Moral psychology is the interdisciplinary field that draws on both normative theorizing in philosophy and empirical research and modelling in psychology and other social sciences. Despite popular misconception, many philosophical claims beget empirical hypotheses that can be tested. Scientific investigation of human thinking and behavior and the norms thereof are inspired by, speak to, or assume various philosophical theories. As the field of moral psychology has developed recently, moral philosophers have increasingly offered philosophical interpretations of empirical work in psychology and other social sciences, and at times even conducting their own experiments. Likewise, psychologists empirically examining human morality have become increasingly philosophically self-aware. The resulting literature is increasingly conversant in both cutting-edge scientific findings and long-standing philosophical theories.

This course examines the intersection of philosophy and psychology on questions of human nature and how we should live. We will focus on many of the main concepts and theories in contemporary moral psychology. Students will learn how psychology and philosophy enrich one another. Readings will primarily focus on contemporary empirical findings with philosophical underpinnings discuss in class. Students will learn to criticize methodologies and analyses in the empirical literature. The following topics will be covered this term include preferences, responsibility, emotions, character, cultural and moral disagreement, cooperation, altruism, evolution and morality, dual-process theory, and wellbeing.

Dr. Brian Robinson
Assistant Professor
Department of History, Political Science, and Philosophy

FALL 2019
RHOD 332
MW: 9:00 - 9:50
3 Credit Hours

Office Hours
MW 2:00 - 4:00
F 2:00 - 3:00
**Course Description**

Well-being, moral responsibility, ethical naturalism, innateness or morality, moral heuristics and biases, moral intuitions, emotions and sentiments, morality and evolution, egoism and altruism, moral disagreement, character and virtue, psychopathology, and moral development. (Credit may not be obtained in both PHIL 4317 and PSYC 4317.)

**Prerequisites:** None

**Student Learner Outcomes:**

Students will:

- gain an understanding of many of the main concepts, debates, and theories in contemporary moral psychology,
- learn how empirical findings help answer normative questions or challenge normative views,
- learn to criticize methodologies and analyses in the empirical literature,
- develop the ability to reveal philosophical assumptions of themselves and others through dialogue,
- learn to engage in reasoned debate and discussion with others,
- improve skills in active reading to understand and explain philosophical texts, and
- improve your ability to think critically, reason soundly, and write clearly.

**Textbook:**


Other PDFs made available on Blackboard ([https://blackboard.tamuk.edu/](https://blackboard.tamuk.edu/))

**Contact:**

*Dr. Brian Robinson*

brian.robinson@tamuk.edu*

361-593-3602 (office)

361-593-3502 (fax)

www.brobinson.info

*preferred mode of communication

**Technology Requirements:**

- Computer or mobile device that can access Blackboard ([https://blackboard.tamuk.edu/](https://blackboard.tamuk.edu/)).
- Optional: Audio or audio/video recording device that can produce a digital file.
SCHEDULE

Deadlines at Glance:

- 3 Questions (Weekly Reading Engagement)  
  First Class Meeting of the week (before class)
- Sign-ups for Commentaries (deadline)  
  August 23
- First Student Lead Discussion  
  October 18
- Term Paper/Project: Topics for approval  
  Nov. 15 by 11:59 pm
- Term Paper/Project: Detailed Proposal or Outline  
  Nov. 27 by 11:59 pm
- Second Student Lead Discussion  
  Dec. 4
- Term Paper/Project (date and time set by university)  
  Dec. 11 by 1:10 pm

Weekly Reading Schedule:

All readings available in the textbook, on Blackboard as PDFs, or at the URL provided.

