

Moral Motivation

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Class meetings: Tuesdays 12-2pm, room TBD, Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-4pm, room 408

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Moral judgments are, typically, motivating. We implore others to take courses of action by describing them as *kind*, *honest*, *fair*, or just plain *good*, and we admonish others by describing their actions as *cruel*, *harmful*, *deceitful*, *unjust*, *bad*, *wrong*, and so on. We can encourage ourselves to do something that we don't particularly want to do by thinking "It's the right thing to do". And we often find that our motivations change in line with our moral judgments; for example, somebody who comes to believe that she is morally required to donate to charity, or to refrain from eating animal products, may subsequently find herself with a newfound inclination to donate to charity or a newfound aversion to eating animal products.

By and large, the motivating power of moral judgments seems to be a good thing. After all, it surely helps to get us to do what we morally ought to do. And it helps us to ensure that other people within our sphere of influence also do what they morally ought to do. Moral motivation thus helps us to be good people.

But, as always, things aren't quite that simple. It is unclear precisely what the relationship between moral judgment and motivation is; in some of us, the relationship seems to be close, but there are also plenty of other people who seem to be able to make moral judgments without being at all motivated to change their behavior. Moreover, it's unclear whether more moral motivation is always better. Following the demands of morality too closely might interfere with our personal relationships, with our happiness, or perhaps even with our ability to make genuine friends. And there may be an important difference between caring about the particular things that are morally valuable – caring about *people*, or *justice*, or *happiness*, for instance – and caring about *morality* itself, considered in the abstract.

This course will examine a bunch of questions about moral motivation and related issues, with topics later in the course selected based on students' developing interests. Along the way, we'll also discuss the general skills needed for success in graduate school and beyond: how to write good papers, how to write appealing abstracts for conferences, how to give snazzy conference presentations, and so on.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of this class, all students will have developed the following knowledge and skills:

- An in-depth understanding of some contemporary philosophical debates about moral motivation.
- The ability to summarize the state of the literature, to articulate and defend a philosophical view, and to anticipate and respond to objections, on some of these issues.
- The ability to write a clear, concise, compelling abstract, suitable for conference submission.
- The ability to provide formative feedback on another person's work-in-progress.
- The ability to present a philosophical argument out loud in real time, conference-style.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

We have students in this class with very different kinds of background knowledge and interests. Some of you may be considering doctoral work on these topics (or related topics), while others are just trying them out. To that end, I have designed the course with two “tracks”: the “I’m into it” track and the “Just passing through” track. I want to incentivize co-authoring, especially for students who are new to this material, so the “Just passing through” track itself has two options: an individual option and a collaborative option.

Here is a breakdown:

“I’m into it” track:

- Reading responses, 1 page, due by midnight the day before each class (10%)
- Midterm paper, 2,000 words, due October 15th (15%)
- Final paper plan, 1-2 pages, due November 15th (5%)
- Conference abstract, 750 words, due November 19th (5%)
- Feedback on 5 conference abstracts, presented as in-line comments, due November 26th (10%)
- In-class conference-style presentation, ~20 minutes, December 3rd or 10th (15%)
- Final paper, 6,000 words, due December 17th (40%)

“Just passing through” track A:

- Reading responses, 1 page, due by midnight the day before each class (10%)
- Four sole-authored short papers, 2,000 words, due October 1st, October 22nd, November 12th, and December 3rd (each 15%)
- Conference abstract, 750 words, due November 19th (5%)
- Feedback on 5 conference abstracts, presented as in-line comments, due November 26th (10%)
- In-class conference-style presentation, ~20 minutes, December 3rd or 10th (15%)

“Just passing through” track B:

- Reading responses, 1 page, due by midnight the day before each class (10%)
- Three co-authored short papers, 2,000 words, due October 8th, November 12th, and December 17th (each 20%)
- Conference abstract, 750 words, due November 19th (5%)
- Feedback on 5 conference abstracts, presented as in-line comments, due November 26th (10%)
- In-class conference-style presentation, ~20 minutes, December 3rd or 10th (15%)

The deadline to choose a track and communicate it to me is September 24th.

