

MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

PSYC 377 FALL 2025

Course website: <https://moodle.macalester.edu/course/view.php?id=6380>

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Office: OLRI 327 (phone: 696-6112) Student hours: Tue 3-4 PM and Wed 9-10 AM (and by appointment!)

COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Hello and welcome to Moral Psychology! I'm excited to have you in class this semester.

This course will explore fundamental questions of moral psychology. Which kinds of behaviors do we view as immoral? How are moral judgments shaped by intuition, emotion, and reasoning? Is climate change a moral issue? What are the developmental and evolutionary origins of moral judgments? When and why do we blame others? How do we make inferences about others' moral character? In this course, we will gain insight into these topics, considering perspectives from social, developmental, evolutionary, and political psychology.

Readings for the course consist of primary literature (theoretical and empirical journal articles), which are on Moodle. We'll typically read around two articles for each class period, and I try to keep the reading load under 50 pages per week.

I have designed the structure and assignments of this course to meet several goals:

- To build your skills in examining moral behavior from a social scientific perspective. This includes identifying research hypotheses, understanding the relationship between hypotheses and empirical data, considering alternative explanations, and connecting theories to applied or real-world patterns of behavior.
- To give you a space to engage deeply with course material, to discuss and defend your ideas, and to respectfully critique and debate others' ideas.
- To help you become a more effective argumentative writer. This includes learning how to read and understand primary scientific literature, to construct arguments that relate to prior literature, and to communicate your ideas to different audiences.
- To build your skills in communicating your ideas in different modes (online forums, verbal presentations) and in different formats or degrees of formality (personal reflection, scientific writing).
- To help you reflect on your own goals, learning, and growth.

STRUCTURE OF CLASSES

This is a discussion-based class, so prepare to do lots of discussing! To give you a chance to discuss the material in different ways, we'll have a mix of small-group and whole-class discussion time. Tuesdays will often include some amount of lecture, in addition to discussion. Thursdays will typically be entirely discussion-based days.

Each of you will facilitate the discussion (along with a partner) once during the semester. Typically, these student-led presentations will take place on Thursdays.

FLEXIBILITY POLICIES

I know that life sometimes interferes with deadlines, so I provide you with five “flexibility tokens” that allow you to miss some deadlines without penalty. See the ‘Course Grade’ section later in this document for more information.

If you are sick and cannot come to class, that's okay! But please be sure to let me know, in advance, that you won't be able to make it to class.

You must let me know in advance about any illness-related absence or extension that you need. I am very willing to be flexible, but I need to know about your circumstances prior to missing any classes/deadlines.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND WELL-BEING

I am committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment where all students can fully participate and succeed. I will post all assignments to Moodle at least two weeks before they are due, and I will post pdfs of all slides.

If you have a disability that may affect your learning in this course, please contact Shammah Bermudez in Disability Resources (disabilityservices@macalester.edu). Please also email me so we can work together to ensure your accommodations and needs are being met. It is important for this to happen as early in the semester as possible, to ensure that your accommodations are implemented early on. Further information about disability services and accommodations is available at: <http://www.macalester.edu/disability-resources>

I encourage you to make your well-being a priority throughout this and every semester. Taking care of yourself will help you more fully engage in and benefit from your academic experience. Beyond being a student, you are a human being carrying your own experiences, thoughts, emotions, and identities with you. It is important to acknowledge any stressors you may be facing, which can be mental, emotional, physical, cultural, financial, etc., and how they can have an impact on your academic experience. I encourage you to remember that sleeping, moving your body, and connecting with others can be strategies to help you increase your well-being and remain resilient. If you are having difficulties maintaining your well-being, please don't hesitate to reach out to me or to find support from reach out to one of the resources listed on Macalester's [Health and Wellness Resource guide](#).

PLAGIARISM AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USE POLICY

Plagiarism is the presentation of others' thoughts, ideas, or words as your own. Plagiarism can be blatant, such as directly copying other's words, or it can be subtle, such as failing to properly cite another's ideas. If you are unsure about citations, wording, or similarity of structure, please meet with me to discuss these issues; I can help you make sure that you are citing and paraphrasing appropriately. If I have any reason to suspect your integrity in this class, I will contact you. After that meeting, I will determine what further steps are appropriate, and I may refer you to the Director of Academic Programs, who will determine additional consequences. If you have questions, please contact me or visit Macalester's [academic integrity page](#).

