Course Syllabus

PSYXXX: Moral Psychology (CRN: XXXXX)

Term, meeting days and times, location of course

**Instructor** Sarah Dimakis, M.S.  
e-mail: [sdimakis@uoregon.edu](mailto:sdimakis@uoregon.edu)  
office hours: TBD  
location: Straub 461

**Course description.** Individuals develop variable and sometimes even opposing intuitions about what themselves and others should and should never do. Moral psychology is the scientific study of how individuals distinguish right from wrong, and act (or fail to act) accordingly. In this course, we will explore questions like:

* How do we decide that a behavior is wrong?
* How do we judge if someone else is a good or bad person?
* How do we lie, cheat, steal, and hurt others with a clear conscience?
* Why do different groups of people come to different conclusions about what is right?
* How do we persuade others to reconsider their stance on moral issues?

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

**Learning objectives.** In this course, you will be developing important skills that are transferable outside of the classroom, like introspection, critical thinking, writing, and speaking. You will be developing skills in consuming and evaluating psychology research, collaborating with peers, and communicating scientific research. Additionally, on 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 novel situations.

**Estimated Student Workload.** When you complete this course, you will earn 4 credits toward your degree. Four credits is equivalent to 120 hours of work across the term, or 12 hours per week for 10 weeks. You will spend 3 hours in class per week, and the remaining 90 hours will be split evenly between readings, homework assignments, and studying for and taking quizzes and exams.

**Required readings.** There is no assigned textbook for this course. All readings will be posted on Canvas at the beginning of the course. Readings should be completed before the class date indicated on the schedule.

**Grading.** Your course grade will be determined by the following assignments:

Midterm exam 100 points

Final paper 100 points

Quizzes (4 total; 25 points each) 100 points

Homework (4 total; 20 points each) 80 points

Participation 20 points

= 400 points

**Midterm**. There is one exam for this course, a midterm exam, which is scheduled on the first day of the fifth week of the course. The exam will consist of 5 matching, 5 fill-in-the-blank, 20 multiple choice, and 4 short answer questions. You can bring one 8x10 piece of paper of notes to the exam.

**Final paper**. Your final research paper will be due during finals week. It will be 4-5 pages double spaced. You will choose a research question from a list of topics, read relevant research on the topic, and discuss how the research findings answer or fail to answer the research question. Detailed instructions and a topic list will be given out after the midterm exam in week 5.

**Quizzes**. Every other week, as indicated on the syllabus, there will be a quiz on Canvas due at 11:59pm on Sunday. The quiz will test comprehension for reading and lecture material for the two weeks prior to the quiz. You may use readings, notes, the internet, etc., to succeed on the quiz (but you cannot use another person). The quizzes will be timed (25 minutes) and consist of 10 multiple choice questions and 5 matching questions.

**Homework**. Every other week, as indicated on the syllabus, you will have structured homework assignments due on Canvas at 11:59pm on Sunday. The assignments are designed to help you work through the lecture and reading material with concrete, personally relevant examples, and provide an opportunity to think in depth about a topic before class group discussion.

**Participation**. Showing up to class, turning in your assignments on time, and actively participating in group and class discussion is incredibly important to succeed in this course, so participation has been given a part of your grade to reflect its importance. Please let me know (via e-mail so that I have a record of it) if you need to miss a class.

The following grid provides the letter grade associated with each percent:

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

**Note**: Grade cutoffs are set so that there is no “rounding up,” although I will round up students who are very close to a grade interval who have exceeded expectations in class discussions or on an assignment. I may assign an “A+” if a student demonstrates exemplary understanding of the material (on assignments and in class discussions).

**Late assignment policy**. Please reach out to me in advance to a deadline if you need an extension on an assignment, including a timeframe of when you think you can finish the assignment by. I will not ask for a reason or a doctor’s note. My standard late penalty is 10% off of the assignment per day, but I will have a conversation with you before that is enforced so that you are not penalized for getting sick or having other out of the ordinary circumstances happen to you.

**Special 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 accommodation that is appropriate. For a list of resources provided by the Accessible Education Center, please see <http://aec.uoregon.edu>.

