

**PSYC UN2645: Moral Psychology  
Spring 2026**

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**I. Bulletin description and personnel**

PSYC UN2645: Moral Psychology (3 points). Spring 2026.  
Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:10 a.m. - 11:25 a.m., 142 Uris.

Prerequisite: An introductory psychology course.

An introduction to basic concepts in moral psychology. Topics include controversies around the definition of morality, bedrocks of moral thought and behavior, and connections between morality and other areas of life, among other subjects.

Instructor: Dr. Larisa Heiphetz Solomon

lah2201@columbia.edu (this is the best way to reach me outside of office hours and I typically reply to e-mails within 3 business days)

212-854-1348

821 Uris Hall

Office hours: Mondays, 3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m., 821 Uris. If you have another class during office hours, please e-mail me to set up a meeting at a different time. Please also let me know which of your classes conflicts with my office hours so that I can consider how best to arrange my office hours around popular courses in future semesters. The TAs and I are happy to meet with you throughout the course of the semester to discuss the course material. **If you have questions about course policies and logistics (like when something is due or what will be on an exam), please e-mail one of the TAs or come to their office hours.** Questions about course content or psychology more broadly can be directed toward any of the TAs or me.

Teaching Assistants:

Courtney Jimenez, Graduate TA, caj2171@columbia.edu

Office hours: Thursdays, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., 324D Schermerhorn Hall

Una Aleksic, Undergraduate TA, ua2195@columbia.edu

Office hours: Tuesdays, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m., 359 Schermerhorn Extension

Armando Javier Gimenez, Undergraduate TA, ajg2297@columbia.edu

Office hours: Fridays, 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m., 359 Schermerhorn Extension

Lynne Kim, Undergraduate TA, lk3039@columbia.edu

Office hours: Wednesdays, 12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m., 359 Schermerhorn Extension

**II. A full description of the content of the course.**

How do children learn to distinguish right from wrong? Why do some people act more morally than others, and how is it that the same person can make moral decisions in some circumstances but not others? What does it mean to be "moral"?

Questions like these have fascinated scholars and laypeople for centuries. This lecture will review theories of moral cognition as well as empirical findings on human morality. We will examine both classic work and more recent research. While focusing on research from psychology, we will also discuss some ideas from related disciplines, such as philosophy.

This course consists of biweekly lectures that will include time for student participation. Evaluations include small in-class assignments, two in-class exams, and a cumulative final exam.

### **III. The rationale for giving the course**

This is an introductory class designed for undergraduates who have passed an introductory psychology course and who wish to learn more about moral psychology. It fulfills the following requirements:

- For the psychology major or concentration in the College and in the School of General Studies, for the psychology minor in Engineering, and for the psychology postbac certificate, this course will fulfill the Group III (Social, Personality, and Abnormal) distribution requirement.
- For other undergraduate students, this course will fulfill one term of the social science requirement of the School of General Studies.

Students cannot receive credit for both PSYC GU4672 (a seminar on moral psychology) and this course.

### **IV. The reading list and weekly syllabus**

A few notes to keep in mind:

- The schedule below is subject to change.
- The course consists of three main sections. We will begin by covering the definitions of morality as well as bedrocks of moral cognition and behavior, including developmental, neuroscientific, and cultural bedrocks. In the second part of the course, we will consider morally relevant behaviors—transgressions as well as virtuous acts. Finally, the third part of the course will focus on connections between morality and other areas of life.
- Please read the required article(s) for each day before coming to class on that day. Articles are available on the course website; please e-mail me immediately if you cannot access them.
- We will read a combination of classic and newer articles. Many required readings are somewhat older, since it is difficult to understand what is happening in psychology currently without a firm understanding of the basis of newer work. Lectures will incorporate some more recent material.
- We will read some empirical articles (articles that present data from new studies) and some review articles (articles that describe a theory or provide an overview of a body of research). Reading original work is different from reading a textbook, in part because the work we will be reading was often written for an audience that already has some familiarity with psychology. Understanding primary literature is a skill that requires practice. If you do not have extensive experience reading and thinking about original articles, or if you want to chat about the readings, please come visit me during office hours. I would love to see you!
- One way to think about the relation between readings and lectures is that for any given class period, one of these usually provides breadth while the other provides depth. For some days, you may read a review article summarizing the results of many studies (breadth), and lecture will describe one or two studies in detail (depth). Other days, you will read an empirical paper detailing a small number of studies, and lecture will provide a broader view of the research area.
- Please do not record the class in any way (audio recording, videos, photographs, etc.) unless you have an accommodation and have checked with me first. The goal of this rule is to protect the privacy of the members of the course. We often discuss topics on which students are still forming their thoughts, and I want you all to feel comfortable thinking out loud and saying things that you may change your mind about later. Some class members may also have other privacy-related concerns.

January 21st: Introduction to the course  
Please read the syllabus before coming to class.

[Optional reading that may be helpful if you do not have much experience reading psychology articles:  
Jordan, C. H., & Zanna, M. P. (1999). *How to read a journal article in social psychology*. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *The self in social psychology* (pp. 461-470). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.]

