PSY 311: Origins of Moral Thought
Spring 2022: Wednesdays and Fridays, 8:30am–9:50am, LSP 262

Professor: Joshua Rottman; **Office Phone:** (717) 358-4874; **Email:** jrottman@fandm.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10:30am–11:30am

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Course Description

How have humans acquired the capacity to make judgments about right and wrong, and to (sometimes) behave in accordance with these judgments? We will address this question on three different timescales – millennia (human evolution), centuries (modern history), and years (individual development) – to explore how morality has resulted from natural selection, how cultural and ecological shifts bring about new moral convictions, and how moral beliefs emerge during childhood. Readings will combine insights from psychology, anthropology, philosophy, economics, history, and biology to provide manifold perspectives on the genesis of morality.

Course Objectives

Our moral values define us, unite us, and give meaning to our lives. Being so near and dear to our hearts, we often take them to be self-evident. However, like other aspects of human nature, morality is a psychological phenomenon with a history that can be uncovered with scientific tools. In this course, we will explore how moral beliefs, far from being timeless truths, are products of biological and cultural evolution that reliably develop in early childhood. The vantage point that we will attain by coming to view morality as a naturalistic phenomenon can deliver an elevated understanding of how to transcend our predispositions, if we wish, thus providing us with improved abilities to create a better future. By the end of the semester (provided regular attendance, active participation in class discussions, assiduous completion of all assignments, and adherence to all other class policies), you will attain and cultivate the skills needed to achieve the following objectives:

- **Understand** how particular moral beliefs, motivations, and behaviors have emerged throughout history.
- **Analyze** evidence critically when explaining, discussing, and writing about scientific findings and claims.
- **Synthesize** data and theory from a wide range of materials to construct innovative arguments.
- **Communicate** ideas by honing your abilities to confidently express evidence-based viewpoints.
- **Evaluate** previously accepted moral commitments to determine whether they are rationally justifiable.
- **Apply** knowledge from this course in deciding how to pursue moral aims for creating a better future.

Required Texts

- Bloom, P. (2013). *Just babies: The origins of good and evil.* New York: Crown Publishers.
- Additional material posted on Canvas (canvas.fandm.edu)

Course Requirements and Grading

You will be assessed by your performance on the following assignments, detailed below (1,000 points total):

Discussion Posts (10 total)	Papers (2 total)	Inclusivity Intervention	Thoughtful Participation
10 pts. each	250 pts. each	250 pts.	150 pts.

Letter grades will be assigned as follows (decimals will be rounded to the nearest whole number):

A	93–100	**A-**	90–92	**B+**	87–89	**B**	83–86	**B-**	80–82	**C+**	77–79
C	73–76	**C-**	70–72	**D+**	67–69	**D**	63–66	**D-**	60–62	**F**	0–59

Please note: You are not your grade. Your grade is an assessment of your mastery of course material; it is not an assessment of your worth as a human being.

Discussion Posts

Course Objectives Fulfilled: Understand / Analyze / Synthesize / Evaluate

By 7pm each Tuesday, you are required to submit three questions about the set of assigned readings for the upcoming pair of classes, which should be posted in the appropriate discussion forum on Canvas. One of these can be a clarification question, but at least two should be aimed at fueling a sophisticated discussion for which there is no clear answer provided in the text, thus indicating a careful and critical interrogation of the material (e.g., by raising contradictions or agreements between different readings, critiquing methods or conclusions, and/or asking about implications of the research). If a question relates to a particular passage, please include the page number from the reading. (Note that these discussion posts will be viewable by your classmates. If you ever feel uncomfortable with posting a response publicly, you may instead submit it to me via email.)

I understand that life sometimes gets in the way of thoughtfully completing all of the readings on time, so I be forgiving of occasional lapses and will only count the best 10 of 13 posts toward your grade in the course. This means that you may take up to 3 "free passes" for excused/unexcused absences.