In this course, you may use AI tools (such as ChatGPT) to help you generate ideas and to brainstorm. For example, you might decide to use it to help brainstorm ideas or discover relevant articles for your research paper. However, you should note that the material generated by these tools may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Beware that overuse of AI may stifle your own independent thinking and creativity, and use any tools (for generating text, code, video, audio, images, or translation) wisely and carefully. **You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own.** If you include material—including both *ideas* and *language*—generated by an AI program, you must cite it like any other reference material, both in this course and at Macalester College in general. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENTS

**** Weekly Reading Responses ****

You will submit a two-part reading response each week: an initial reading response at the beginning of the week, plus a follow-up response at the end of the week.

Initial responses: are 350+ words and are due each Monday, beginning Mon 9/8 (focusing on the readings for the week of 9/8). The goal is to engage deeply and critically with the week's readings. This can include:

- discussing how the readings relate to current (or historical) events/issues or to practical applications
- putting multiple articles in conversation with each other — e.g., synthesizing ideas/claims across multiple readings from the week (this can also include incorporating readings from previous weeks)
- offering fruitful future research ideas or questions — e.g., what sort of research would be helpful to conduct next and what might you expect it to find (and why)?
- discussing merits and critiques of the work (e.g., regarding methodology, interpretations, claims, etc.)

Your responses must address at least two readings. It's often helpful to include a small amount of summary, which can help contextualize your response; but summarizing is not your primary goal here.

Follow-up responses: are 200+ words and are due each Friday, beginning Fri 9/12. I encourage you adopt a more reflective or personal approach in your follow-up responses. You can discuss things like:

- how you might apply ideas from this week into your own life
- your big-picture takeaways from the week — e.g., what was most noteworthy, most hopeful, most concerning, etc.
- your reactions to ideas that came up during the week's discussions, or other ideas you've had since your initial response

No reading response is required for the week you lead the discussion, and you may skip a reading response in one other week of your choosing.

During the weeks of 10/13, 11/24, and 12/1 (the weeks of Fall Break, Thanksgiving Break, and the last full week of the semester), you'll submit an initial reading response, but you don't need to submit a follow-up response.

Submitting your responses. I will share a Google Doc with you early in the semester. Please add each week's reading responses to this Google Doc **and** to the corresponding Moodle forum for that week. I know this is a little cumbersome, but there's a reason for this: having your responses in a Google Doc is the easiest way for me to provide occasional feedback, and having your responses on Moodle is the easiest way for your peers to see everyone else's contributions.

Post initial 350+ word reading response by 8 PM every Monday;

Post 200+ word follow-up response (as a reply to your initial reading response) by 8 PM every Friday

Please post your responses in your shared Google Doc **and** on Moodle

**** Participation ****

I expect you to be an active participant in class! This means doing the readings before class, listening carefully to your classmates, and sharing your ideas, questions, and interpretations in class.

***** Class Presentation and Discussion Facilitation *****

Once during the semester, you and a partner will present to the class and facilitate the discussion. The format for doing so is flexible, including some combination of (a) identifying the major themes from the reading responses and organizing the discussion accordingly; (b) synthesizing the claims from the set of readings; (c) posing questions regarding interpretations

of data/theory, or how data/theory might relate to other questions; (d) having the class participate in an activity or debate related to the week's topic. Your presentation must incorporate one or two additional articles beyond those on the reading list, and you must meet with me at least one week in advance to discuss your articles and plans for your presentation.

**** Morality Reflection paper **** — due Fri 10/10 by 8 PM

For this assignment, you will identify a particular moral issue that's important to you, and you'll pay attention to discussions of this issue in/by various different public sources. Over the course of about 10 days, you'll record details about how this issue gets discussed or presented (e.g., by politicians, activists, celebrities, corporations, etc.) in sources that align with your own view, as well as in sources that oppose your view. Then you'll submit a reflection paper that summarizes your experience and observations, reflects on the ways that different sources discuss this issue, and offers suggestions for respectful and productive strategies for engaging with this issue.

**** Research Paper, Peer Review, and Presentation ****

You will write a 10-12 page APA-style research paper on a topic of your choice within the field of moral psychology. Your paper may take one of two approaches: (1) a Research Review, in which you review and synthesize research and defend a thesis based on this research; (2) a Research Proposal, in which you propose a study (or studies) that would extend the research on your topic, and you describe your predicted results and their implications. Additional details regarding this assignment will be provided in class.

As part of this assignment, you will also engage in a peer review process, providing feedback to two of your peers (consequently, you will receive feedback from two peers). This serves to improve your own and your peers' writing and to familiarize you with the peer-review process, which is a central part of scientific writing.