**Cheating/plagiarism.** Any form of academic dishonesty, including getting outside help on assessments and plagiarizing of any kind are not productive to your learning and therefore will not be tolerated in this class. 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. Please familiarize yourself with the University of Oregon’s conduct code, found at <http://conduct.uoregon.edu>. You are responsible for behaving in accordance with this policy and continued enrollment in this class will be considered implicit agreement that you have read and accepted the terms of that policy. If you have questions about what is considered academic dishonesty for this course, please reach out and ask.

**Email policy.** If you email me, I will get back to you within 24 hours, or 48 hours at the latest. If I do not respond to your email within 24 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 have multiple questions, or you would like to brainstorm with me about an assignment, or you would like to go over a past quiz/exam.

**Diversity and classroom climate**. While studying moral psychology, we are bound to hear from others who do not agree with our moral values. 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 offer opinions, hear one another’s opinions, and make arguments and challenge ideas. This is only possible when we respect each other. 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 “you are wrong and dumb for thinking that,” you want to say “let’s talk about that – I don’t think that theory is supported by the research.”
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. Learn from each other’s mistakes. We don’t always say what we mean, and 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.

That being said, if you do not feel comfortable participating in a class discussion or believe there is more 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.

Weekly Schedule

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Week | Topic | Readings | Due |
| 1 introduction and evolution of morality | Defining and measuring morality | Syllabus | HW1 due Sunday at 11:59pm |
| Primate morality, evolution of morality | Wade (2007); Allchin (2009) |
| 2 moral development | Infant morality | Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom (2007); Bloom (2010) | QUIZ1 due Sunday at 11:59pm |
| Theories of moral development: Kohlberg’s stage theory, social domain theory | Kohlberg (1968); Smetana (2013) |
| 3 moral reasoning | Abstract moral principles, trolleyology | Greene et al. (2009); Aktas, Yilmaz, & Bahcekapili (2017) | HW2 due Sunday at 11:59pm |
| The social intuitionist model, emotion vs. reason debate | Haidt (2001); Sauer (2012) |
| 4 moral judgment | Character judgments | Klein & O’Brien (2016) | QUIZ2 due Sunday at 11:59pm |
| Action judgments, moral dumbfounding | Haidt, Koller, & Dias (1993); Uhlmann et al. (2015) |
| 5 moral behavior | Cooperation, insights from game theory | Butler, Burbank, & Chisholm (2011); Fehr & Gachter (2002) | HW3 due Sunday at 11:59pm |
| Altruism and reputation | Sonnentag & McDaniel (2013); Monin & Miller (2001) |
| 6 immoral behavior | MIDTERM |  |  |
| Moral inconsistency and hypocrisy | Conway & Peetz (2012); Valdesolo & DeSteno (2008) |
| 7 moral emotions | Other-condemning emotions | Schnall et al. (2008); Cronin, Reysen, & Branscombe (2012) | QUIZ3 due Sunday at 11:59pm |
| Self-conscious and other-suffering emotions | Bastian, Jetten, & Fasoli (2011); Bloom (2013) |
| 8 the moral self | The moral self, moral identity | Stets & Carter (2011) | HW4 due Sunday at 11:59pm |
| Self-concept maintenance | Bandura et al. (1996); Mazar, Amir, & Ariely (2008) |
| 9 morality and politics | Morality of conservatives and liberals | Graham, Haidt, & Nosek (2009); Pizarro (2012) | QUIZ4 due Sunday at 11:59pm |
| Moral influence, persuasion | Day et al. (2014); Feinberg & Willer (2015) |
| 10 morality, religion, and culture | Morality and religion | Shariff & Norenzayan (2007); Graham & Haidt (2010) |  |
| Universal and culture specific morality | Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood (1990); An & Trafimow (2016) |

Readings

Aktaş, B., Yilmaz, O., & Bahçekapili, H. G. (2017). Moral pluralism on the trolley tracks: Different normative principles are used for different reasons in justifying moral judgments. *Judgment and Decision Making*.

Allchin, D. (2009). The evolution of morality. *Evolution: Education and Outreach, 2*(4), 590-601.

An, S., & Trafimow, D. (2014). Affect and morality: a cross-cultural examination of moral attribution. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 45*(3), 417-430.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Mechanisms of moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 71*(2), 364.

Bastian, B., Jetten, J., & Fasoli, F. (2011). Cleansing the soul by hurting the flesh: The guilt-reducing effect of pain. *Psychological science, 22*(3), 334.