**Introduction**

Week of Aug. 21

Required:

Recommended:

Note: No 3 Questions assignment or Discussion assignment this week

**Preferences**

Week of Aug. 26

Required:
- Alfano, *Moral Psychology*: Chapter 1: Preferences (pg. 24-48)

Recommended:
Responsibility

Week of Sept. 2 (NB: No class on Monday, Sept. 2 for Labor Day)

Required:
- Alfano, Moral Psychology: Chapter 2: Responsibility (pg. 49-80)

Recommended:

Note: No 3 Questions assignment or Discussion assignment this week

Emotion

Week of Sept. 9

Required:
- Alfano, Moral Psychology: Chapter 3: Emotions (pg. 81-111)

Recommended:

Moral Judgment

Week of Sept. 16

Required:

Recommended:
Character Traits

Week of Sept. 23

Required:
- Alfano, *Moral Psychology*: Chapter 4: Character (pg. 112-137)

Recommended:

Week of Sept. 30

Required:

Recommended:

Cultures and Moral Disagreements

Week of Oct. 7

Required:
- Alfano, *Moral Psychology*: Chapter 5: Disagreement (pg. 138-170)

Recommended:
Moral Foundations

Week of Oct. 14

Required:

Recommended:

Week of Oct. 21

Required:

Recommended:

Cooperation

Week of Oct. 28

Required:
Recommended:

Evolution and Morality

Week of Nov. 4

Required:

Recommended:

Week of Nov. 11

Required:

Recommended:

Wellbeing

Week of Nov. 18

Required:

Recommended:
Weeks of Nov. 25 & Dec 2

(Note: 3 Questions only due on Nov. 25; no student-lead discussions that week. For week of Dec. 2, no questions, only student-lead discussions)

Required:

**Course Grading and Requirements**

3 Questions (Weekly Reading Response Assignment - 15% Total)

The schedule for the term lists the assigned readings for each week. These readings are to be read before class on Monday (or Wednesday in cases of no class meeting on a Monday). For each week’s set of readings, students are required to submit 3 questions they had in response to the reading. There are many different kinds of legitimate questions to ask. To receive credit, the questions must demonstrate engagement with the readings. Submitted questions that demonstrate little or no awareness of what is in the text will receive little to no credit for that week’s assignment. These are to be genuine questions you have after reading the text. What do you want to know more about? What in the reading are you struggling with? Each question can be followed up by 1-3 three sentences to motivate, explain, or provide context for the questions. Here are a few sample kinds of questions that would receive full credit:
• What does the term ‘x’ mean? The author kept using it, but it seemed s/he was using it in two different ways, such as here [quote from text] and here [second quote from text]. (NB: Just asking what a term means is not sufficient, at least not when the word can be looked up easily and is not a technical term.)

• In [reading title], why did they use this experimental procedure? The methodology section didn’t explain.

• How does [reported empirical finding] related to Kantian deontology? It seems like this could be a significant challenge to that view?

• The authors argue for naturalized ethics? What arguments are there against this view?

• What was the author’s argument for [X]? They claimed [X] on pg. [y] but didn’t argue for it. OR They said, “[quote],” but how does that support the claim for [X]?

• If [author] is correct, does that mean that people lack free will?

• [Author] argued that [X] was true about moral psychology. Could this claim be tested in an experiment like...?

These questions are due 30 mintues before the first class meeting of the week (so that I can review them before class begins). Before the next class meeting, everyone’s questions will be complied and shared (anonymously) on Blackboard for the whole class to review before the next class meeting.

Student-Lead Discussions - Two: 15% Each

Each week (except when noted on the schedule due to a shortened week), two to three students will lead discussion at the end of the week. Students are required to lead discussion twice in the term, once in the first half of the term and once in the second.

The procedure for leading discussion is as follows:

• Sign up for two weeks on Blackboard.

• On your week to lead discussion:
  1. Review all the questions submitted by your fellow students.
  2. Write a short response (200-400 words) to something from the week’s readings, submitted questions, discussion from earlier in the week, or independent but related research.
  3. Prepare at least two discussion questions.
  4. Submit (2) & (3) to Prof. Robinson by Wednesday at 5:00 pm on Blackboard.
  5. Prof. Robinson will provide feedback on (2) & (3) on Wednesday or Thursday. You are welcomed and encouraged to make an appointment to discuss and receive feedback in person.
  6. Review and revise (2) & (3) based on Prof. Robinson’s feedback provided.
7. Lead the class discussion for 15-20 minutes based on your revised short response and/or discussion questions.