Papers #1 & #2

Course Objectives Fulfilled: Understand / Analyze / Synthesize

You will write two papers during the course of the semester. **Paper #1 is due at 11:59pm on March 11th; Paper #2 is due at 11:59pm on April 28th.** For each, you should defend or refute a version of one of the following claims with an argument that incorporates abundant material from assigned readings and at least two additional peer-reviewed journal articles of your own choosing:
1. A child who grew up alone on a desert island would never develop a sense of right and wrong.
2. Understanding the origins of moral thought can illuminate the current political landscape.
3. Acting prosocially is always fundamentally selfish, both psychologically and evolutionarily.
4. If invisibility cloaks were widely available, people would cease to behave in morally positive ways.
5. Paragons of moral character are not necessarily well-suited for achieving peace and social justice.
6. Sociocultural norms are a more powerful driver of moral thought and action than evolved dispositions.
7. When deciding how to act in a moral situation, we should rely on our emotions rather than on reason.
8. Protests, rallies, and marches tend to inhibit, rather than facilitate, the achievement of moral aims.
9. In order to make moral progress, we must suppress – rather than appeal to – our moral intuitions.
10. *Choose your own adventure.* (You may submit a prompt of your own for approval via email.)

Each paper should be approximately 2,000–3,000 words in length, not including your reference list. You are responsible for making sure that you upload a correct and readable document to Canvas by the deadline. In order for grading to be accomplished without the possible influence of unconscious bias, you should include only your F&M ID number for identification (five points will be deducted if you include your name). However, while it is important for your papers to be graded as fairly as possible, it is even more important for you to obtain prior feedback as needed––so you are encouraged to do so even when it might compromise the anonymity of your submission. In addition to the option to discuss your paper during office hours, you may submit an introductory paragraph, an outline, or a full draft by email for ungraded feedback by two weeks before the deadline. Finally, you may submit a revised version of your first paper by the last day of the semester, and I will raise your original grade in accordance with the quality of the new submission (however, any late penalties that you initially incurred will still be applied). This revision must include a detailed cover letter that precisely explains what changes you've made and how these edits have suitably addressed the feedback that you received on your initial submission.

Inclusivity Intervention

Course Objectives Fulfilled: Understand / Synthesize / Communicate / Apply

One of the largest threats to a progressive society is the existence of bigotry and discrimination directed toward outgroup members. The science of moral psychology has yielded insights into why bias and marginalization exist and has suggested ways in which intergroup relations can be ameliorated. In collaboration with 2–3 classmates, you will design an evidence-based solution for fostering a community with greater tolerance and support of minorities and stigmatized groups. In particular, you should utilize information from the readings and class discussions to propose a concrete means of fostering social inclusion and reducing social exclusion. You will give a pitch for your intervention in the form of a 20-minute group presentation **during the final exam period designated for this class**. Your presentation should include precise implementation details and a well-formulated argument for why your solution is better than various alternative solutions.

Thoughtful Participation

Course Objectives Fulfilled: Understand / Analyze / Synthesize / Communicate / Evaluate

The success of this course depends heavily on your contributions to our class discussions. Also, as research has convincingly shown, you will learn more effectively by actively participating in these discussions. You are expected to come to each class prepared to discuss all of the readings critically and creatively, by making well-founded claims, raising objections, and asking thought-provoking questions that range in content from specific critiques of a particular methodology to big-picture applications of a body of findings. To give everybody an equal opportunity to receive full credit, I may sometimes refrain from calling on frequent participators. I will also frequently institute random cold calling, but I will typically provide you time to prepare for this.

Please respect a diversity of opinions and questions, and aim to contribute constructively and considerately. You are expected to have the assigned readings readily accessible, and it will often be helpful to have relevant readings from previous classes and any notes you have taken. Because consistent attendance is necessary for your ability to participate in discussions, frequent absences will negatively impact your participation grade.

Your participation grade will primarily reflect the quality – rather than quantity – of your in-class comments, including how well you respond to classmates and actively encourage their participation. An excellent grade will be earned by reliably participating in thoughtful ways that reveal intellectual acuity and a deep engagement with the material; by always displaying excellent preparation, having thought critically about all assigned readings and formulated discussion questions before class; by respectfully engaging others and generously listening to their contributions, thus approaching discussion as a collaborative activity; and by making sophisticated connections between ideas that consistently elevate the level of discussion.

