-92.99%	B- 80-82.99%	C- 70-72.99%	D- 60-62.99%
B+ 87-89.99%	C+ 77-79.99%	D+ 67-69.99%	F 59.99% or below

MIDTERM EXAM

There is one exam for this course, which is scheduled for the sixth week of the course. The exam will consist of 25 multiple choice questions (2 points each) and 5 short answer questions (10 points each) and will focus on the readings and lecture content from weeks 1-6. The exam is take-home, open notes, and you will have a week to complete it. Submit on Canvas.

TERM PAPER

The purpose of the term paper is to apply principles and theories you've learned in this course while diving deeper into a topic of profound interest for you. You will choose a research question, search for and read relevant research on the topic (including a couple of starter articles provided to you on Canvas), and write a paper describing the research findings and how they answer or fail to answer the research question. You may choose one of the following research questions (which you may interpret in a number of ways), or an alternate, equivalent question that you discuss with the instructor prior to turning in the proposal: (a) How do people develop moral prejudice, i.e., negative moral attitudes towards a group of people (e.g., based on race, sexuality, gender identity, weight, belief in God)? (b) Given insights from psychological research, what should policymakers do to reduce immoral or unethical behavior (e.g., academic cheating, violence)? (c) How might you attempt to change someone's mind about a moral issue (e.g., people shouldn't eat animals, police reform)? (d) How and why do psychopaths differ in their moral judgments and behavior? (e) To what extent are a group (e.g., infants, young children, nonhuman animals) capable of morality? (f) When is lying considered permissible, or even preferred (i.e., prosocial lying), and when is it considered obligatory to tell the truth? (g) How do we detect if someone is telling the truth or lying?

I encourage you to choose a research question that you find compelling and believe will encourage your growth as a scientist and person. Often, this won't be a question that is 'easy' to answer, or most comfortable for you. You will turn in a topic proposal outlining your chosen research question and plan for the structure of your paper in Week 8 for feedback (about 1 page double spaced) and the final draft during finals week (about 4-6 paged double spaced). Please use APA format, including a title and reference page that do not count towards page length. Successful papers will provide a nuanced understanding of the topic, an abundance of empirical evidence to support claims and ideas, and thoughtful discussion of the strengths and limitations of psychological research in answering big, important questions. Submit on Canvas.

REFLECTIONS

To enrich class discussions and facilitate a deeper encoding of the readings, you will write five reading reflections (about 1 page double spaced) over the course of the term. You must choose readings that are eligible for reflection, as indicated by a * symbol next to the reading in the syllabus but which five readings you choose is entirely up to you. If there are two papers eligible for reflection in a given week, you can pick one to reflect on or incorporate both into your reflection. Your reflection should include a short summary of the reading and then at least one of the following: (a) evaluate the extent to which you were convinced by the author(s)'s arguments or claims (b) connect the reading to observations or experiences in your life, or to theories or findings from this course or another course you've taken (c) consider how the findings could be applied to fix a social problem. Reflections are due on Canvas the night before class (11:59pm). Late assignments will not be accepted.

LEAD DISCUSSION

In a small group of 3-4 people, you will give a 10-minute presentation and then lead a 20-minute discussion based on a reading from your assigned week (readings that are eligible for presentation are indicated by a ** symbol next to the reading on the syllabus). The presentation should summarize the (1) research question (2) relevant background information (3) method (4) results, and (5) discussion of implications and limitations from the reading. For the discussion portion, you may want to devise an activity for the class (e.g., a demonstration of the

phenomenon, a debate) and/or prepare a few questions to spark conversation. <u>You must reach out to the instructor one week prior to leading discussion to make an office hours appointment.</u>

The discussion should engage your classmates and demonstrate your preparation and expertise. If you fall ill or otherwise cannot attend your presentation for an unexpected reason, reach out to the instructor as soon as possible with documentation, and you will be reassigned to another group, or given an alternate assignment if reassignment is not possible.

