Course Description

Why do we often leave a tip at restaurants, but never at shoe shops? Why do we find repugnant to have sex with siblings? Why don’t people wear shorts when they get married? Why do we get angry if somebody jumps a queue? Why is it more likely that people throw an empty can of coke on the street when the street is already dirty? Why, when we get up in the morning, don’t we even consider to be nudist for the day? Why did women and children aboard the Titanic were more likely to survive than males? What if a person had no social contact during the first years of her life? In this course we examine these types of questions by intermingling philosophical and empirical research.

The course concerns the psychological and philosophical foundations of moral judgement and decision-making.

Our goals are threefold:
1. to survey some of the explanations of the way we deliberate and decide in moral and social contexts;
2. to critically assess such explanations by relying on empirical and theoretical resources;
3. to identify the normative implications (if any) about how we should decide in a moral situation that these explanations would have if true.

Background

The subject matter of this course is the latest “cutting edge” research. Prior familiarity with the types of studies discussed during the course will not be assumed. However, students will benefit from having the following background: (1) Any course in philosophy with a substantial ethics component. (2) Any course in philosophy with a substantial component in philosophy of science. (3) At least one course in psychology or a related human or social science.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students will be able to demonstrate:
1. an understanding of central theories and arguments in the field of moral psychology,
2. an understanding of how people make moral decisions,
3. a knowledge of philosophical problems regarding judgement, reason, expectation, emotion and motivation, and the relation between them,
4. an awareness of the implications of findings in the cognitive sciences for problems in ethics,
5. an ability to bring analytic and critical tools to bear in reading and writing about current topics of research in moral psychology.

Students will also acquire the following transferable skills:
1. written skills;
2. analytical skills;
3. oral communication skills;
4. ability to recognise and critically assess an argument;
5. ability to apply philosophical reasoning to other disciplines and practices.

**Structure and Course Requirements**
The classes are a mixture of lectures and seminars. The course is conducted in English.

**Readings and Participation.**
You are expected to complete the assigned readings before the class for which they are assigned, to bring the texts under discussion with you to class, and to come to class prepared and willing to discuss them. All students are expected to give at least one presentation.

Every week, you must think about and formulate an interesting short question about some potentially puzzling, social or moral behaviour, in which people around you routinely engage — e.g. “Why do people shake hands?”; “Why do people pay taxes?”; “Why do people at the airport wait standing in queue at the gate for a long time before their flight is actually ready for boarding?” This question should be emailed to me at least 24 hours before the class.

Every week I select one question among all the ones I received. You are required to propose an answer to it in no more than 500 words. This answer should be emailed to me at least 48 hours before the next class.

NOTE The answer need not be the “right” one. All that matters is that it identifies and describes in some detail some plausible mechanism or principle that could explain the behaviour of interest.

You are also required to write one report (see below) of no more than 2,000 words, and one final essay of no more than 2,500 words, which have to be handed in (hard copy, no email). The essay will be written on a relevant topic approved by the seminar leader.

**Assessment**
The final mark will be determined by:
- the marks of the weekly short questions and answers (15%),
- the report on the breaching experiment (20%),
- the presentation (10%),
- participation in class (10%),
- the final essay (45%).
Schedule and Readings (14 weeks)

There will be no official textbook. We shall work on articles, and excerpts from books.

I. What’s moral psychology about?

Required Readings


Further Readings


II. What are norms? And what/how do they explain?

Required Readings


Further Readings

III. How can we experiment on norms?

Required Readings


IV. The breaching experiment

Required Readings


V. Three models of moral judgement: Haidt’s social intuitionist model

Required Readings


Further readings

Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.

VI. Three models of moral judgement: Josh Greene’s Dual-system model

Required Readings

Available online at URL: <http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~jgreene/GreeneWJH/Greene-KantSoul.pdf>

Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.

VII. Three models of moral judgement: Mikhail’s universal moral grammar model

Required Readings

Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.

Further readings


VIII. From Judgement to Action. What could the mechanism of norm compliance be?

Required Readings

* Colombo, M. (2013). *Two Neurocomputational Building Blocks of Social Norm Compliance, Biology and Philosophy*
Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.
Further Readings

Available in the library.

IX. Abnormal moral psychology and decision-making: Autism

Required Readings


Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.

X. Abnormal moral psychology and decision-making: Psychopathy

Required readings


Further readings


Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.
XI. Socialization and “Good” Decision-Making

Required Readings

Preprint available online at: URL: http://experimentalphilosophy.typepad.com/files/dorinsicholsbroadxphi.pdf

Further Readings

Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.

Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.

XII. Moral Cognition & Language

Required Readings

Preprint available online at: URL <http://www.philosophy.ed.ac.uk/people/clark/pubs/wa.pdf>

Available online at: URL: < http://www.philosophy.ed.ac.uk/people/clark/pubs/Rules.pdf>

Further Readings


Available online – from the UvT Library WorldCat.


Required Readings


Further readings


XIV. Normative Theories and Empirical Evidence. What Now? Ethical Issues


Further Readings