January 26th: Methods

Gilovich, T., Keltner, D., & Nisbett, R. E. (2011). The methods of social psychology. In T. Gilovich, D. Keltner, & R. E. Nisbett, *Social psychology* (pp. 42-63). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

January 28th: Methods

No new reading.

### **Part I: The Basis of Morality**

February 2nd: What is morality? - Rationalist and intuitionist approaches

Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review*, 108, 814-834. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814

February 4th: What is morality? - Components of morality

Graham, J., Haidt, J., Motyl, M., Meindl, P., Iskiwicz, C., & Mooijman, M. (2019). Moral foundations theory: On the advantages of moral pluralism over moral monism. In K. Gray & J. Graham (Eds.), *Atlas of moral psychology* (pp. 211-222). New York, NY: The Guildford Press.

Schein, C., & Gray, K. (2016). Moralization and harmification: The dyadic loop explains how the innocuous becomes harmful and wrong. *Psychological Inquiry*, 27, 62-65. doi: 10.1080/1047840X.2016.1111121

February 9th: Bedrocks of morality - Neuroscience

Greene, J. D., & Young, L. (2020). The cognitive neuroscience of moral judgment and decision-making. In D. Poeppel, G. R. Mangun, & M. S. Gazzaniga (Eds.), *The cognitive neurosciences* (pp. 1005-1015). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

February 11th: Guest speaker

February 16th: Bedrocks of morality - Infancy

Hamlin, J. K. (2013). Moral judgment and action in preverbal infants and toddlers: Evidence for an innate moral core. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22, 186-193. doi: 10.1177/0963721412470687

Warneken, F., & Tomasello, M. (2006). Altruistic helping in human infants and young chimpanzees. *Science*, 311, 1301-1303. doi: 10.1126/science.1121448

February 18th: Bedrocks of morality - Childhood

Yoo, H. N., & Smetana, J. G. (2022). Distinctions between moral and conventional judgments from early to middle childhood: A meta-analysis of social domain theory research. *Developmental Psychology*, 58, 874-889. doi: 10.1037/dev0001330

February 23rd: Bedrocks of morality - Culture

Sachdeva, S., Singh, P., & Medin, D. (2011). Culture and the quest for universal principles in moral reasoning. *International Journal of Psychology, 46*, 161-176. doi: 10.1080/00207594.2011.568486

February 25th: Review for Exam 1/flex day

March 2nd: Exam 1

## **Part II: Moral and Immoral Behaviors**

March 4th: Transgressions

Rai, T. S., & Holyoak, K. J. (2013). Exposure to moral relativism compromises moral behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 49*, 995-1001. doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2013.06.008

March 9th: Guest speaker

March 11th: Responses to transgressions - Punishment

Sarin, A., Ho, M. K., Martin, J. W., & Cushman, F. A. (2021). Punishment is organized around principles of communicative inference. *Cognition, 208*, 104544. doi: 10.1016/j.cognition.2020.104544

March 16th and March 18th: Spring break

March 23rd: Responses to transgressions - Forgiveness

McNulty, J. K. (2019). Highlighting the dark side of forgiveness and the need for a contextual approach. In E. L. Worthington, Jr., & N. G. Wade (Eds.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 33-42). New York, NY: Routledge.

March 25th: Virtue

Marshall, J., Gollwitzer, A., Mermin-Bunnell, K., Shinomiya, M., Retelsdorf, J., & Bloom, P. (2022). How development and culture shape intuitions about prosocial obligations. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 151*, 1866-1882. doi: 10.1037/xge00001136

March 30th: The virtuous self

Hardy, S. A., & Carlo, G. (2011). Moral identity: What is it, how does it develop, and is it linked to moral action? *Child Development Perspectives, 5*, 212-218. doi: 10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00189.x

April 1st: Increasing virtue

Caviola, L., Schubert, S., & Greene, J. D. (2021). The psychology of (in)effective altruism. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 25*, 596-607. doi: 10.1016/j.tics.2021.03.015

Effron, D. A., & Conway, P. (2015). When virtue leads to villainy: Advances in research on moral self-licensing. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 6*, 32-35. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.03.017

April 6th: Moral dilemmas

Berry, Z., Lewis, N. A., Jr., & Sowden, W. J. (2021). The double-edged sword of loyalty. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 30*, 321-326. doi: 10.1177/09637214211010759

Levine, E. E., Roberts, A. R., & Cohen, T. R. (2020). Difficult conversations: Navigating the tension between honesty and benevolence. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 31*, 38-43. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.07.034

April 8th: Review for Exam 2/flex day

April 13th: Exam 2

### **Part III: Connections Between Morality and Other Parts of Life**

April 15th: Morality and emotion

Bloom, P. (2017). Empathy and its discontents. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 21, 24-31. doi: 10.1016/j.tics.2016.11.004

Zaki, J. (2018). Empathy is a moral force. In K. Gray & J. Graham (Eds.), *Atlas of moral psychology* (pp. 49-58). New York, NY: The Guildford Press.

