

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2011-12

Philosophy 3992G: Moral Psychology

Winter Term

Wednesday 11.30am-12.30pm

Classroom: UCC-65

Friday 10.30am-12.30pm

Classroom: UCC-60

Instructor: Chloë FitzGerald

Office: TBA

Office Hours: Thursday 10.30am-12.30pm

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DESCRIPTION

Moral psychology is the study of the human capacity for moral thought and behaviour. How do human beings behave morally? What enables them to do so? This field is interdisciplinary, with input from philosophers, psychologists, and cognitive scientists. In this course, we will deal primarily, though not exclusively, with contributions by philosophers to contemporary debates in moral psychology. Specific topics may include the roles that reason and emotion play in moral decision-making, whether human beings can be autonomous, the relevance of “moral luck,” limitations posed by self-deception and weakness of will, whether virtue is attainable for us, and our capacity for altruism. In addition to exploring many of these issues, we will consider how plausible the moral psychologies are of competing ethical theories, such as Kantianism, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics.

TEXTS

Moral Psychology: Historical and Contemporary Readings, (Thomas Nadelhoffer, Eddy Nahmias & Shaun Nichols, eds.), Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell (2010)

Supplementary readings will be available online.

OBJECTIVES

1. Introduce students to the major contemporary debates arising in moral psychology.
2. Enable students to develop a sophisticated understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of current research in moral psychology.
3. Enable students to use issues in moral psychology as tools for evaluating ethical theories.
4. Develop the students' critical reading and writing skills, including skills in reading and writing about work in the empirical sciences that is relevant to moral psychology.
5. Develop the students' ability to argue for philosophical positions and discuss research from other disciplines from a philosophical perspective.
6. Develop the students' confidence and skills in oral presentation.

REQUIREMENTS

15% **Class participation.** This includes reading the required texts each week and actively participating in class discussions and activities.

15% **Presentation.** Each student will give a short presentation on a topic.

30% **Short paper.** One short expository paper of 1,500 words on one out of a selection of three topics will be due half-way through the course. Papers that are late will be penalised at 5% per day, up to a maximum 50% penalty.

40% **Longer paper.** A longer argumentative paper of 3,000 words on one out of a selection of six questions will be due in the last class. No work will be accepted after the last day of classes.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.