

UofT PHL 340H1: Issues in Philosophy of Mind

M/W 3:00-4:30

Instructor:

Dr. Victor Kumar

Office hours: after class and by appointment (JHB #424)

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Course description:

The topic of this course is **the moral mind**. The aim is to learn about the psychological states and processes that underlie moral thought. Each unit will begin with general ideas in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. We'll then narrow our focus and explore the following sorts of questions. How do people make moral judgments? Are they based on intuition or reasoning? What are moral emotions? Do some emotions distort moral thinking? Is morality a biological adaptation or is it acquired through learning? Does empirical research explain how moral progress occurs? Throughout the course, we'll see how philosophical ideas about moral thinking inform, and are informed by, empirical research in psychology and neuroscience.

Assigned readings:

- Various articles posted online

Class format:

I expect everyone to do the assigned readings in advance. The format of the class will be a mix of lecture and discussion. The aim of discussion is to analyze an author's view and to evaluate his/her arguments. **To do well in this class you must come prepared to critically discuss the material.** Active discussion is crucial not just for learning the material, but also for learning how to do the kind of analysis and critical evaluation that is part of a good philosophy essay.

Assessment:

- **4 short essay assignments** - There will be four 1200-1500 word (~5 pp) essay assignments, due in person, one at the end of each unit. Each is worth **25% of your final grade**. Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day.
- You will have at least **one** opportunity to do a **creative project instead of an essay assignment**—short video, poster, dialogue, text conversation between two authors, etc. Basically, **anything** that's creative and relevant to the course material.
- **BONUS:** *As long as you submit and receive a passing grade on all four assignments*, the **average** between your best grade and your worse grade will **replace** your worst grade. (For example, if your best score is an A and your worst score is a C, the C will turn into a B.)
- **BONUS:** If you are a **very good discussion participant** there is a strong likelihood that your final grade in the course will be bumped 1/3 of a letter grade. (For example, a B+ would get bumped to an A-.)
- There is **no midterm or final exam** in this class.

1. Moral Intuition and Moral Reasoning:

Jan. 11 – Introduction to the course

Jan. 13 – Jerry Fodor – “Precis of *The Modularity of Mind*”

Jan. 18 – Jonathan Haidt – “The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail”

Jan. 20 – Josh Greene – “The Secret Joke of Kant’s Soul”

Jan. 25 – Richmond Campbell & Victor Kumar – “Moral Reasoning on the Ground”

Jan. 27 – catch-up

2. Moral Emotions:

Feb. 1 – Paul Griffiths, “Current Emotion Research in Philosophy”

Feb. 3 – Dan Batson & Laura Shaw – “Evidence for Altruism”

***1st assignment due**

Feb. 8 – Video assignment (NO CLASS)

Feb. 10 – Paul Bloom – “Against Empathy” (optional: read a few replies)

Feb. 22 – Dan Kelly – “Against the Yuck Factor: On the Ideal Role of Disgust in Society”

Feb. 24 – Victor Kumar – “Foul Behavior”

3. Evolution of the Moral Mind:

Feb. 29 – Stephen Laurence and Eric Margolis – “The Poverty of the Stimulus Argument”

Mar. 2 – Susan Dwyer et al. – “The Linguistic Analogy: Motivations, Results, and Speculations”

***2nd assignment due**

Mar. 7 – Shaun Nichols et al. – “Rational Learners and Moral Rules”

Mar. 9 – Frans de Waal – *Primates and Philosophers* (excerpt)

Mar. 14 – Phillip Kitcher – reply to de Waal

Mar. 16 – catch-up

4. Moral Progress:

Mar. 21 – Paul Bloom, “How do Morals Change?” & Eileen Reynolds “American Revolution”

Mar. 23 – Allen Buchanan & Russell Powell, “What is Moral Progress?”

***3rd assignment due**

Mar. 28 – Elizabeth Anderson, “The Social Epistemology of Morality”

Mar. 30 – Victor Kumar & Richmond Campbell, “Honor and Moral Revolution”

Apr. 4 – Peter Railton, “The Affective Dog and its Rational Tale”

Apr. 6 – catch-up

Apr. 13 – ***4th assignment due** (to be handed in to me, via email)

Expected classroom behavior:

Please be respectful toward me and your classmates. In discussion you may disagree with me or your classmates, but it is very important to express your disagreements with civility. Also, do not distract me or your classmates by talking, sleeping, reading the newspaper, using your cell phone, texting, or using any electronic equipment, etc. **You are not permitted to use a laptop during class.** Though laptops can be useful for taking notes, they are too great a distraction.

Accessibility:

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or Accessibility Services at (416) 978 8060 or accessibility.utoronto.ca

Academic Integrity:

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship at the UofT. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that your UofT degree is valued and respected as a true signifier of your individual academic achievement.

The University of Toronto’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

- Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from me or other available campus resources like the College Writing Centres, the Academic Success Centre, or the U of T Writing Website.