The Moralities of Everyday Life  
Summer, 2019

Contact Information

Instructor: Paul Bloom  
Email: paul.bloom@yale.edu  
Webpage: https://campuspress.yale.edu/paulbloom/  
Twitter: https://twitter.com/paulbloomatyale

Short Summary

This course introduces the modern science of moral thought and moral action, explored through the disciplines of cognitive science, social and developmental psychology, neuroscience, behavioral economics, and analytic philosophy. Topics include empathy and compassion in babies and young children; emotional reactions to family, friends, and strangers; the origins of prejudice and bigotry; sexuality, disgust, and purity; punishment, revenge, and forgiveness; the relationship between morality and religion. Enrollment limited. For college students only. 1 Credit.

Course Goals

How is it that we are capable of transcendent kindness—and unspeakable cruelty? How do we explain people’s strongly held opinions about abortion, gay marriage, affirmative action, eating meat, and torture? How do evolution, culture, and religion conspire to shape our moral natures? These are among the most important—and exciting—questions around, and they are the focus of this course. We will explore the modern science of moral belief and moral action, drawing upon disciplines such as cognitive science, neuroscience, economics, and philosophy. We will look at research from the lab, from the community, and from the battlefield; we will discuss babies, monkeys, and psychopaths; we will debate claims about moral differences between men and women, liberals and conservatives, Christians and Muslims. We will explore issues such as prejudice and bigotry, sexuality and purity, and punishment, revenge, and forgiveness.

The lectures and readings will be accessible to a general audience; no special background is needed. But participants should be prepared to keep up with the readings, and be comfortable thinking about and debating ideas from a variety of fields.
**About the Professor**

PAUL BLOOM is the Brooks and Suzanne Ragen Professor of Psychology and Cognitive Science at Yale University. His research explores how children and adults understand the physical and social world, with special focus on morality, religion, fiction, and art. He has won numerous awards for his research and teaching. He is past-president of the Society for Philosophy and Psychology, and co-editor of *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, one of the major journals in the field. He has written for scientific journals such as *Nature* and *Science*, and for popular outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. He is the author of five books, including *How Pleasure Works*, *Just Babies*, and, most recently, *Against Empathy*.

**About the Teaching Fellows**

MARK SHESKIN is an Assistant Professor of Social Sciences at Minerva Schools at KGI—where he teaches small discussion-based seminars via video chat, much like this course that you are taking! He received his PhD from Yale in 2013, where he was one of the teaching assistants for the original 2011 precursor of this course. His research includes studies on the origins of fairness, and his current focus is developing a video chat platform for developmental studies with parents and their children (TheChildLab.com).

You can contact him at msheskin@gmail.com

JULIA MARSHALL is a fifth-year graduate student at Yale University in the Mind and Development Lab. She studies children and adults’ moral intuitions related to obligation and third-party punishment.

You can contact her at julia.marshall@yale.edu

**Format and requirements**

This course lasts five weeks. For each week, students will watch a series of short lectures that were taped in late 2013, as part of an online course—a MOOC—on morality, along with other supplementary on-line lectures and readings. Each week, there are two meetings for online discussion, during the periods of Tuesday and Thursday, 6:00 – 8:00 PM EDT.

Although this is an online summer course, the expected workload is equivalent to a typical semester-long university class. You will watch a semester’s worth of lectures, do the same amount of readings, do about as much writing, and have roughly the same amount of contact with the instructor and the teaching fellow (actually, this course will have more one-on-one contact with the instructor than a lecture would.). All of the necessary readings/video will be available online.
## Class meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Section A (Last names TBD)</th>
<th>Section B (Last names TBD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TF Mark Sheskin</td>
<td>TF Julia Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1 - Foundations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues July 2</td>
<td>Mark’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
<td>Julia’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs July 4</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 6-7pm</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 7-8pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2 - Empathy, Concern, &amp; Hate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues July 9</td>
<td>Mark’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
<td>Julia’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs July 11</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 6-7pm</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 7-8 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3 – Universals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues July 16</td>
<td>Mark’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
<td>Julia’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs July 18</td>
<td>Mark’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
<td>Julia’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4 – Sex, Religion, &amp; Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues July 23</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 6-7pm</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 7-8 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs July 25</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 6-7pm</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 7-8 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5 – Getting Better</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues July 30</td>
<td>Mark’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
<td>Julia’s Meeting Room 6-8pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs Aug 1</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 6-7pm</td>
<td>Prof. Bloom’s Meeting Room 7-8pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Requirements

**Class Participation (30%).** Class participation is an essential part of this course. You are required to attend all classes, on time, and actively engage in the discussion. *If you miss more than two classes, you will automatically fail the course, regardless of how well you do otherwise.*

**Weekly reading responses (30%).** Prior to each Thursday’s class, you will submit a reading response. The responses will involve an integrative discussion of ideas and research, and will be about 800 words.

The reading response will be due Wednesday at 6PM.

**Take-home exam (40%).** This will be assigned in the final week of class. It is an open-book exam and will involve a series of short essays.
READINGS (these are subject to change)

WEEK 1
Foundations

Harris (2010). Science Can Answer Moral Questions; TED Talk
Haidt (2008). The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives; TED Talk
Le Guin (1973). The ones who walk away from Omelas

WEEK 2
Empathy, Concern, and Hate

Bloom (2014). Against Empathy [with commentaries and responses]
Smith (2011). Less than human [excerpts]
Manne (2014). In Ferguson and beyond: Punishing humanity
Bloom (2017). Beastly

WEEK 3
Universals

Levitt and Dubner (2009). Superfreakonomics [excerpt]
Bloom (2013). Just Babies [Chapter 1 and 3]

WEEK 4
Sex, Religion, and Politics

Bloom (2013). Just Babies [Chapters 4 and 5]
Haidt (2012). The righteous mind [excerpts]
Jost (2012). Left and right, right and wrong
Gray & Schein (2015). The myth of harmless wrongs
Bigman et al. (2019). Holding robots responsible

WEEK 5:
Getting Better

Singer (2015). The logic of effective altruism. [read responses and commentaries]
Wright (2009). Progress is not a zero-sum game; TED talk