Opportunities for Extra Credit

You may earn up to 10 extra credit points during the semester through any combination of the options below. Additional bonus opportunities may also arise, providing the potential to earn even more extra credit.

- Each time you email a paragraph-length description of a relevant talk that you attended (e.g., Common Hour), you will earn 2 extra credit points.
- Each time you visit the Writing Center for help on a paper, you will earn 1 extra credit point.
- Each time you email a paragraph-length description of a relevant news article, television show, or movie, accompanied by a paragraph detailing the connections to class content, you will earn 1 extra credit point.

Course Policies and Recommendations

Academic Accommodations

I strive to provide an environment that is equitable and conducive to achievement and learning for all students. As such, I invite you to speak with me about your individual learning needs so that we can discuss how this course can best accommodate them. In addition, formal academic accommodations are available for students who require them. Please schedule an appointment with me during the first week of class to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been supported by appropriate documentation and approved by the Office of Student Accessibility Services. I will keep all information confidential.

Academic Integrity

I take academic honesty very seriously. You risk severe consequences by committing acts of plagiarism (i.e., representing someone else's work as your own), cheating, falsification, impersonating, or other similar offenses, including facilitating another student in committing an act of academic dishonesty. Penalties for these offenses will be carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis, and may include receiving a failing grade in the course or expulsion from F&M. Please refer to the Franklin & Marshall College Catalog for additional details.

Policy on Late Assignments

You will lose 5% of your grade for every day that a paper submission is late. Because other assignments cannot be made up in a straightforward way, late submissions will generally not be accepted. In extreme cases when unexpected and unavoidable circumstances prevent you from completing an assignment on time, please inform me as soon as possible, and I will use my discretion to determine whether to waive or reduce the late penalty.

Communication

Email is the best way to reach me; I typically respond within 24 hours. I also convey most announcements via email; please be sure to stay on top of your inboxes and read all emails fully. I will be available for meetings during the times listed at the top of the syllabus, by appointment, and anytime when my office door is open. I encourage you to meet with me often, particularly in cases when you need further clarity on an assignment or a grade. Additionally, because this class involves discussions of sensitive topics, it may trigger a stress response or lead to strong emotional reactions. While mild discomfort can often be a positive indication of personal and intellectual growth, please speak with me immediately if you experience (or anticipate experiencing) more severe forms of distress. If any issues arise that have the potential to interfere with your success in the course, please let me know as soon as possible. I value open communication, and I invite you to be frank with me.

Tips for Success

This class will be intensive. You will be expected to consistently keep up with all of the readings and to assimilate and synthesize a lot of difficult material. This will often require spreading readings across several days preceding each class session and re-reading some material after classes. I am here to help you succeed, and I urge you to talk with me about concerns or confusions regarding the course material and assignments. Your fellow students can also be great resources; reaching out to them can be a fun and collaborative way to learn. In particular, swapping paper drafts with your classmates to receive informal peer evaluations is an acceptable and encouraged practice to improve your writing. Additionally, please feel free to take advantage of the many other resources that Franklin & Marshall has to offer! For example, the Writing Center can assist you with writing and other academic skills. Finally, a number of resources are available to support your wellbeing, including Counseling Services at the Student Wellness Center, DipCares, and the House Deans. If any issues arise that have the potential to interfere with your success, please be in touch with me as soon as possible.

Semester Schedule

Components of this schedule are subject to change; please check Canvas regularly for updates.

