

PSY 497 COURSE SYLLABUS (DRAFT)

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What will you learn?

In this course, we will explore the psychological foundations of moral judgment and moral actions. Consider a few questions. How can we explain kindness and cruelty? Where does our sense of right and wrong come from? How could people differ so much about moral issues that are dear to each of us?

This course will examine the developmental origins of morality and discuss the scientific methods of investigating our moral natures. Furthermore, this course will also discuss how we might transcend our moral natures. Through the materials covered in this class, students will gain potentially better understanding of themselves and current social issues.

Readings

1. Basic Textbook: Bloom, P. (2013). *Just babies: The origins of good and evil*. New York: Crown Publishers
2. Supplemental Materials TBA
3. What if I want to get started before Dec 15, 2014? You can refer to the following:
 - 1) “The Moral Life of Babies”, by Paul Bloom, in the New York Times Magazine (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/09/magazine/09babies-t.html?pagewanted=all>)
 - 2) “The Moral Instinct”, by Steven Pinker, in the New York Times Magazine (http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/magazine/13Psychology-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)
 - 3) “The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives”, by Jonathan Haidt, TED talk
 - 4) “Science Can Answer Moral Questions”, by Sam Harris, TED talk

Grade Evaluation

The selected book is different from the typical textbook most undergraduate classes use. It is simply fun to read and very easy to follow. The topics are fascinating.

Reading Quizzes: Reading the textbook is essential to your successful completion of these assignments. You will be quizzed over your reading of each topic. You will earn credit for every quiz on which you score a 60% or better (i.e., they are treated as pass / fail). There will be 7 quizzes, which add up to be worth 21% of your overall grade (3% each).

Quiz Total: 3 x 7 = 21

Assignments: For each topic, there will be an assignment. Reading the textbook is essential to your successful completion of these assignments. Your postings should be substantive and civil. Please observe the following criteria when posting answers:

- 1) Does the posting demonstrate the understanding of the materials being discussed? **Please make an explicit mention of the theory and viewpoints discussed in the textbook, which you use for your arguments.**
- 2) Does the argument in the posting hold together and move forward?
- 3) Are there grammatical and spelling errors?

Answering Questions Total: $10 \times 7 = 70$

Discussion Responsibilities: For answers to discussion questions, every student is required to make responses to the work by at least two students. The discussion responses must address whether and how the posting centered around the theories and viewpoints presented in the textbook.

Lateness for discussions is not acceptable.

Discussion Total: 2 (self-introduction) + $7 = 9$

Coursework Policy: All quizzes are to be taken closed-book. **You are not allowed to take any quiz or submit an assignment after its respective deadline**, unless you notify me of extenuating circumstances and I give permission in advance.

To be on the safe side, assume that I grade on a numerical scale: **A = 100-90; B = 89-80; C = 79-70; D = 69-60; F = below 60**. However, I reserve the right to reward exemplary attendance and participation.

Incompletes: The policy for this course is not to allow incompletes. If you cannot complete the course with a grade that find satisfactory, it is your responsibility to drop it.

Other Important Basics:

Keep in mind that a syllabus sometimes shifts a little as the course gets underway. I say that by way of noting the importance of class attendance, as you will be held responsible for any change in plans announced in class.

The other basic admonition every syllabus must include is that dishonesty (broadly defined) is not allowed. This means that neither cheating nor plagiarism will be tolerated and students who engage in either will be subject to the disciplinary processes described in the Code of Student Conduct. There is a brochure on plagiarism at course website. If you have further questions about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please see me. Or, as the university likes me to say: **“All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment.”** (See Student’s Guide Handbook).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Gee Library

Room 132

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu

Also, note that “Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must go through the Academic Support Committee.” Their phone is (903)886-5150.

Disclaimer:

While I make every effort to abide by the information presented here, I reserve the right to modify this syllabus at any time.

Tentative Schedule of Topics

	Date	Topic
1	Dec 15	Introduction to the course
2	Dec 16	The moral life of babies
3	Dec 18	Empathy and compassion
4	Dec 22	Fairness, status, and punishment
5	Dec 24-25	X-mas Holiday
6	Dec 26	Others
7	Dec 30	Bodies
8	Jan 1	New Year
9	Jan 5	Family matters
10	Jan 7	How to be good