8. Hand in a hard copy of your short response writing and discussion questions immediately after leading discussion.

Your short response writing and the discussion can be about (almost) anything you’d like to talk about relating to the readings or topic of the week. There are a variety of formats that these can take, such as but not limited to: (1) presenting a brief criticism of one or more of the readings; (2) raising a question(s) the readings or discussion raised for you; (3) presenting a new connection between the readings (other than one stated by the professor during class); (4) applying the readings or discussion to another course-relevant topic; (5) response to an objection raised in class; (6) your personal view (with supporting reasons) on a topic/issue raised in the readings or discussion. These response papers should not be primarily summaries of the readings.

The grade for the assignment will be split equally between the final version of your discussion materials (short response writing and questions) and how well you facilitate the discussion.

Notes on policies for this assignment:

- A third student is only allowed when all other weeks have already filled with at least two students.

- Do not delete anyone else’s name from the form. Changes are tracked and doing so will result in a significant grade reduction for at least one discussion grade.

- For appointments, it is best to schedule a meeting using Starfish to ensure that you’re not left waiting on another student speaking with me during my office hours.

- Once the schedule is set, students cannot change weeks except in consultation with Prof. Robinson due to illness or some other kind of excused absence.

- It is the responsibility of everyone (not just the student leading the discussion) to keep the dialogue respectful.

**Term Paper/Project - 55% Total (Approval and Proposal/Outline - 7%; Final Paper/Project - 35%)**

- Proposal and Outline: 10%
- Rough Draft: 10%
- Final Draft 10%

There will be one term paper, due on the date of the final.

There are two options for this paper/project:

1. A theoretical/philosophical paper (2500-3000 words) that argues for (or against) a particular normative claim and engages with the relevant scientific literature (including outside research beyond assigned readings),

3. An audio or video podcast. This can be done independently or with a partner. The required length depends upon the format: audio podcasts will be longer, while video podcasts can be shorter if visual effects (animations, for instance) are used. The rough guideline is approximately 15-20 minutes for audio podcasts or 10-12 minutes for video (per student). A script must be written beforehand and (at least mostly) followed during the podcast. The script and the audio or video must be submitted to Blackboard (links to Youtube are acceptable).

For all options, topics must first be approved by the instructor by email or verbally at a meeting during office hours. Then detailed proposals or outlines are required and due (submitted via Blackboard) by the date listed above. Topic approval and the detailed proposal or outline are worth 7% of the overall course grade.

The final paper/project/podcast are to be submitted via Blackboard. Papers/scripts will be subject to an automated plagiarism checker (Turnitin or similar). Plagiarism will result at minimum in zero credit for the assignment. Each student is individually responsible for ensuring the paper/project/podcast is successfully submitted. The final

**Course Policies**

**Attendance and Participation**

Since philosophy is hard and much of the course will be discussion based, attendance is necessary for learning. It is your responsibility to be in class. Attendance may be taken regularly at the beginning of class. You may miss up to five class days without penalty, but on the sixth missed day your overall grade in the course may be reduced by one-half grade for each day missed beyond the fifth. Please provide documentation if absences are due to legitimate reasons. Falsifying the attendance of another student by signing in for them carries the penalty of immediate course failure. (See Academic Misconduct below.) I do not provide make-up lectures for students who were absent from class. (If, however, a student has problems understanding certain points about material covered during an absence, I will help by answering specific questions.) I will review material from an excused absence, after the student has obtained notes from a classmate and if the student has clearly read the assignment first.

Participation includes being in class on time, having the assigned text for the day, and being attentive in class. Simply being physically present in class is not sufficient to attain a passing attendance grade. As such, it is necessary to demonstrate some form of active engagement in the learning process.

Besides being on time, and silencing cell phones, I must stress the importance of everyone allowing for an open forum for discussion, so that we are all free to speak our minds on any topic without condemnation or hostility. Our job is to examine and evaluate ideas, not each other.