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE
Both attendance and lively participation in class discussions are vital for a seminar class and are therefore given a grade in this course to reflect their importance. Reach out to the instructor as soon as possible if you have a documented reason for absence (e.g., medical or family emergency) to receive an "excused absence." I will keep a log of your attendance and the quality (not quantity) of your contributions to class discussions. Small assignments posted to Canvas (e.g., syllabus quiz) also qualify under this grade category. Students who receive full points for participation will arrive to class on time, contact the professor well in advance of missing a class, be eager to share and respectful of others' ideas, and pose insightful questions and comments that elevate class discussions.

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY
The midterm, term paper proposal, and term paper will be marked 10% off every day they are late (maximum 50%). Reflections cannot be turned in late so plan accordingly by turning them in early in the term. Please reach out to the instructor as early as possible if you have a documented family or medical emergency and need an extension.

ACCOMMODATIONS
The University of Oregon works to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation, please notify me as soon as possible. If you have a documented disability, please request that a counselor at the Accessible Education Center (uoaec@uoregon.edu, 541-346-1155) send a letter verifying the type of accommodations that are appropriate. For a list of resources provided by the Accessible Education Center, please see http://aec.uoregon.edu. Contact the instructor in the first week of class to talk about your accommodations.

CHEATING POLICY
Any form of academic dishonesty, including getting outside help on take home assignments and plagiarizing of any kind will not be tolerated in this class. We will talk in depth in this course about the ways we justify cheating to ourselves, but I promise that it isn't worth it. I will catch it, and it will be uncomfortable for both of us. It isn't fair to other students, and it isn't fair to your future self. If you have questions about what is considered academic dishonesty for this course, please reach out and ask. If you are struggling to the point that you feel the need to cheat, please reach out. I will follow the procedure to handle misconduct as outlined by the University. This means that instances of suspected cheating or plagiarizing will be reported to the University, and at the very least, you will receive a zero on the assignment.

E-MAIL POLICY
When you e-mail me, please add PSY407 in the subject line (e.g., "PSY407 Question about reflections"). I will get back to you within 24 hours on workdays, or 48 hours over the weekend. If I do not respond to your email within 48 hours, please resend it because I may have not received it. I recommend attending my office hours (or making an appointment with me) if you

would like to brainstorm topic ideas for the term paper or review answered marked incorrect from the midterm exam. For papers, I prefer to help in the outline stage and cannot review full drafts prior to submission.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

While studying moral psychology, we are bound to hear from others who do not agree with our moral values, which will cause us to feel uncomfortable. I do not expect to agree with you on everything, and I do not expect you to agree with your classmates on everything. We are a group with diverse backgrounds and experiences. We must therefore make it a priority that everyone in this class (students and instructor) have the opportunity to speak and challenge each other's ideas.

Here are a few ground rules that I propose that we follow, and I am open to discussing more: (1) Criticize ideas and not people. Instead of attacking the speaker (e.g., "you are wrong and dumb for thinking that"), you should disagree with the claim or idea by providing contradictory research findings or personal experiences. (2) Avoid making assumptions about others. Without complete information about other people, we try to fill in the missing information but fall short. When we sit back and listen, we learn things we could not expect. (3) Allow others to make mistakes and learn from them. Allow yourself to make mistakes. We don't always say what we mean, and there are things we don't know. We are all learning and growing in this class. (4) Keep an open mind. Don't assume your beliefs are fully formed and that you can't learn from others. (5) Treat others with respect, even when you disagree. Always treat others how you would like to be treated.

If you do not feel comfortable participating in a class discussion or believe there is more that I could be doing to promote a more effective learning environment, I urge you to come talk to me. I will always listen to your concerns with respect and an open mind and will make adjustments when appropriate.

READING SCHEDULE

* Eligible for reflection ** Eligible for article presentation

WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION TO MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Carey, M. A., Steiner, K. L., & Petri Jr, W. A. (2020). Ten simple rules for reading a scientific paper. *PLOS Computational Biology*, *16*(7), e1008032.

