

**PH 820: Contemporary Philosophy**  
**Evolution and Ethics**  
Thursdays 6:30-9:15

**Professor:**

Dr. Victor Kumar – victor.c.kumar@gmail.com  
Office hours: T 1:00-3:00; R 1:00-2:00

**Course description:**

The topic of this course is the evolution of morality and its philosophical implications. The course will have three sections. (1) *Evolution of Morality*. We'll survey important recent scientific theories about the biological and cultural evolution of morality. (2) *Evolution and Debunking*. We'll think about whether evolution is incompatible with moral objectivity, whether moral intuitions are untrustworthy relics of a remote past, and whether sexist political assumptions undermine evolutionary psychology. (3) *Evolution and Progress*. We'll look at is-ought questions surrounding the connection between evolution and progress, whether the evolutionary history of morality suggests routes for attaining moral progress, and whether moral progress can be naturalized.

**Assessment:**

- Participation - 1/3
- Weekly shorties (500 words) - 1/3
- Short essay (3000 words) - 1/3

*The purpose of the essay in this course is to write a good conference submission. I'll give you lots of feedback before and after the essay is due.*

**Schedule:**

**Week 1 – Jan. 18**

Introduction to the course

**I. EVOLUTION OF MORALITY**

**Week 2 – Jan. 25**

Daniel Dennett – *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (excerpt from Ch. 1-3)

**Week 3 – Feb. 1**

Michael Tomasello – *A Natural History of Morality* Ch. 1-3

**Week 4 – Feb. 8**

Joseph Henrich – *The Secret of Our Success* Ch. 1-5, 10-12, 15-17

**Week 5 – Feb. 15 – Lab meeting with Victor Kumar**

Victor Kumar & Richmond Campbell – *Why We Are Moral* Ch. 1-2

**II. EVOLUTION AND DEBUNKING**

**Week 6 – Feb. 22**

Richard Joyce – *The Evolution of Morality* Intro, Ch. 5-6

**Week 7 – Mar. 1**

Sharon Street – “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value”

Katia Vavova – “Debunking Evolutionary Debunking”

**Week 8 – Mar. 15 – Lab meeting with Said Saillant**

Guy Kahane – “Evolutionary Debunking Arguments”

Said Saillant – “Did Moral Knowledge Evolve?”

**Week 9 – Mar. 29**

Nina Strohminger – “Disgust Talked About”

Daniel Kelly – *Yuck* Ch. 4-5

Victor Kumar – “Foul Behavior”

**III. EVOLUTION AND PROGRESS**

**Week 10 – Apr. 5**

Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes* Intro, Ch. 1-3, 6

**Week 11 – Apr. 12**

David Roberts – “Donald Trump and the Rise of Tribalist Epistemology”

Allen Buchanan & Russell Powell – *The Evolution of Moral Progress* Preface, Intro, Ch. 4-7

**Week 12 – Apr. 19 – Lab meeting with Russell Powell**

Russell Powell - TBA

**Week 13 – Apr. 26**

Arnold Kling – “Cultural Intelligence”

Allen Buchanan & Russell Powell – *The Evolution of Moral Progress* Ch. 8