April 20th: Morality and intergroup bias

Rhodes, M., & Chalik, L. (2013). Social categories as markers of intrinsic interpersonal obligations. *Psychological Science*, 24, 999-1006. doi: 10.1177/0956797612466267

Starck, J. G., Sinclair, S., & Shelton, J. N. (2021). How university diversity rationales inform student preferences and outcomes. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 118, 1-7. doi: 10.1073/pnas.2013833118

April 22nd: Morality and religion

Tsang, J., Al-Kire, R. L., & Ratchford, J. L. (2021). Prosociality and religion. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 40, 67-72. doi: 10.1016/j.copsy.2020.08.025

April 27th: Guest speaker

April 29th: Movie day

May 4th: Movie day and review for final exam

### **V. Course requirements**

Grades will be determined as follows:

#### *In-class assignments (15%)*

Occasionally, in class, I will ask you to provide a written answer to a short question. These questions may ask you to reflect on the readings assigned for that day, to connect the day's topic to your own experiences, or to do another task related to that day's lecture topic. Responses are graded as follows:

√+ (answers question accurately; if asked for an example, provides one that shows understanding of the concept)

√ (makes an attempt to answer the question but does not provide an accurate/complete response)

√- (does not answer the question)

Throughout the semester, there will be at least 8 opportunities to complete an in-class assignment, and I will only count your top 5 scores. If you are not in class when responses are collected, you cannot receive credit; there are no make-ups. I may provide bonus in-class assignments (e.g., a 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> opportunity to complete an in-class assignment). Bonus assignments do not change how many assignments are counted in your grade; I will still only count your top 5 scores. They are just an extra opportunity for you to earn the points. **You can earn two extra credit points, to be applied to your final exam score, by completing ALL in-class assignments.**

I will announce in class when in-class assignments have been graded. Please check the course website to make sure that your grade was properly entered and let me know within **one week** if you think an error was made (e.g., you remember completing the assignment but the course website is showing a grade of 0).

Note that because in-class assignments must be written and handed in, **you must have paper and a writing utensil with you to do the in-class assignment.** The TAs and I will not have extras, and we are not able to accept e-mailed or computer-generated assignments.

### Exams 1 and 2 (25% each)

Exam 1 will include all class material covered prior to the exam. Exam 2 will include all class material covered after Exam 1; material that was included in Exam 1 will not be re-tested in Exam 2. The exams will include material that was only covered in lecture, material that was only covered in the readings, and material that was covered in both lecture and reading. Because some students do better with multiple choice questions while others do better with open-ended questions, exams will contain a mixture of both. I will provide more information about format before the first exam.

The person who graded your exam will have a copy and will be happy to go over specific questions with you after the exams are graded. If you believe that a question on your exam was graded incorrectly, please bring it to the attention of the person who graded your exam. If this does not resolve your issue, please e-mail me a paragraph including all of the following information: (a) your name; (b) which question(s) you are asking about; (c) for each question, the answer you wrote on your exam; (d) why you believe your answer(s) to be correct. Your response to part (d) must include at least one of the following pieces of information: (1) a citation to one of the readings posted on our course website and the page number of that reading where your answer is found or from which you derived your answer; or (2) the date of the lecture in which your answer was given, and the specific slide on which your answer appears or from which you derived your answer. **To consider your argument, I must receive this paragraph no later than one week after the date on which exam grades are made available.**

Make-up exams will only be offered in the case of emergencies, such as a severe illness. **Make-up exams must be completed within one week of the original exam. They may have a different format and/or different questions than the original exam.**

### Final exam (35%)

The final exam will be cumulative; anything that was covered in the course is fair game. The exam will be weighted toward material covered after Exam 2 and material that requires students to synthesize information from different topics. The format of the final exam will be similar to the midterms. The final exam will include at least one open-ended question asking you to connect the movie we watch at the end of the semester to material covered in class.

The registrar's office determines the date and time of the final exam. This office also sets the policy for make-up final exams, which are typically not given. For example, you will not be able to make up an exam that you miss due to travel or vacation plans. You can find more information here: <http://registrar.columbia.edu/content/exams>.

For more information on academic integrity (which pertains to all the course requirements listed above), please see <http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity-statement>. If you have any questions about academic integrity, please contact one of the TAs or me.

## **VI. Students with disabilities**

Students with special needs who may require classroom and/or test accommodations should let me know as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, stop by the Office of Disability Services (ODS) on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of Lerner Hall to register for support services. ODS often requires a few weeks to process an application, so please contact them as soon as you can. The procedures for registering with ODS can be found at <http://health.columbia.edu/services/ods> or by calling (212) 854-2388 (Voice/TTY).

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations for this course, students must first be registered with their school Disability Services office. Detailed information is available online for both the Columbia (<https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>) and Barnard (<https://barnard.edu/disabilityservices/students/register>) registration processes.

Refer to the appropriate website for information regarding deadlines, disability documentation requirements, and drop-in hours or in-take session.

*Thanks for reading this far! I am very much looking forward to getting to know you and learning about morality together.*