**Reading Assignments**

The schedule for reading assignments is provided below. They are to be read prior to that day’s class. Students are required to
always bring the assigned reading to class. Students are required to have either a printed copy or a means of accessing the PDF in class. Please download them before class.

**Plagiarism/Cheating**

Plagiarism on an exam or dialogue will result in no credit for the assignment and a report to the department chair and dean(s). Repeated plagiarism on more than one assignment can result in an automatic F for the course. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, paraphrasing or directly quoting published or unpublished work(s), words, ideas, or data by another person (including online resources) without documentation, citation, or acknowledgement. The submission of material(s) prepared by another person(s) or agency that sell academic papers or other material(s) also constitutes plagiarism. In the context of this course, plagiarism also includes, but is not limited to, quoting from an assigned reading on an exam without putting it in quotation marks.

Students must write their exams separately, independently, and without outside assistance. It is each student’s responsibility to ensure that their answers on the exam are her/his own alone and do not match those of another student either from the same class, another section, or a previous semester. It is each student’s responsibility to ensure that his or her submitted work adheres the university’s policy on plagiarism and cheating. If you need help understanding this policy or what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me.

**Office Hours**

My office hours are listed above. My door is open and I highly encourage students to come see me. My job is to help you succeed, and one of the best times I can do that is during office hours. So please come see me. If my office hours don’t work for you, let me know and something can be arranged.

**Email**

I am available by email and you are welcome to contact me with questions. I generally respond the same day. However, you should think of any email to me as something formal, instead of as a casual email to a friend. You should include a subject, a salutation, and your name. I advise you read the following as well: [http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor](http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor).
Cell Phones, Computers, & Tape Recorders

(1) You may not use your phone during class (for calling or texting). (2) Unless otherwise stated, you may not use a computer (or tablet) in class, including to take notes or to view an assigned online reading. Studies have shown usage of computers in class leads to more distraction and lower grades for you and those around you and that you learn more by taking handwritten notes. (3) You may only record (audio or video) class sessions if you obtain my permission beforehand.

Deadlines

All assignments must be turned in by the date and time specified. I do not accept late work unless class was missed for a documented emergency that arose without time for you to submit your work in advance. If you know that you will miss a class session prior to that session, you will need to submit your assignment in advance.

Grades

A (100-90): Outstanding. The student displays thorough mastery of all material and genuine engagement with the subject matter. This grade is reserved for those individuals who attain the highest levels of excellence in thought and expression. Exceptionally good writing.

B (80-89): Good. The student displays accurate understanding of the bulk of material. Writing is clear and free of mechanical errors.

C (70-79): Adequate. The student displays basic grasp of roughly three fourths of the course material. There may arise occasional misunderstanding or inaccuracy. Writing is acceptable.
D (60-69): Marginal. The student displays a grasp of the course material that deserves credit. Quality of apprehension of material indicates lack of effort and/or lack of aptitude.

F (<60): Unacceptable. The student displays virtually no grasp of the course material.

**Names and Pronouns**

If you prefer to be referred to by a different name or with a different pronoun, please let the instructor know. Please contact the instructor if you have any questions or concerns.

**Changes to Syllabi**

The standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be by announcement in class, by email notice, and by changes to this syllabus posted on Blackboard.

**UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

**Six Drop Policy**

The following provision does not apply to students with Texas public college or university credits prior to Fall 2007. The Texas Senate Bill 1231 specifies the number of course drops allowed to a student without penalty. After a student has dropped six courses, a grade of QF will normally be recorded for each subsequent drop. Additional information on Senate Bill 1231 is available at the Registrar’s Office at (361) 593-2811 and at Academic Procedure: Drop Policy.

**Students with Disabilities**

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 accommodations of their disability. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as early as possible in the term at (361) 593-2904. DRC is located in the Life Service and Wellness building at 1210 Retama Drive.