Bloom, P. (2010). The moral life of babies. *New York Times Magazine*, 3.

Bloom, P. (2013). The baby in the well: the case against empathy. *New Yorker*.

Butler, D. J., Burbank, V. K., & Chisholm, J. S. (2011). The frames behind the games: Player's perceptions of prisoners dilemma, chicken, dictator, and ultimatum games. *The Journal of Socio-Economics, 40*(2), 103-114.

Conway, P., & Peetz, J. (2012). When does feeling moral actually make you a better person? Conceptual abstraction moderates whether past moral deeds motivate consistency or compensatory behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 38(*7), 907-919.

Cronin, T., Reysen, S., & Branscombe, N. R. (2012). Wal-Mart's conscientious objectors: Perceived illegitimacy, moral anger, and retaliatory consumer behavior. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 34(4), 322-335.

Day, M. V., Fiske, S. T., Downing, E. L., & Trail, T. E. (2014). Shifting liberal and conservative attitudes using moral foundations theory. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 40*(12), 1559-1573.

Fehr, E., & Gächter, S. (2002). Altruistic punishment in humans. *Nature, 415*(6868), 137-140.

Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2015). From gulf to bridge: When do moral arguments facilitate political influence? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 41*(12), 1665-1681.

Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations*. Journal of personality and social psychology, 96*(5), 1029.

Graham, J., & Haidt, J. (2010). Beyond beliefs: Religions bind individuals into moral communities. *Personality and social psychology review, 14*(1), 140-150.

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.

Haidt, J., Koller, S. H., & Dias, M. G. (1993). Affect, culture, and morality, or is it wrong to eat your dog? *Journal of personality and social psychology,* 65(4), 613.

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

Hamlin, J. K., Wynn, K., & Bloom, P. (2007). Social evaluation by preverbal infants. *Nature, 450*(7169), 557-559.

Klein, N., & O'Brien, E. (2016). The tipping point of moral change: When do good and bad acts make good and bad actors? *Social cognition,* 34(2), 149-166.

Kohlberg, L. (1968). The child as a moral philosopher. *Psychology today*, 25-30.

Miller, J. G., Bersoff, D. M., & Harwood, R. L. (1990). Perceptions of social responsibilities in India and in the United States: Moral imperatives or personal decisions? *Journal of personality and social psychology, 58*(1), 33.

Monin, B., & Miller, D. T. (2001). Moral credentials and the expression of prejudice. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 81*(1), 33.

Mazar, N., Amir, O., & Ariely, D. (2008). The dishonesty of honest people: A theory of self-concept maintenance. *Journal of marketing research, 45*(6), 633-644.

Pizarro, D. (2012, May ). The strange politics of disgust [Video]. TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/david\_pizarro\_the\_strange\_politics\_of\_disgust?language=en

Reeder, G. D., & Spores, J. M. (1983). The attribution of morality. *Journal of Personality and Social psychology*, 44(4), 736.

Sonnentag, T. L., & McDaniel, B. L. (2013). Doing the right thing in the face of social pressure: Moral rebels and their role models have heightened levels of moral trait integration. *Self and Identity, 12*(4), 432-446.

Sauer, H. (2012). *Psychopaths and filthy desks. Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, 15*(1), 95-115.

Schnall, S., Haidt, J., Clore, G. L., & Jordan, A. H. (2008). Disgust as embodied moral judgment. *Personality and social psychology bulletin, 34*(8), 1096-1109.

Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2007). God is watching you: Priming God concepts increases prosocial behavior in an anonymous economic game*. Psychological science, 18*(9), 803-809.

Smetana, J. G. (2013). *29 Moral Development: The Social Domain Theory View*.

Stets, J. E., & Carter, M. J. (2011). The moral self: Applying identity theory*. Social Psychology Quarterly, 74*(2), 192-215.

Uhlmann, E. L., Pizarro, D. A., & Diermeier, D. (2015). A person-centered approach to moral judgment. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 10*(1), 72-81.

Valdesolo, P., & DeSteno, D. (2008). The duality of virtue: Deconstructing the moral hypocrite. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 44*(5), 1334-1338.

Wade, N. (2007). Scientist finds the beginnings of morality in primate behavior. *New York Times.*