PSYC S230: Moral Psychology

Spring 2025

1 Course information

Class schedule	T/F 3:00–4:50 pm
	J208
Instructor	Alan Jern
	Office: A202D
	Email: jern@rose-hulman.edu
Open meeting time	Thursdays 2:00–3:00 pm (on Teams)
Required book	Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (E-book acceptable)

2 Overview

Some of the greatest disagreements people have are over questions of right and wrong—questions that people generally consider to be about morality. The purpose of this course is to explore how people think about morality, and to better understand these sorts of disagreements. Some of the central questions of this course are:

- Are people naturally good?

- Are moral judgments driven more by intuition or reason?

- Do people follow consistent principles when making moral judgments and, if so, what principles are they?

- How do people judge the moral character of others?

- Are people generally honest?

- Why are people sometimes cruel?

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Provide your own thoughtful answers to many of these and related questions and support your answers with psychological evidence.

- Read a psychology research article, understand its main conclusions, and identify some of its limitations.

- Summarize and discuss a psychological study or theory with someone else.

- Identify the key theories in moral psychology, provide evidence for them, and discuss their limitations.

3 Assessment

Component	Points
Syllabus quiz	10
Online participation	170
Class participation	150
Leading discussion	100
Assignments (3)	150
Paper	230

3.1 Participation

This course will be heavily dependent on discussion. Therefore you are expected to come to class having already completed the required readings and prepared to discuss them thoughtfully.

3.1.1 Online score

To make discussions more productive, some pre-discussion of the materials will happen online through Perusall. See Moodle for details about signing up and using this site. Your online Perusall scores will be based primarily on the number of thoughtful, high-quality comments you make and the number of upvotes and responses you make to other students' comments. In general, the more thoughtful and engaged you are in the discussion, the higher your score will be.

Your score for the first reading and your two lowest scores will be dropped. Additionally, scores for readings with student discussion leaders will not count toward your online participation score (though you are still expected to do those readings and come to class prepared to discuss them.)

Note: Signing up for Perusall is required and costs $10. If you cannot pay the $10, please contact me right away.

3.1.2 In-class score

The Perusall discussions will serve as a jumping-off point for our discussions in class. Your in-class participation will be self-assigned using a rubric I will provide you. At three points in the quarter, you will use the rubric to determine what participation score you have earned for that third of the quarter. I will review these scores and may make adjustments if I feel they are off the mark. Your class participation score will be the sum of these scores.

3.2 Leading discussion

On one day, you and a couple other students will be appointed the discussion leaders. You will lead discussion for about 30 minutes of class that day. I will randomly assign everyone to a day during the first week of class. Your group will post discussion questions for the assigned reading on Moodle at least 12 hours before we are scheduled to discuss that reading in class. On the day of class, you will use these questions as the basis for a discussion of the readings.

I will post some general guidelines on Moodle for running an effective discussion that you should aim to follow. I will also post a grading rubric for leading the discussion on Moodle.

3.3 Assignments

There are three assignments throughout the quarter, each worth 50 points. The assignments will require you to think more deeply about one topic or reading from the class, in some cases perform a simple experiment, and write a short paper.

3.4 Paper

Benchmark	Points
First draft	30
Final draft	200
Total	230

I will provide you with a list of questions related to the course. You will choose one of these questions (or one of your own, with my permission) and write an essay taking a position on the question using supporting evidence from the course. More details about this assignment will be posted separately on Moodle.

3.5 Final grade

Grades will be assigned as follows.

Points	Grade
≥ 90%	A
87%–89.9%	B+
80%–86.9%	B
77%–79.9%	C+
70%–76.9%	C
67%–69.9%	D+
60%–66.9%	D
< 60%	F

4 Course policies

4.1 Late assignments

Late assignments (including the self-assigned participation scores) will receive a point penalty that doubles for each additional day they are late. Specifically:

- 1 day late: 1% deduction

- 2 days late: 2% deduction

- 3 days late: 4% deduction

- 4 days late: 8% deduction

- 5 days late: 16% deduction

- 6 days late: 32% deduction

- 7 days late: 64% deduction

- 8+ days late: No credit

An assignment counts as 1 day late as soon as the deadline for that assignment has passed. If you submit an assignment late, you do not need to notify me. Just submit the assignment on Moodle. It will be automatically timestamped and I will deduct the appropriate number of points when I grade it.

There will be no exceptions made to this late policy and no assignments will be accepted later than 7 days after their deadlines. You should plan to submit your assignments before the deadline. The purpose of this policy is that if something unexpected comes up, you can submit one or two days late with minimal penalty.

Note: The late policy does not apply to the online discussions on Perusall because the whole point of those deadlines is to prepare you for in-class discussion.

