

PHIL114b: Abnormal Moral Psychology
Spring 2022 – T 9-11:50am

Instructor:

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Office Hours: Mondays and Thursdays, 12-1:30pm or by appointment

Course Description: Philosophical theorizing in moral psychology often prioritizes psychological ideals such as virtue and rationality, though most (if not all) of us fall short of those ideals. This course will examine moral psychological phenomena from the other direction: by discussing a variety of ways in which human beings experience obstacles and failures as practical agents. This approach has the potential to yield a more nuanced understanding of the psychological predicaments we find ourselves in, and how we might guide ourselves out of them. We will begin by talking about cognitive bias and weakness of will before addressing the impact of mental disorders on practical reasoning.

Learning Goals:

1. Understand and be able to explain views about moral psychology, particularly the challenges we face as practical agents, including bias, weakness of will, addiction, and mental disorder.
2. Identify and charitably interpret arguments from the assigned texts and be able to critically assess their merits.
3. Present philosophical ideas clearly and concisely, both orally and in writing.
4. Synthesize the above skills in papers that summarize a philosophical argument, introduce possible objections, and assess whether the objections are successful.
5. Acquire the skills to effectively present philosophical material orally as well as raise and respond to questions.

Oral Communication Requirement

This class satisfies the oral communication requirement. Being an effective speaker, presenting your ideas clearly and forcefully, thinking on your feet and being able to respond to critical questions and comments are all essential components of doing philosophy well. We will develop these skills in this class. All enrolled students will be expected to watch a series of short videos on presentation techniques before presentations begin in class. Students will give two in-class presentations. For the first presentation, students will present an assigned paper and raise a few questions for discussion. The goal of this exercise is to learn how to extract and succinctly present the central argumentative arc of a philosophical paper. For the second presentation, students will present outlines of their final papers. In preparation for the second presentation, students will have the chance to implement the feedback they received after their first presentation. In addition, they will also receive valuable feedback on their plan for their final papers. For both presentations, students will also have the opportunity to participate in a short Q&A session, where they will be able to respond to questions that their peers raise. Students will get feedback both from the instructor and their peers on both presentations.

Course Materials:

All course materials will be available on the course website on LATTE.

Course Website:

This course will have a website in which I will post the syllabus, all readings and course assignments, and any supplemental readings. All students enrolled in the course should have access to this website already, but if you have any difficulties with this, let me know.

You will submit your responses to course readings on the course LATTE page, as described in more detail below.

Additionally, the course website will also have a forum, where you should feel free to post any questions you have about the course readings or class discussions. These forum posts count as a form of participation in the course, and I will reply to them regularly, schedule permitting.

Course Requirements:

1) Two presentations	30% (15% each)
2) First paper	20%
3) Final paper	30%
4) Ten responses to course readings	10% (1% each)
5) Participation	10%

1) Two presentations

At our first class meeting, students will select a paper to present on, which will dictate when they give their first presentations. The first presentation should be roughly 10 minutes in length and include a general outline of the paper in question, as well as discussion questions for the class. The second presentations (which should be of similar length) will be on the outlines of your final papers, and will be conducted during Week 13 of class. For both presentations, students will also have the opportunity to engage in a short Q&A session, where they are able to respond to questions for their peers.

2&3) Writing assignments

There are two papers that need to be handed in during the semester. The first paper must be 4-5 pages (double-spaced, 12 pt font, Times New Roman, 1" margins). The second paper must be 6-8 pages in the same format. You are welcome to either develop the ideas of your first paper in more detail or select a new topic. If you choose to select a new topic, that topic must be approved by me by Week 10.

4) Responses to course readings

In preparation for the class, you will need to post a short response to the readings for that week on LATTE (under 'Response to [assigned reading]') before 5 pm on the day before the class meets, for a total of ten posts. These responses should be short (100-150 words) and include, regarding a passage/chapter of your choice: 1. A question (explained if necessary), 2. A critique (a short paragraph), and 3. Something you liked about the reading (a sentence or two).