<u>SYLLABUS QUIZ DUE SUNDAY 4/3 AT 11:59PM</u>

WEEK 2 – MORAL JUDGMENT

* Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological review*, *108*(4), 814.

Greene, J. D., Cushman, F. A., Stewart, L. E., Lowenberg, K., Nystrom, L. E., & Cohen, J. D. (2009). Pushing moral buttons: The interaction between personal force and intention in moral judgment. *Cognition*, *111*(3), 364-371.

WEEK 3 – MORAL CHARACTER EVALUATION

* Pizarro, D. A. (2019, February 12). *Friend or Foe?: How Do We Know Who To Trust* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOB4eCz0OJ8

* Berman, J. Z., & Silver, I. (2022). Prosocial behavior and reputation: When does doing good lead to looking good? *Current opinion in psychology*, *43*, 102-107.

** Uhlmann, E. L., Zhu, L. L., & Tannenbaum, D. (2013). When it takes a bad person to do the right thing. *Cognition*, *126*(2), 326-334.

WEEK 4 – BLAME AND PRAISE

* Anderson, R. A., Crockett, M. J., & Pizarro, D. A. (2020). A theory of moral praise. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*.

** Pizarro, D. A., Uhlmann, E., & Bloom, P. (2003). Causal deviance and the attribution of moral responsibility. *Journal of experimental social psychology*, *39*(6), 653-660.

WEEK 5 – ALTRUISM AND EGOISM

* Marsh, A. A. (2016, October 7). *Why some people are more altruistic than others* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uq-6T6TAu74

* Effron, D. A., & Conway, P. (2015). When virtue leads to villainy: Advances in research on moral self-licensing. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *6*, 32-35.

** Vonasch, A. J., Reynolds, T., Winegard, B. M., & Baumeister, R. F. (2018). Death before dishonor: Incurring costs to protect moral reputation. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *9*(5), 604-613.

WEEK 6 – DISHONESTY AND TRUST

* Wiltermuth, S. S., Newman, D. T., & Raj, M. (2015). The consequences of dishonesty. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *6*, 20-24.

* Yip, J. A., & Schweitzer, M. E. (2015). Trust promotes unethical behavior: Excessive trust, opportunistic exploitation, and strategic exploitation. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *6*, 216-220.

<u>MIDTERM EXAM DUE SUNDAY AT 11:59PM</u>

WEEK 7 – THE MORAL SELF

* Shalvi, S., Gino, F., Barkan, R., & Ayal, S. (2015). Self-serving justifications: Doing wrong and feeling moral. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *24*(2), 125-130.

** Bryan, C. J., Adams, G. S., & Monin, B. (2013). When cheating would make you a cheater: implicating the self prevents unethical behavior. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *142*(4), 1001.

WEEK 8 – MORAL EMOTIONS

* Cameron, C. D., Conway, P., & Scheffer, J. A. (2022). Empathy regulation, prosociality, and moral judgment. *Current opinion in psychology*, *44*, 188-195.

* Bloom, P. (2017). Empathy and its discontents. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, *21*(1), 24-31.

TERM PAPER PROPOSAL DUE SUNDAY AT 11:59PM

WEEK 9 – MORALITY AND RELIGION

* Tsang, J. A., Al-Kire, R. L., & Ratchford, J. L. (2021). Prosociality and religion. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *40*, 67-72.

** Preston, J. L., & Ritter, R. S. (2013). Different effects of religion and God on prosociality with the ingroup and outgroup. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *39*(11), 1471-1483.

WEEK 10 – MORALITY AND POLITICS

* Haidt, J. (2012, December 31). *The moral roots of liberals and* conservatives [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SOQduoLgRw

** Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2013). The moral roots of environmental attitudes. *Psychological science*, *24*(1), 56-62.

FINALS WEEK – SUBMIT TERM PAPER

TERM PAPER DUE TBD