4.2 Anonymous grading

Do not include your name on anything (including file name) you submit on Moodle, unless I say otherwise. The reason for this is because I use an anonymous grading feature on Moodle that lets me grade your assignments without seeing your names. Your names are revealed after I've finished grading the assignment. I do this to keep my grading as impartial as possible. If you put your name on the assignment, it undermines the process for everyone.

4.3 Asking for help

I highly encourage you to contact me if you ever need help in this course. That's what I'm here for! But I also want to encourage you to be self-sufficient. So if you ever ask me a question that can be easily answered on this syllabus or the Moodle page (a due date, a page limit, a detail about the late policy), **I will deduct 1 point from your grade total**.

The corollary of this policy is that if you ever find anything on this syllabus or the Moodle page that looks like a genuine mistake (the wrong date, inconsistent information) and you ask me about it, **I will give you 1 point of extra credit**. (Only the first person to tell me gets the extra credit.)

Don't be afraid to contact me. The point of this policy is to incentivize you to try to find answers yourselves first. If you look for an answer and honestly can't find it, I want to know that too. Just tell me you tried to find it on your own first and where you looked. You won't be penalized for that.

4.4 Academic integrity

Academic misconduct will be addressed according to the policies described in the Rose-Hulman student handbook. Academic misconduct includes: (1) submitting work that is not your own (including AI-generated work); (2) copying ideas, words, or graphics from any source without appropriate citation; (3) misrepresenting your work or yourself (i.e., deliberately submitting the wrong assignment or lying to explain a late assignment); (4) collaborating with other students when this is not permitted; and (5) submitting the same work for credit in two courses without prior consent of both instructors. If you are unsure whether something qualifies as academic misconduct, please check with me before doing it.

5   Course schedule

All required readings, assignments, and due dates will be posted on Moodle.
† indicates a student-led discussion.

Week 1: Origins of morality

- Warneken & Tomasello. (2009). The roots of human altruism. British Journal of Psychology.

  Due: Syllabus quiz

Week 2: Intuition vs. reason

- Bloom. (2010). The moral life of babies.

- Tasimi. (2020). Connecting the dots on the origins of social knowledge. Perspectives on Psychological sciences.

- †Haidt. (2013). *The Righteous Mind*. Chapters 1–2.

Week 3: Intuition vs. reason

- Royzman, et al. (2015). The curious case of Julie and Mark: Unraveling the moral dumbfounding effect. Judgment and Decision Making.

- McHugh, et al. (2017). Searching for moral dumbfounding: Identifying measurable indicators of moral dumbfounding. Collabora: Psychology.

- Greene. (2013). *Moral Tribes*. Chapter 4.

Due: Participation 1

Week 4: Moral judgment

- †Haidt. (2013). *The Righteous Mind*. Chapters 3–4.

- Oktar, et al. (2023). Philosophy instruction changes views on moral controversies by decreasing reliance on intuition. Cognition.

- †Haidt. (2013). *The Righteous Mind*. Chapters 5–6.

Due: Assignment 1

Week 5: Moral judgment

- †Haidt. (2013). *The Righteous Mind*. Chapter 7.

- Curry. (2019). What's wrong with Moral Foundations Theory, and how to get moral psychology right.

- Greene. (2013). *Moral Tribes*. Chapter 9.

Week 6: Minds and morality

- Levine et al. (2020). The logic of unversalization guides moral judgment. PNAS.

- †Bostyn et al. (2024). Beyond the trolley problem: Moral choices and motivations in a real-life sacrificial dilemma

- †Wegner & Gray. (2016). *The Mind Club*. Chapter 1

Due: Participation 2

Week 7: Cruelty

- Moran et al. (2011). Impaired theory of mind for moral judgment in high-functioning autism. PNAS.

- Cardinale & Marsh. (2015). Impact of psychopathy on moral judgments about causing fear and physical harm. PLOS One.

- Baumeister & Vohs. (2004). Four roots of evil. The Social Psychology of Good and Evil.

Due: Assignment 2; Paper first draft

Week 8: Moral character

- Rai. (2015). People resort to violence because their moral codes demand it.

- †Hidden Brain. (2020). Playing favorites: When kindness toward some means callousness toward others.

Due: Assignment 3

Week 9: Altruism

- MacFarquhar. (2015). Extreme altruism: should you care for strangers at the expense of your family?

- Wise. (2022). Looking back on "Strangers Drowning"

Week 10: Honesty and applied morality

- Serota, et al. (2010). The prevalence of lying in America: Three studies of self-reported lies. Human Communication Research.

- Pascual-Esama, et al. (2020). Cheaters, liars, or both? A new classification of dishonesty profiles. Psychological Science.

- Cohn, et al. (2019). Civic honesty around the globe. Science.

- Dwyer, et al. (2023). Are people generous when the financial stakes are high? Psychological Science.

Due: Paper final draft; Participation 3