On Thu 12/4 or Tue 12/9, you will give a brief (5-7 minute) presentation of your project, with a 5-minute Q&A.

Due dates:

Topic (Mon 9/29), Annotated Bibliography (Wed 10/15), Draft (Wed 11/12),
Peer review (Wed 11/19), Presentations (Thu 12/4 and Tue 12/9), Final paper (Sun 12/14)

**** Self-Assessments ****

At various times throughout the semester, you will evaluate your own goals, learning, and areas for continued growth.

COURSE GRADE: CONTRACT FOR A B AND FINAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

Throughout the semester, I will assess your work and give you a lot of feedback! But I won't assign grades. We'll use a two-part process for determining final grades: Contract For a B, plus a final self-assessment. Under Contract For a B, if you fulfill various expectations that I have for you throughout the course (described below), you are guaranteed to earn at least a B as your course grade. Then, at the end of the semester, you'll complete a final self-assessment in which you reflect on your work in the course and tell me what grade you think you have earned. Your self-assessed final grade will be the grade you receive in the course (more information on this below).

Contract For a B expectations:

- 1. Attendance:** Be present, on-time, and prepared for class. I understand that you may need to miss class occasionally. If you miss an excessive amount, though, you will risk going off-contract.
- 2. Engagement:** Be an active and engaged member of our class community, including participating in class discussions, asking questions, and allowing space for others to participate and ask questions.
- 3. Completing Work:** Submit all assignments, on time and fully complete. This includes your weekly reading responses (initial and follow-up responses), your climate change reflection, and all components of your research paper. Late assignments will only be accepted when accompanied by a flexibility token.
- 4. Rewriting and Responding to Feedback:** The final version of your research paper should show evidence of substantial rewriting and incorporation of the feedback you receive from me and from your peers.
- 5. Editing:** In final drafts of your writing, your work will be free from errors. Consider getting editing help from peers and the MAX center.
- 6. Self-reflection:** In the various self-assessments that you complete throughout the course, you will show evidence of thoughtful and honest reflection about your own goals, effort, and growth.
- 7. Awareness:** Keep track of your progress in the course; keep track of whether you are staying on the contract for B. If you are unsure of your progress or status, check in with me.

Flexibility tokens. You have five flexibility tokens, each of which may be used for any reason to provide a 48-hour extension on an assignment. Please tell me that you're using a token, but you don't need to tell me why you're using it. You may use more than one token for a given assignment (e.g., two tokens for a 96-hour extension), but I urge you not to do this. If a late submission is accompanied by a flexibility token, then you remain on-contract. If your tokens are all gone and you need additional extensions, please reach out and I will do my best to help. **You may not use flexibility tokens on your class facilitation, research presentation, or final paper.**

Final self-assessment

At the end of the semester, after you've submitted all assignments, you'll complete a final self-assessment. You'll reflect on the totality of your work from the semester and you'll indicate the grade you think you have earned in the course. If you have met all the Contract For a B expectations and remain on-contract, this is the grade you will receive in the course. (Note that I reserve the right to adjust your grade — either up or down — if my assessment of your work is quite different from the grade you indicate).

Final Conference

We will have a final conference together sometime during the week of 12/15. During this conference, we'll discuss your final paper and your final self-assessment.

Off-Contract Grades

If you go off-contract, your final grade will be determined more traditionally, with the following percentages: 40% Reading responses and participation; 40% final paper; 10% climate change reflection; 10% class facilitation

TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

* indicates a student-led presentation for that topic/week

Week of 9/1 (week 1): Moral Decline — no reading response this week

For Thursday:

Mastroianni, A.M., Gilbert, D.T. (2023). The illusion of moral decline. *Nature*, 618, 782–789.

Week of 9/8 (week 2): Moral Conviction and Moral Concern

For Tuesday:

Skitka, L. J., Hanson, B. E., Morgan, G. S., & Wisneski, D. C. (2021). The psychology of moral conviction. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 72, 347-366.

For Thursday:

Skitka, L. J., Hanson, B. E., Washburn, A. N., & Mueller, A. B. (2018). Moral and religious convictions: Are they the same or different things? *PLoS One*, 13(6), e0199311.

Waytz, A., Iyer, R., Young, L., Haidt, J., & Graham, J. (2019). Ideological differences in the expanse of the moral circle. *Nature Communications*, 10, 1-12.

Week of 9/15 (week 3): Moral Domains and Politics

For Tuesday:

Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 1029-1046.

Schein, C. & Gray, K. (2015). The unifying moral dyad: Liberals and conservatives share the same harm-based moral template. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41, 1147-1163.

