PH380-15 Moral Psychology: The Science of Good and Evil

20/21

Department
 Philosophy
Level
 Undergraduate Level 3
Module leader
 Stephen Butterfill
Credit value
 15
Module duration
 10 weeks
Assessment
 100% coursework
Study location
 University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

PH380-15 Moral Psychology: The Science of Good and Evil

Module aims

To equip students to understand and use scientific research relevant to ethical issues; and to investigate ethical questions in the light of recent discoveries about humans and other animals.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

- Why do humans experience moral intuitions, and why do they make ethical judgements? Is this a consequence of their cooperative natures (Hamlin 2015)? Or could it be an elaborate way of managing terror of death (Pyszczynski 2016)?
- What are the effects of social inequality on the ethical behaviours of nonhuman animals (Hippel, Ronay, and Maddux 2016)?

- Why does morality vary so much across cultures, and why are there themes that recur across cultures (Graham et al. 2013; Curry, Mullins, and Whitehouse 2019)?
- Could scientific discoveries undermine or support moral principles (Singer 2005; Greene 2014)?
- Do humans substantially and systematically disagree on ethical matters? If so, does this threaten moral realism or moral epistemology (Doris and Plakias 2008; Enoch 2009; McGrath 2008)?
- What do dual-process theories of moral cognition claim? Is there any evidence for them (Van Bavel, FeldmanHall, and Mende-Siedlecki 2015; Greene 2015)?
- What is the role of emotion in moral psychology (Haidt 2001; Huebner, Dwyer, and Hauser 2009; Cameron, Lindquist, and Gray 2015; Nichols 2002)?
- Are there innate drivers of morality? Why do infants behave prosocially and respond to prosocial behaviour by others from the second year of life or earlier (Brownell 2013; Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom 2007; Hamlin 2013; Olson and Spelke 2008)?
- Moral judgements modulate, and are modulated by, thoughts and acts of physical cleansing (Schnall, Benton, and Harvey 2008; Zhong and Liljenquist 2006). What, if anything, does this tell us about the nature of morality in humans?
- Your brain can distinguish harm-related events in around 120 miliseconds (Decety and Cacioppo 2012). What might this reveal about the origins of your moral principles?
- Why do ethical failures threaten the sense of self (Barkan et al. 2012; Shalvi et al. 2015)? · Could human moral psychology make mitigating climate change democratically infeasible (Markowitz and Shariff 2012; Gardiner 2011)? And why are some people moved to act on climate change by thoughts of harm, others by thoughts of purity (Feinberg and Willer 2013)?

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- By the end of the module the student should be able to understand and accurately report discoveries that bear, or have been thought to bear, on ethical questions. They should be able to critically analyse how discoveries actually bear, or fail to bear, on ethical questions. And they should be competent in transdisciplinary research which involves linking discoveries in moral psychology with philosophical issues in ethics.

Indicative reading list

Barkan, Rachel, Shahar Ayal, Francesca Gino, and Dan Ariely. 2012. "The Pot Calling the Kettle Black: Distancing Response to Ethical Dissonance." Journal of Experimental Psychology: General 141 (4): 757–73. doi:10.1037/a0027588.
Brownell, Celia A. 2013. "Early Development of Prosocial Behavior: Current Perspectives." Infancy 18 (1): 1–9. doi:10.1111/infa.12004.
Cameron, C. Daryl, Kristen A. Lindquist, and Kurt Gray. 2015. "A Constructionist Review of Morality and Emotions: No Evidence for Specific Links Between Moral Content and Discrete Emotions." Personality and Social Psychology Review 19 (4): 371–94. doi:10.1177/1088868314566683.
Curry, O. S., D. A. Mullins, and H. Whitehouse. 2019. "Is It Good to Cooperate? Testing the

Theory of Morality-as-Cooperation in 60 Societies." Current Anthropology.

Decety, Jean, and Stephanie Cacioppo. 2012. "The Speed of Morality: A High-Density Electrical Neuroimaging Study." Journal of Neurophysiology 108 (11): 3068–72. doi:10.1152/jn.00473.2012.

Doris, John M., and Alexandra Plakias. 2008. "How to Argue About Disagreement: Evaluative Diversity and Moral Realism." In Moral Psychology, Vol 2: The Cognitive Science of Morality: Intuition and Diversity, 303–31. Cambridge, MA, US: MIT Press.

Enoch, David. 2009. "How Is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?" The Journal of Ethics 13 (1): 15–50. doi:10.1007/s10892-008-9041-z.

Feinberg, Matthew, and Robb Willer. 2013. "The Moral Roots of Environmental Attitudes." Psychological Science 24 (1): 56–62. doi:10.1177/0956797612449177.

Gardiner, Stephen M. 2011. A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change. Oxford University Press.

Graham, Jesse, Jonathan Haidt, Sena Koleva, Matt Motyl, Ravi Iyer, Sean P. Wojcik, and Peter H. Ditto. 2013. "Chapter Two - Moral Foundations Theory: The Pragmatic Validity of Moral Pluralism." In Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, edited by Patricia Devine and Ashby Plant, 47:55–130. Academic Press. doi:10.1016/B978-0-12-407236-7.00002-4.

Greene, Joshua D. 2014. "Beyond Point-and-Shoot Morality: Why Cognitive (Neuro)Science Matters for Ethics." Ethics 124 (4): 695–726. doi:10.1086/675875.