If you choose the “Just passing through” track B – the collaborative track – there is no requirement to work with the same co-author for all three of your papers, and I gently encourage you to try working with different co-authors for each paper. I will post an announcement about tracks on our course website with comments enabled, so that students considering taking the collaborative track can find each other.

Here is a quick summary of each course requirement.

All students: Do every reading and take notes in advance of every class (10%)

This is a reading-based class. We are inheriting a rich intellectual history that rewards sustained attention. You will be much better-prepared to contribute to class discussion, and you will remember the readings much better – not only during the semester, but in future – if you take notes. To that end, I incentivize the taking of notes by asking *all* students to submit a 1-page summary of *each* reading before *each* class. In the first class meeting I will provide samples of good reading summaries for you to use as models.

All students: Submit a conference-submission-style abstract (5%) and assess five other students' abstracts (10%)

I think that one of the secrets to success in grad school is to go to a *lot* of conferences. But conferences often ask for submissions in the form of abstracts, rather than full papers. So we are going to talk explicitly about how to write good abstracts, have a go at writing one, and then evaluate each other's abstracts. There is a peer assessment component here because it is much easier to appreciate a set of standards when you have tried using them to evaluate others' work.

All students: Give a conference-style presentation of one of your arguments (15%)

Like I said, go to conferences! ...But presenting at conferences is scary. So we are going to talk about what makes a good talk, and then we are going to practice by each giving short presentations of one argument from one of our papers, accompanied by some sort of visual aid (slides or a handout, or both).

"Just checking" track: submit three co-authored or four sole-authored short papers (each 20%/15%)

The "just checking" track is for students who are fairly new to this material and who do not intend to work on it or on related areas. For these students, it is more appropriate to write multiple short papers, to test your understanding of a wider range of topics from the class. Papers should be short – no more than 2,000 words – and may follow any one of a set of "paper styles" that I will distribute and discuss in class. We are also going to talk about the process of selecting a paper topic in class. Because I want to gently encourage co-authoring, but I recognize that co-authoring can be hard (especially with a strict word limit!), students who choose the collaborative track need only submit three short papers rather than four.

"I'm into it" track: submit a midterm paper (15%), a final paper plan (5%), and a final paper (40%)

The "I'm into it" track is for students who have some familiarity with this material and/or are thinking of working on these or related topics. For these students, it is more appropriate to produce an extended piece of work on one topic from the class that piques their interest, working with me to develop their thinking on this topic into something lengthier and more polished. So, this track includes a 6,000-word final paper, and a plan for this paper submitted a month in advance, to give us time to work together on it. Because it is useful for developing one's philosophical ideas to start writing in the middle of the semester rather than waiting until the end, and because students on this track are likely to be interested in more than one topic from the course, this track also includes a short midterm paper. It is OK for the final paper to be a revised and extended version of the midterm paper, and also OK for them to be on totally different topics.

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

COURSE WEBSITE

There is a course website site for this course, which can be accessed via NYU Classes. All course documents (syllabus, assignments, readings, and some documents with helpful tips for reading and writing Philosophy papers) can be accessed via this site. Please check the site regularly for announcements – when I want to send a message to all students, I will do so by posting an announcement on the course website.

ELECTRONICS IN THE CLASSROOM

In this class there is a ban on electronics – including laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. There is a lot of research indicating that the use of electronics in the classroom prevents you and people sitting around you from learning. If you have a special reason to need electronic equipment for note-taking, that's a different matter; in this case, please contact me to discuss a waiver from the ban.

EMAILS

When emailing me about this class, please write “Phil-GA 2285” in the subject line, and maintain a formal tone. I will endeavor to reply to all emails within 48 hours. If I do not manage to do this, it is okay to email again to remind me – but please wait 48 hours first. Professors receive a lot of emails every day.