**Classroom Conduct Expectations**

Students are referred to the Student Code of Conduct section of the Student Handbook. Students are expected to assume individual responsibility for maintaining a productive learning environment and conduct themselves with the highest regard for response and consideration of others. Ongoing or single behaviors considered distracting will be addressed by the faculty member initially, but if the behavior becomes excessive and the student refuses to respond to the faculty member’s efforts, the issue will be referred to the Dean of Students. In the case of serious disruptive behavior in a classroom, the instructor will first request compliance from the student and if the student fails to comply, the instructor has the authority to ask the student to leave the classroom. The student is expected to comply with the instructor’s request and may subsequently contest this action using procedures established by the department. If the student fails to leave after being directed to do so, assistance may be obtained from other university personnel, including the University Police Department. The incident shall be handled as an academic misconduct matter using established
departmental procedures for academic misconduct to determine if the student should be allowed to return to the classroom.

**Academic Misconduct**

Students are expected to adhere to the highest academic standards of behavior and personal conduct in this course and all other courses. Students who engage in academic misconduct are subject to University disciplinary procedures. Students are expected to be familiar with the current Student Handbook, especially the section on academic misconduct, which discusses conduct expectations and academic dishonesty rules. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:

1. **Cheating:** deception in which the student misrepresents that he/she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he/she has not mastered; giving or receiving aid unauthorized by the professor on assignments or examinations.
2. **Aid of academic dishonesty:** Intentionally facilitating any act of academic dishonesty. Tampering with grades or taking part in obtaining or distributing any part of a scheduled test.
3. **Fabrication:** use of invented information or falsified research.
4. **Plagiarism:** unacknowledged quotation, and/or paraphrase of someone else’s work, ideas, or data as one’s own in work submitted for credit. Failure to identify information or essays from the internet and submitting them as one’s own work also constitutes plagiarism. Please be aware that the University subscribes to the Turnitin plagiarism detection service. Your paper may be submitted to this service at the discretion of the instructor.
5. **Lying:** deliberate falsification with the intent to deceive in written or verbal form as it applies to an academic submission.
6. **Bribery:** providing, offering or taking rewards in exchange for a grade, an assignment, or the aid of academic dishonesty.
7. **Threat:** an attempt to intimidate a student, staff or faculty member for the purpose of receiving an unearned grade or in an effort to prevent reporting of an Honor Code violation.

Other forms of academic misconduct include but are not limited to:

1. **Failure to follow published departmental guidelines, professor’s syllabi, and other posted academic policies in place for the orderly and efficient instruction of classes, including laboratories, and use of academic resources or equipment.**
2. **Unauthorized possession of examinations, reserved library materials, laboratory materials or other course related materials.**
3. **Failure to follow the instructor or proctor’s test-taking instructions, including but not limited to not setting aside notes, books or study guides while the test is in progress, failing to sit in designated locations and/or leaving the classroom/test site without permission during a test.**
4. **Prevention of the convening, continuation or orderly conduct of any class, lab or class activity. Engaging in conduct that interferes with or disrupts university teaching, research or class activities such as making loud and distracting noises, repeatedly answering cell phones/text messaging or allowing pagers to beep, exhibiting erratic or irrational behavior, persisting in speaking without being recognized, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom or test site without authorization, and making physical threats or verbal insults to the faculty member, or other students and staff.**
5. **Falsification of student transcript or other academic records; or unauthorized access to academic computer records.**
6. Nondisclosure or misrepresentation in filling out applications or other university records.

7. Any action which may be deemed as unprofessional or inappropriate in the professional community of the discipline being studied.

Harassment /Discrimination

Texas A&M University-Kingsville does not tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation (or any other illegal basis) and will investigate all complaints that indicate sexual harassment, harassment, or discrimination may have occurred. Sexual harassment and sexual assault are types of sex discrimination. Such sexual misconduct is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any member of the university community violating this policy will be subject to disciplinary action. A person who believes he/she has been the victim of sexual harassment or unlawful discrimination may pursue either the informal or the formal complaint resolution procedure. A complaint may be initially made to the Office of Compliance at (361) 593-4758, complainant’s immediate supervisor, a department head, a supervisory employee, or the Dean of Students at (361) 593-3606 or the Office of Compliance at (361) 593-4758. Regardless of who the complaint is filed with, the Compliance Office will be notified of the complaint so it can be investigated.