———. 2015. "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Moral Judgment and Decision Making." In The Moral Brain: A Multidisciplinary Perspective, 197–220. Cambridge, MA, US: MIT Press.

Haidt, Jonathan. 2001. "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment." Psychological Review 108 (4): 814–34. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814.

Hamlin, J Kiley. 2015. "The Infantile Origins of Our Moral Brains." In The Moral Brain: A Multidisciplinary Perspective, edited by Thalia Wheatley and Jean Decety, 105–22. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Hamlin, J. Kiley. 2013. "Moral Judgment and Action in Preverbal Infants and Toddlers: Evidence for an Innate Moral Core." Current Directions in Psychological Science 22 (3): 186–93. doi:10.1177/0963721412470687.

Hamlin, J. Kiley, Karen Wynn, and Paul Bloom. 2007. "Social Evaluation by Preverbal Infants." Nature 450 (7169): 557–59. doi:10.1038/nature06288.

Hippel, William von, Richard Ronay, and William W Maddux. 2016. "Of Baboons and Elephants: Inequality and the Evolution of Immoral Leadership." In The Social Psychology of Morality, edited by Mario Ed Mikulincer and Phillip R Shaver, 289–303. London: Routledge.

Huebner, Bryce, Susan Dwyer, and Marc Hauser. 2009. "The Role of Emotion in Moral Psychology." Trends in Cognitive Sciences 13 (1): 1–6. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2008.09.006.

Markowitz, Ezra M., and Azim F. Shariff. 2012. "Climate Change and Moral Judgement." Nature Climate Change 2 (4): 243–47. doi:10.1038/nclimate1378. McGrath, Sarah. 2008. "Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise." Oxford Studies in Metaethics 3. Oxford University Press: 87–107.

Nichols, Shaun. 2002. "Norms with Feeling: Towards a Psychological Account of Moral Judgment." Cognition 84 (2): 221–36. doi:10.1016/S0010-0277(02)00048-3.

Olson, Kristina R., and Elizabeth S. Spelke. 2008. "Foundations of Cooperation in Young Children." Cognition 108 (1): 222–31. doi:10.1016/j.cognition.2007.12.003.

Pyszczynski, Tom. 2016. "God Save Us God Save Us: A Terror Management Perspective on Morality." In The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil, edited by Mario Ed Mikulincer and Phillip R Shaver, 21–39. London: Routledge.

Schnall, Simone, Jennifer Benton, and Sophie Harvey. 2008. "With a Clean Conscience: Cleanliness Reduces the Severity of Moral Judgments." Psychological Science 19 (12): 1219–22. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02227.x. Shalvi, Shaul, Francesca Gino, Rachel Barkan, and Shahar Ayal. 2015. "Self-Serving Justifications: Doing Wrong and Feeling Moral." Current Directions in Psychological Science 24 (2): 125–30. doi:10.1177/0963721414553264. Singer, Peter. 2005. "Ethics and Intuitions." The Journal of Ethics 9 (3): 331–52. doi:10.1007/s10892-005-3508-y. Van Bavel, Jay J, Oriel FeldmanHall, and Peter Mende-Siedlecki. 2015. "The Neuroscience of Moral Cognition: From Dual Processes to Dynamic Systems." Current Opinion in Psychology, Morality and ethics, 6 (December): 167–72. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.08.009. Zhong, Chen-Bo, and Katie Liljenquist. 2006. "Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing." Science 313 (5792): 1451–2. doi:10.1126/science.1130726.

Subject specific skills

- Students should be able to pursue and organize philosophical, scientific and anthropological research using a range of sources (print and electronic media), to critically evaluate reports of experiments, and to engage independently in philosophical debate, and to use information provided by these reports when engaged in independent philosophical debate.

Transferable skills

- Students should be able to communicate clearly and substantively in speech and in writing on the questions addressed in the module.
- Students should be able to isolate the important claims within readings, both philosophical and scientific. They should be able to understand a range of experimental methods interpret data presented in tables and charts. They should be able to understand the structure of arguments, test views for strengths and weaknesses, make pertinent use of examples, and compare the substance of views consistently.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)
Total	150 hours

Type	Required
Private study	124 hours (83%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time
Assessed Exercise 3 (500 words)	10%	
Assessed Exercise 1 (500 words)	10%	
Essay (2000 words)	70%	
2000 word essay		
Assessed Exercise 2 (500 words)	10%	

Feedback on assessment

Feedback on essays will be provided on the coversheet for the essay, addressing standard areas of evaluation and individual content. Feedback on Assessed Exercises will be given through peer review and seminar activities, typically including discusion of drafts; written feedback on Assessed Exercises will not normally be provided.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy

- - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
    - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
    - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
    - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
  - Year 4 of UPHA-V701 Undergraduate Philosophy (wiith Intercalated year)
  - Year 4 of UPHA-V702 Undergraduate Philosophy (with Work Placement)
  - UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
    - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
    - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
    - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)

This module is Core option list A for:

- UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 3 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 3 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 3 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
- Year 3 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list B for:

- UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
- Year 2 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list C for:

- Year 4 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Option list A for:

- UPHA-VL78 BA in Philosophy with Psychology
  - Year 2 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
  - Year 3 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
- Year 4 of UPHA-VL79 BA in Philosophy with Psychology (with Intercalated year)

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature
  - Year 2 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
  - Year 3 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
- Year 4 of UPHA-VQ73 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature with Intercalated Year

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)

This module is Option list E for:

- UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law
  - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
  - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law