For Thursday:

Wright, J. C. & Baril, G. (2011). The role of cognitive resources in determining our moral intuitions: Are we all liberals at heart? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47, 1007-1012.

Van Boven, L., Ramos, J., Montal-Rosenberg, R., Kogut, T., Sherman, D. K., & Slovic, P. (2019). It depends: Partisan evaluation of conditional probability importance. *Cognition*, 188, 51–63.

***Week of 9/22 (week 4): Intuitionism, Emotion, and Dual Processes**

For Tuesday:

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

Guglielmo, S. (2018). Unfounded dumbfounding: How harm and purity undermine evidence for moral dumbfounding. *Cognition*, 170, 334-337.

Ask, K. & Pina, A. (2011). On being angry and punitive: How anger alters perception of criminal intent. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2, 494-499.

For Thursday:

Greene, J. D., Sommerville, R. B., Nystrom, L. E., Darley, J. M., & Cohen, J. D. (2001). An fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in moral judgment. *Science*, 293, 2105-2108.

Koenigs, M., Young, L., Adolphs, R., Tranel, D., Cushman, F., Hauser, M., & Damasio, A. (2007). Damage to the prefrontal cortex increases utilitarian moral judgements. *Nature*, 446, 908-911.

Gleichgerrcht, E., & Young, L. (2013). Low levels of empathic concern predict utilitarian moral judgment. *PLoS One*, 8, e60418.

** Research Topic paragraph due Monday 9/30 by 8 PM**

Email me a paragraph w/ description of topic you want to examine in your research paper

*Week of 9/29 (week 5): Moral Licensing and Hypocrisy

For Tuesday:

Merritt, A. C., Effron, D. A., & Monin, B. (2010). Moral self-licensing: When being good frees us to be bad. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4/5, 344-357.

Cascio, J., & Plant, E. A. (2015). Prospective moral licensing: Does anticipating doing good later allow you to be bad now? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 56, 110-116.

For Thursday:

Tiefenbeck, V., Staake, T., Roth, K., & Sachs, O. (2013). For better or for worse? Empirical evidence of moral licensing in a behavioral energy conservation campaign. *Energy Policy*, 57, 160-171.

Kreps, T. A., Laurin, K., & Merritt, A. C. (2017). Hypocritical flip-flop, or courageous evolution? When leaders change their moral minds. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 113, 730-752.

*Week of 10/6 (week 6): Climate Change

For Tuesday:

Markowitz, E. M. & Shariff, A. F. (2012). Climate change and moral judgement. *Nature Climate Change*, 2, 243-247.

Gifford, R. (2011). The dragons of inaction: Psychological barriers that limit climate change mitigation and adaptation. *American Psychologist*, 66, 290-302.

For Thursday:

Gardiner, S. M. (2010). Ethics and climate change: an introduction. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*,), 54-66.

Atkinson, Q. D., & Jacquet, J. (2022). Challenging the idea that humans are not designed to solve climate change. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 17, 619-630.

** Morality Reflection paper due Friday 10/10 by 8 PM**

Share a Google Doc with me. Please give your file this filename: Lastname_Reflection

Week of 10/13 (week 7): Intergroup Attitudes and Polarization — no follow-up reading response this week

For Tuesday:

Brewer, M. B., & Pierce, K. P. (2005). Social identity complexity and outgroup tolerance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31, 428-437.

Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22, 129-146.

** Annotated Bibliography due Wed 10/16 by 8 PM **

Share a Google Doc with me. Please give your file this filename: Lastname_Bibliography

*Week of 10/20 (week 8): Outcomes, Mental States, and Accountability

For Tuesday:

Cushman, F., Dreber, A., Wang, Y., & Costa, J. (2009). Accidental outcomes guide punishment in a “trembling hand” game. *PLoS One*, 4, e6699.

For Thursday:

Feinberg, M., Fang, R., Liu, S., & Peng, K. (2019). A world of blame to go around: cross-cultural determinants of responsibility and punishment judgments. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 45, 634-651.

Hirschfeld-Kroen, J. et al. (2021). When my wrongs are worse than yours: Behavioral and neural asymmetries in first-person and third-person perspectives of accidental harms. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 94.

Week of 10/27 (week 9): Moral Character and Identity*For Tuesday:**

Tannenbaum, D., Uhlmann, E. L., & Diermeier, D. (2011). Moral signals, public outrage, and immaterial harms. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47, 1249-1254.

