

PHL 376 H1F
Topics in Moral Philosophy
Evolution and Ethics
M/W 5:00-6:30

Instructor:

Dr. Victor Kumar

Office Hours: Wed 1-2; by appointment

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Course description:

The topic of this course is **evolution and ethics**. Our aim is to learn about the evolution of morality and its potential philosophical implications. We'll read some of the most important recent scientific work on the biological and cultural evolution of morality and explore whether it sheds light on a range of philosophical questions. Is morality unique to humans? Are we fundamentally egoists or altruists? Is morality best understood as a social contract? Are moral truths culturally relative? Are moral intuitions an untrustworthy relic of our evolutionary past? Does evolution debunk morality? Or does evolution vindicate morality as a form of social technology?

Readings:

- Michael Tomasello (2016) *A Natural History of Morality* (bookstore)
- Joseph Henrich (2015) *The Secret of Our Success* (bookstore)
- Articles and book chapters posted online

Class format:

I expect everyone to do the 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 important not just for learning the material, but also for doing the critical analysis that is part of a good philosophy essay.

Assessment:

- **6 shorties** – worth **30%** of your final grade (5% each)
You will be asked to write 6 short expositions that summarize part of the readings, due via email the week they are assigned on Fri at 6:00pm (max 300 words).
- **2 essays** – Worth **70%** of your final grade (35% each)
You will be asked to write 2 essays, due in person in late Oct. and by email in early Dec. (1500-2500 words).
- **Bonus:** If you are a very good **discussion participant** in class, your final grade will be bumped up by as much as **5 points**.
- Late assignments are penalized **1 point** per day.
- There is **no midterm or final exam**.

Introduction:

Sept. 12 – Introduction to the course

Sept. 14 – Video: The History of Humans (NO CLASS)

1. Biological Evolution:

Darwinian Evolution

Sept. 19 – Daniel Dennett – *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (excerpt from Ch. 1-3)

Sept. 21 – Frans De Waal – *Primates and Philosophers* Part 1

1st shorty due Sept. 23

The Origins of Morality

Sept. 26 – Sarah Hrdy – “Meet the Alloparents”

Sept. 28 – Michael Tomasello – *A Natural History of Morality* Ch. 1 & 2

2nd shorty due Sept. 30

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

Oct. 5 – Michael Tomasello – *A Natural History of Morality* Ch. 4

3rd shorty due Oct. 7

Debunking Morality

Oct. 12 – Richard Joyce – *The Evolution of Morality* Ch. 6

Oct. 17 – Sharon Street – “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value”

Oct. 19 – Joshua Greene – “The Secret Joke of Kant’s Soul”

1st essay due Oct. 24 (in person)

2. Cultural Evolution:

Cultural Selection

Oct. 24 – Joseph Henrich – *The Secret of Our Success* Ch. 1 & 5

Oct. 26 – Joseph Henrich – *The Secret of Our Success* Ch. 9

Oct. 31 – Joseph Henrich – *The Secret of Our Success* Ch. 10

Nov. 2 – Joseph Henrich – *The Secret of Our Success* Ch. 11

4th shorty due Nov. 4

Relativism

Nov. 9 – Video: Jonathan Haidt on liberals and conservatives (NO CLASS)

Nov. 14 – Jesse Prinz – *The Emotional Construction of Morals* Ch. 6

Nov. 16 – Carol Gilligan – *In A Different Voice* Ch. 1

5th shorty due Nov. 18

Nov. 21 – David Wong – *Natural Moralities* Ch. 1

Nov. 23 – David Wong – *Natural Moralities* Ch. 2

6th shorty due Nov. 25

Vindicating Morality

Nov. 28 – Victor Kumar & Richmond Campbell – *Why We Are Moral* Ch.1

Nov. 30 – Victor Kumar & Richmond Campbell – *Why We Are Moral* Ch.2

Dec. 5 – Victor Kumar & Richmond Campbell – *Why We Are Moral* Ch.3

2nd essay due Dec. 12 (email)

Expected classroom behavior:

Please be respectful. In discussion you may (and should) disagree with me or with your classmates, but it is very important to express your disagreements with civility.

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.