

830:421

Advanced Topics in Social Psychology

Summer 2017

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Office hours: Tuesday 12-1 and by appointment

Text: Shermer, Michael (2004). The Science of Good and Evil. New York: Holt

ISBN: 0-8050-7769-3

This class will explore theory and research related to moral beliefs and behaviors. The goal of the course is to (a) survey moral belief systems across time and culture, (b) review classic philosophical explanations of morality, (c) examine past and present psychological theories of moral behavior, and (d) consider how moral beliefs impact behavior, particularly when people confront moral dilemmas. Readings from online sources and material posted at sakai supplement the text chapters.

Evaluation: Course grade will be based on the following:

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| Class attendance: | 20 |
| (2 points for every class you attend up to 10 classes) | |
| Class exercises/homework: | 20 |
| Class presentation and power points: | 30 |
| Final exam : | 30 |
| Total: | 100 points |

Class attendance (20): Classes will focus on discussion of readings. I will supplement that with other material. The topic of moral beliefs is intrinsically interesting and certainly important to our sense of self-identity and how we behave. For the class to function well, you must be prepared to participate

Class exercises (20): There will be a few homework exercises to complete over the course of the semester. These exercises are thought problems and brief questionnaires. Your anonymous responses will be used in class to illustrate some of the issues we discuss in the course. These assignments will be announced in class and posted at sakai.

Class Presentation and Power points (30): We will be covering a fairly wide range of material. Your assignment is to select some area of moral beliefs and explore it in more detail than we have time to do in class. Then prepare a 15 minute presentation for the class to be given during the 6/27 and 6/29 classes. The presentation should be based on a set of power point slides. A copy of your slides must be sent to me on the day of your presentation. Your presentation can be an in depth review of a psychological theory of morality; it can be a review of research; it can be a proposal for research (e.g.,

planning an experiment). I want to give you as much latitude as possible to pursue a question or topic that interests you.

Final exam (30): The final exam will be an essay on the last class date 7/7. I will give you a set of questions in advance, so that you can prepare your answers to be written in class.

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topics</u> |
|-------------|--|
| 5/30 | Overview and class exercises |
| 6/1 | Moral behavior: what we believe <i>Questions for class: What is the origin of moral beliefs? What do polls tell us? What do religions say? Are there universal morals?</i> |
| 6/6 | Western philosophical positions <i>Questions for class: Historically, Western philosophy has taken 4 approaches to conceptualizing moral beliefs. What are they? How do they relate to religious approaches?</i> |
| 6/8 | Sentiment approach: Grounded in Evolution? <i>Questions for class: What is the functional argument for the development of moral beliefs? Is it the same as the evolutionary argument?</i> |
| 6/13 | Questions of Evil and Free Will <i>Questions for class: Why is evil such a vexing problem for some approaches to morality? Is free will necessary for moral behavior?</i> |
| 6/15 | Shermer's Provisional Morality Applications to campus and politics <i>Question for class: How does Shermer's Provisional Morality fit with other theories? How are moral beliefs predictive of political attitudes? Do professors practice moral bias?</i> |

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| 6/20 | Morality of Animals |
| | <i>Questions for class: Is morality restricted to humans? Can animals make moral choices? If so, what are the implications for theories of the origin of moral beliefs?</i> |
| 6/22 | Moral Development |
| | <i>Questions for class: From the perspective of psychology, how do people develop morality? What are the major theories and what are their strengths and weaknesses?</i> |
| 6/27 | Presentations |
| 6/29 | Presentations |
| 7/6 | Wrap up and Final Exam |

Assignments and Readings --

For 6/1:

1. <http://www.debate.org/opinions/is-there-a-universal-moral-code>

Debate.org asks people whether or not there is a universal moral code. Your task is to read a few pages of opinions and then select the one you find most compelling on each side (one “yes” opinion and one “no” opinion). Make a copy, bring it to class, and be prepared to explain which one you find the most persuasive.

2. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/183413/americans-continue-shift-left-key-moral-issues.aspx>

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1681/moral-issues.aspx>

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/210917/views-moral-values-slip-seven-year-lows.aspx>

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/210542/americans-hold-record-liberal-views-moral-issues.aspx>

Gallup polls that examines change in moral beliefs between 2001 and 2015. Which issue has changed the most? Which the least? Which one most surprises you?

5. <http://personal.tcu.edu/pwitt/Universal%20Values.pdf>

Article looks for evidence of common values in major religions. Would you add/subtract any from what they propose? What are the strengths and weaknesses of their archival analysis?

6. "Moral relativism class" word document at Resources at Sakai

7. "Belief Comparisons among Religions" word document at Resources at Sakai

For 6/6:

Read the following papers. Which approach do you agree with most? Which least? Be prepared to discuss this in class.

1. "Virtue ethics" word document at Resources
2. "Kantian Deontology" word document at Resources
3. "Existentialist ethics" word document at Resources
4. "Hume and Morality" word document at Resources
5. "Utilitarian morality" word document at Resources

For 6/8:

1. Shermer chapters 1 and 2
2. Haidt paper: "Emotional dog and rational tail" pdf document at Resources
3. "Five foundations" table word document at Resources

For 6/13:

1. Shermer chapters 3 and 4
2. "Hinckley: Evolution of insanity plea" word document at Resources
3. "McDonald's strip search" word document at Resources
4. "McDonald's homework assignment" word document at Resources

For 6/15:

1. Shermer chapters 5, 6, 7
2. Youtube video debate on morality and religion:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UisxYorDnr4>
After viewing this, who do you find most convincing? What would you have said that was said in the "debate"? Bring 1 paragraph response to these 2 questions to class.
3. Rozin et al article: "Disgust...handbook of emotions" pdf document at Resources
4. Haidt et al article: "Above and below..." pdf document at Resources

5. Graham et al article: "Ideological differences..." pdf document at Resources
6. "Political views of American professors" word document at Resources

For 6/20:

1. "Chimpanzees successfully play..." word document at Resources
2. "Human Fairness: Innate or Evolved" word document at Resources
3. "Evolution of Empathy" word document at Resources
4. "Can animals empathize?" word document at Resources

Questions about animals and morality: Do animals show moral behavior? What does animal "morality" have to say that may explain human morality? How should animals be treated? Do they have rights? Do we have obligations toward them regardless of whether they are moral creatures? Class discussion will focus on these and other issues, so come prepared with your thoughts.

For 6/22:

1. Summaries of 4 psychological theories of moral development at Resources
Carol Gilligan
Lawrence Kohlberg
Elliot Turiel
Jean Piaget
2. "Gilligan In a different voice" pdf document at Resources
3. Three moral dilemmas used by Kohlberg; come to class prepared to share your responses to each. Kohlberg dilemmas document at Resources

For 6/27 and 6/29: Presentations

For 7/6: Social dilemmas:

1. Trolley problem with videos: <http://www.decisionskills.com/trolley-problem.html>
2. "Would you kill one person to save five" word document at Resources
3. "The social dilemma of autonomous vehicles" word document at Resources