Uhlmann, E. L., Zhu, L., & Diermeier, D. (2014). When actions speak volumes: The role of inferences about moral character in outrage over racial bigotry. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 44, 23-29.

For Thursday:

Inbar, Y., Pizarro, D. A., & Cushman, F. (2012). Benefiting from misfortune: When harmless actions are judged to be morally blameworthy. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38, 52-62.

Strohminger, N. & Nichols, S. (2015). Neurodegeneration and identity. *Psychological Science*, 26, 1469-1479.

Week of 11/3 (week 10): Development & Altruism*For Tuesday:**

Hepach, R., Vaish, A., & Tomasello, M. (2012). Young children are intrinsically motivated to see others helped. *Psychological Science*, 23, 967-972.

Aknin, L. B., Hamlin, J. K., & Dunn, E. W. (2012). Giving leads to happiness in young children. *PLoS One*, 7, e39211.

Hamlin, J. K., Wynn, K., & Bloom, P. (2007). Social evaluation by preverbal infants. *Nature*, 405, 557-560.

For Thursday:

Fehr, E., Bernhard, H., & Rockenbach, B. (2008). Egalitarianism in young children. *Nature*, 454, 1079-1083.

Schäfer, M., Haun, B. M., & Tomasello, M. (2015). Fair is not fair everywhere. *Psychological Science*, 26, 1252-1260.

Week of 11/10 (week 11): Social (in)Justice: Sexism, Racism, Protest*For Tuesday:**

Hodson, G., & MacInnis, C. C. (2017). Can left-right differences in abortion support be explained by sexism? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 104, 118-121.

Monroe, A. E., Wyngaarden III, J. B., & Plant, E. A. (2021). "They should have followed the rules": Trade-offs between fairness and authority values predict judgments of social justice protests. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 12, 471-478.

For Thursday:

Cooley, E., Lei, R., Brown-Iannuzzi, J., & Ellerkamp, T. (2019). Personal prejudice, other guilt: Explicit prejudice toward Black people predicts guilty verdicts for White officers who kill Black men. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 45, 754-766.

Roberts, D. E. (1995). Race and the new reproduction. *Hastings Law Journal*, 47, 935-949.

** Draft of Research Paper due Wed 11/12 by 8 PM **

Share a Google Doc with me. Please give your file this filename: Lastname_Draft

Week of 11/17 (week 12): Artificial Intelligence*For Tuesday:**

Coekelbergh, M. (2010). Moral appearances: Emotions, robots, and human morality. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 12, 235-241.

Lin, P., Bekey, G., & Abney, K. (2009). Robots in war: Issues of risk and ethics. *Ethics and Robotics*, 49-67.

Sharkey, A. & Sharkey, N. (2012). Granny and the robots: Ethical issues in robot care for the elderly. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 14, 27-40.

For Thursday:

Bonnefon, J. F., Shariff, A., & Rahwan, I. (2016). The social dilemma of autonomous vehicles. *Science*, 352, 1573-1576.

Awad, E., Dsouza, S., Kim, R., Schulz, J., Henrich, J., Shariff, A., ... & Rahwan, I. (2018). The moral machine experiment. *Nature*, 563, 59-64.

Waytz, A., Heafner, J., & Epley, N. (2014). The mind in the machine: Anthropomorphism increases trust in an autonomous vehicle. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 52, 113-117.

** Peer Review Feedback due Wed 11/19 by 8 PM **

Email files to me. Please name files: Lastname_Comments1.docx and Lastname_Comments2.docx

Week of 11/24 (week 13): Blame and Outrage — no follow-up reading response this week**For Tuesday:**

Malle, B. F., Guglielmo, S., & Monroe, A. E. (2014). A theory of blame. *Psychological Inquiry*, 25, 147-186.

Malle, B. F., Guglielmo, S., Voiklis, J., & Monroe, A. E. (2022). Cognitive blame is socially shaped. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*.

Crockett, M. J. (2017). Moral outrage in the digital age. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1, 769-771.

Week of 12/1 (week 14): The Future (Tue 12/2) — no follow-up reading response this week**For Tuesday:**

MacAskill, W. (2022). [The case for Longtermism](#). *New York Times*.

Syropoulos, S., Law, K. F., & Young, L. (2023). Caring for future generations: Longtermism and the moral standing of future people.

Research Presentations on Thu 12/4 and Tue 12/9

** Final, Revised Research Paper due Sun 12/14 by 8 PM **

Upload .docx to Moodle. Please name file: Lastname_Final.docx

** Final Self-assessment due Sun 12/14 by 8 PM **

** Final Conference with Steve during week of 12/15 **