PLAGIARISM

You are responsible for making sure that none of your work is plagiarized. You must cite any work that you draw from in your papers, both direct quotations and paraphrased ideas. You are strongly encouraged to discuss the course material, including assignments, with your classmates, but all written work that you submit must be your own. For more information, see my “Plagiarism” handout on our course website. You should also be familiar with the academic integrity policies of the College of Arts and Sciences, which are available at <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html>; I will respond to all cases of possible plagiarism in accordance with sections 2 and 3 of these policies.

DISABILITY

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught can be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the NYU Center for Students with Disabilities to determine appropriate academic accommodations. Any information that you choose to provide is confidential and will be treated as such.

CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Grad school can be emotionally challenging. If you or someone you know is feeling anxious, overwhelmed, depressed, or in need of support, lots of services are available. You can contact NYU's Counseling and Wellness Services team by calling (212) 998-4780 or emailing wellness.exchange@nyu.edu, or by visiting <https://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/counseling-services.html> and checking out the links there. They also have walk-in offices in Manhattan and Brooklyn (addresses on the website).

SCHEDULE & READINGS

Required readings are required; optional readings are optional. The optional readings are there for students who are particularly interested in a topic to begin to explore it further.

Class 1 (Sep 3) – INTRODUCTION

- Optional: Rosati, “[Moral Motivation](#)”

Class 2 (Sep 10) – MOTIVATIONAL EXTERNALISM

- Required: Stocker, “[Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology](#)”
- Optional: Velleman, “[The Guise of the Good](#)”

Class 3 (Sep 17) – NO CLASS (I’m away)

Class 4 (Sep 24) – MOTIVATIONAL INTERNALISM

- Required: Smith, excerpts from *The Moral Problem*
- Required: Smith, “[The Argument for Internalism: Reply to Miller](#)”
- Optional: Svavarsdottir, “[Moral Cognitivism and Motivation](#)”

Class 5 (Oct 1) – MORAL WORTH AND MORAL MOTIVATION 1

- Required: Arpaly, “[Moral Worth](#)”
- Optional: Markovits, “[Acting for the Right Reasons](#)”

Class 6 (Oct 8) – MORAL WORTH AND MORAL MOTIVATION 2

- Required: Sliwa, “[Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge](#)”
- Optional: Johnson King, “[Accidentally Doing the Right Thing](#)”

Class 7 (Oct 15) – NO CLASS (Fall recess)

Class 8 (Oct 22) – MORAL MOTIVATION AND MORAL UNCERTAINTY

- Required: Sepielli, “[What To Do When You Don’t Know What to Do](#)”
- Required: Weatherson, “[Running Risks Morally](#)”
- Optional: Hicks, “[Moral Hedging and Responding to Reasons](#)”

Class 9 (Oct 29) – MORAL MOTIVATION AND MORAL IGNORANCE

- Required: Rosen, “[Skepticism about Moral Responsibility](#)”
- Required: Harman, “[Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?](#)”
- Optional: FitzPatrick, “[Moral Responsibility and Normative Ignorance](#)”

Class 10 (Nov 5) – MORAL MOTIVATION AND MORAL TESTIMONY

- Required: Hills, “[Moral Testimony and Moral Epistemology](#)”
- Required: Sliwa, “[In Defense of Moral Testimony](#)”
- Optional: Groll and Decker, “[Moral Testimony: One of These Things Is Just Like the Others](#)”

Class 11 (Nov 12) – MORAL MOTIVATION AND ALIENATION FROM ONE’S LOVED ONES

- Required: Wolf, “[Moral Saints](#)”
- Required: MacFarquhar, excerpts from *Strangers Drowning*
- Optional: Railton, “[Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality](#)”

Class 12 (Nov 19) – TBD BASED ON STUDENT INTEREST

- Required:
- Optional:

Class 13 (Nov 26) – TBD BASED ON STUDENT INTEREST

- Required:
- Optional:

Class 14 (Dec 3) – STUDENT PRESENTATIONS 1

- *No readings*

Class 15 (Dec 10) – STUDENT PRESENTATIONS 2

- *No readings*

Class 16 (Dec 17) – EXTRA POTLUCK FUN CLASS (Make-up for Class 3)

- *No readings*

Done! ☺