5) Participation

One earns a high participation grade in this course by attending class regularly, carefully preparing thoughts on the readings, and speaking in class and/or posting on the course website forums. Reading philosophy can be quite difficult, especially if you haven't done much of it before. I recommend taking notes and reading the required texts multiple times.

Grading

I will grade all assignments from this course (aside from the blog posts) anonymously. What this means is that **you should not include your name anywhere on your course assignments, but rather include your Sage ID as identifying information.** Grading anonymously is one way of correcting against certain kinds of bias, and ensuring that every student is graded fairly.

Below is a list of criteria that will be used to evaluate your papers (note that the % only give a rough indication of how important these aspects are, and that not all of the criteria will apply equally to each of the different assignments; this is not a mathematical scale):

a. Quality of ideas (50%)

Range and depth of argument; fair representation of the position of the philosopher; logic of argument; quality and/or originality of thought; appropriate sense of the complexity of the topic; appropriate awareness of opposing views.

b. Organization and Argumentation (40%)

Clarity of thesis statement in the introduction; logical and clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; unity and coherence of paragraphs; good development of arguments through supporting details and evidence.

c. Clarity, style, and grammar (10%)

Ease of readability; appropriate voice, tone, and style for the assignment; clarity of sentence structure; grammatically correct sentences; accurate spelling; careful proofreading.

If you have any questions about these policies, please feel free to ask me about them.

Credit Hours:

Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of nine hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, presentations, papers, exam preparation, etc.)

Late Work Policy

I will provide a 24-hour extension, no questions asked, if you contact me before a paper deadline and send me what you have written so far. Otherwise, late work will be graded down a third of a letter grade for each full day that it is late. In other words, if a paper were due on Monday, and you didn't contact me, handing in the paper on Tuesday would bring an A paper down to an A-, etc. If you fall behind on work for this class for whatever reason, please come talk to me so that we can figure out a plan to help you get back on track.

Excused Absences

If you have special needs, or plan to be absent from class on a particular date, please send me an e-mail (preferably at least one day in advance) to explain your situation. Otherwise I expect you to attend each and every class and take the exams as scheduled.

Class Conduct

I consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect, and I welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and

inclusive environment for every other member of the class. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Accommodations

If you have a learning or physical disability, or if you learn best utilizing a particular method, please discuss with me how I can best accommodate your learning needs. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all learning styles. I can do this most successfully if you discuss your needs with me in advance. I will maintain the confidentiality of your learning needs.

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you.

In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult [Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to [TurnItIn.com](#) software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the director of academic integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. [Citation and research assistance](#) can be found on the [university library website](#).

Note: I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including paper due dates and test dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that you can adjust your schedule. If you want to read further on any of the topics listed below, I am happy to recommend additional readings.

Reading Schedule

Section 1: Bias and Weakness of Will

1/18: Tamar Gendler – “Alief and Belief”

1/25: Tamar Gendler – “On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias”
Charles Mills – “White Ignorance”

2/1: Donald Davidson – “How is Weakness of the Will Possible?”

2/8: George Ainslie – selections from *Breakdown of Will*

Paper 1 due

2/15: Jesse Prinz – “The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments”

3/1: Jonathan Bennett – “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn”
Nomy Arpaly – “Huckleberry Finn Revisited”

Section 2: Mental Disorders

3/8: Nomy Arpaly – “How It Is Not ‘Just like Diabetes’: Mental Disorders and the Moral Psychologist”

3/15: Hanna Pickard – “Psychopathology and the Ability to do Otherwise”

3/22: Owen Flanagan – “Identity and Addiction,”
Doug McConnell – “Narrative Self-Constitution and Recovery from Addiction”

3/29: M.W. Martin – “Depression, Illness, Insight, and Identity”
with commentary from Nassir Ghaemi

4/5: Matthew Ratcliffe – “Interpreting Delusions”

4/12: **Final paper presentations**

4/26: Course wrap-up and exam review

Paper 2 due

Final exam