Dates	Topic	Reading Assignments (to be completed before each pair of classes)
1/19 + 1/21	Introductions	*Course syllabus.*
Part 1: The Roots of Altruism		
1/26 + 1/28	Origins and diversity of moral thought	Bloom, P. (2013). Selection from *Just babies*: *The origins of good and evil* (pp. 1–31). Haidt, J. (2008, March). The moral roots of liberals and conservatives. *TED*. [bit.ly/1kJz3Ic] Graham, J., et al. (2016). Cultural differences in moral judgment and behavior, across and within societies. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 8*, 125–130.
2/2 + 2/4	Solving the struggles of getting along	Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science, 162*, 1243–1248. Krebs, D. (2010). Born bad? Evaluating the case against the evolution of morality. In *Human morality and sociality* (pp. 13–30).
2/9 + 2/11	Nice guys can finish first	Bloom, P. (2013). Selection from *Just babies*: *The origins of good and evil* (pp. 59–82). Ridley, M. (1996). Selection from *The origins of virtue: Human instincts and the evolution of cooperation* (pp. 52–66). Barclay, P. (2013). Strategies for cooperation in biological markets, especially for humans. *Evolution and Human Behavior, 34*, 164–175.
2/16 + 2/18	The strategic application of moral principles	Blake, P. R., et al. (2014). The developmental origins of fairness: The knowledge-behavior gap. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 18*, 559–561. Sperber, D., & Baumard, N. (2012). Moral reputation: An evolutionary and cognitive perspective. *Mind & Language, 27*, 495–518. Norenzayan, A., & Shariff, A. F. (2008). The origin and evolution of religious prosociality. *Science, 322*, 58–62.
Part 2: Dealing with Bad Apples		
2/23 + 2/25	Social control of moral deviants	Boehm, C. (2014). The moral consequences of social selection. *Behaviour, 151*, 167–183. Molho, C., & Wu, J. (2021). Direct punishment and indirect reputation-based tactics to intervene against offences. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 376*(1838), 20200289.
3/2 + 3/4	Second-party vs. third-party punishment	Bloom, P. (2013). Selection from *Just babies*: *The origins of good and evil* (pp. 82–100). Cushman, F. (2015). Punishment in humans: From intuitions to institutions. *Philosophy Compass, 10*, 117–133.
3/9 + 3/11	Honor and "virtuous" violence	Nisbett, R. E. (1993). Violence and U.S. regional culture. *American Psychologist, 48*, 441–449. Ginges, J. (2019). The moral logic of political violence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 23, 1–3. Fiske, A. P., & Rai, T. S. (2014). Violence for goodness' sake. *New Scientist, 224*, 30–31.
3/16 + 3/18: Spring Break!		

Dates	Topic	Reading Assignments (to be completed before each pair of classes)
		Part 3: In and Out of Others' Shoes
3/23 + 3/25	Partiality and parochialism	Bloom, P. (2013). Selections from *Just babies*: *The origins of good and evil* (pp. 101–130 and pp. 159–185). Kovacheff, C., et al. (2018). The problem with morality: Impeding progress and increasing divides. *Social Issues and Policy Review, 12*, 218–257.
3/30 + 4/1	Compassion, empathy, and prosociality	Bloom, P. (2013). Selection from *Just babies*: *The origins of good and evil* (pp. 33–57). Batson, C. D., & Ahmad, N. Y. (2009). Using empathy to improve intergroup attitudes and relations. *Social Issues and Policy Review, 3*, 141–177.
4/6 + 4/8	Empathic failures and blind spots	Ditto, P. H., & Koleva, S. P. (2011). Moral empathy gaps and the American culture war. *Emotion Review, 3*, 331–332. Cikara, M., et al. (2011). Us and them: Intergroup failures of empathy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20*, 149–153. Bloom, P. (2017). Empathy and its discontents. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 21*, 24–31.
4/13 + 4/15	Disgust and inhumanity	Bloom, P. (2013). *Just babies*: *The origins of good and evil* (pp. 131–157). Kteily, N., & Landry, A. (2022). Dehumanization: Trends, insights, and challenges. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*.
		Part 4: Moving from Is to Ought
4/20 + 4/22	Getting along and seeking moral progress	Bloom, P. (2013). Selection from *Just babies*: *The origins of good and evil* (pp. 187–218). Appiah, K. A. (2006). Selection from *Cosmopolitanism* (pp. 45–85). Saguy, T. (2018). Downside of intergroup harmony? When reconciliation might backfire and what to do. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 5*, 75–81.
4/27	Using moral psychology for a greater good	Rand, D. G., et al. (2014). Harnessing reciprocity to promote cooperation and the provisioning of public goods. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 1*, 263–269. Onyeador, I. N., Hudson, S. T. J., & Lewis, N. A. (2021). Moving beyond implicit bias training: Policy insights for increasing organizational diversity. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 8*, 19–26.