

PHL 2/492: NEUROETHICS SEMINAR

Univ. of Alabama at Birmingham | Spring 2016

1. BASIC COURSE INFO

Prof. Information:

Prof: Dr. Joshua May

Office: Humanities Bldg, Rm 425

Email: joshmay@uab.edu

Website: www.joshdmay.com

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 2-3pm (& by appt.)

Lecture Info:

Time: TR 9:30-10:45am (sect. 2B)

Location: BEC 118

Course Website: Canvas

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Neuroethics studies moral issues arising in connection with the sciences of the mind, particularly research on the brain. This is a relatively new interdisciplinary field covering two main areas. The first is the ethics of neuroscience, which deals with the moral issues that arise from emerging technologies and findings of neuroscience. The second is the neuroscience of ethics, which applies research on the brain to morality (e.g. what drives moral judgment and behavior).

This seminar will cover several topics in each area, likely to include: Moral responsibility and free will: Does unconscious neural activity determine our behavior prior to conscious awareness? Is, e.g., a psychopath morally responsible if the behavior is the result of brain dysfunction? Is addiction a neurological compulsion? Moral cognition: Which areas of the brain are involved in moral thought and action? (Emotional areas? Rational/cognitive areas?) Mind reading: Can neuroscientific technologies determine whether someone is lying? Can brain scan results constitute self-incrimination (thus violating the 5th amendment)? Moral enhancement: Is there something wrong with making oneself a better person (e.g. more caring and generous) by altering one's brain directly (e.g. via pills or deep brain stimulation)?

Students will learn about such topics and evaluate arguments on different sides of the issues.

Note: The 492 version of this course fulfills the Capstone Requirement.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- (1) Understand major theories, cases, methods, and concepts (in ethics and neuroscience).
- (2) Explain and critically assess moral arguments.
- (3) Evaluate and justify one's moral beliefs.

REQUIRED TEXTS

(1) *Neuroethics: Challenges for the 21st Century* by Neil Levy, Cambridge University Press, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0521687263). [Available at the book shops or online. Rent Kindle version for as little as \$17 on Amazon; paperback is \$65].

(2) Additional readings will be available on the Canvas course page (as PDFs).

ASSESSMENT

1. **Engagement** 10% of grade
2. **Discussion Piece** 15% of grade
3. **Tests (x4)** 40% of grade
4. **Essay** 35% of grade + Outline/Presentation [hurdle]

Note: For due dates, see the Schedule at the end of this syllabus (or the Canvas site).

CLASS UPDATES

Electronic announcements and updates will be made on the course website. So do check the site frequently (although you may have it set up to email you each announcement).

MATERIAL COVERED

We will be discussing material primarily from the text. However, *we may not cover everything in the assigned reading, and sometimes material will be brought up in lecture that is not in the readings.* So it's crucial that you come to class. Likewise, there may be *some material in the readings you'll be accountable for that we don't discuss in great detail in lecture.*

COURSE MATERIALS: HANDOUTS, LECTURE SLIDES, ETC.

To help students, I will provide handouts, slides, and so on. I hope providing handouts/slides in particular will allow students in class to participate in discussion rather than write down everything I say. Keep in mind, though, the handouts/slides will be rather *barebones*. You will likely want to supplement them with your own *notes* from class.

Copyright Notice: The course materials that I create (e.g. handouts, recordings, exams) are intellectual property. They are for you to use in this class only, during this semester, and not for others to use (e.g. they're not to be posted on other websites or otherwise shared with others).

BUDDY SYSTEM

Early in the semester, I'll set aside time for you to exchange contact information with some fellow classmates. When needed (e.g. if you have to miss class), get in touch with them to share notes or discuss the course material. (I encourage this but *not* copying each other's assignments.)

NO LAPTOPS, PHONES, ETC. IN CLASS

During class, turn off and put away all computers, phones, and other electronic devices. Texting, instant messaging, web surfing, message checking, e-mailing, are all distractions to you and your fellow classmates. It's becoming so rampant that the best option at this point seems to ban it all during lecture. Think of the class meetings as a "philosophy retreat" where you focus on only philosophy. That's not too much to ask. (Of course, if you have a special need for some such device, do talk with me and we can make exceptions as needed.)

A rationale I endorse:

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/>

Penalties: If I catch you during class, I'll ask you to put the device away and you won't be marked as present for that lecture. If the problem persists, you will need to leave.

2. ASSIGNMENTS

ENGAGEMENT

Students are expected to attend all class meetings and to do so on time. I will do roll call and track attendance (this isn't just part of your grade; it's also for me to learn names). More than about 5 minutes late for class will be counted "absent," although that shouldn't discourage you from coming that day.

Your Engagement grade will primarily be determined by Attendance and Participation in class discussions (a mix of quantitative and qualitative evaluation).

Attendance: Ultimately, acquiring a couple of unexcused absences isn't extremely detrimental, especially if you contribute well in class. But do note that missing numerous class meetings would likely make it difficult for you to do well in the course overall, simply because you will miss discussion of important material.

Excused absences: These require proper documentation for either jury duty (note from the court), military service (note from military superior), or required university-sponsored activities (documentation from UAB official or supervisor). Remember, students with excused absences are still required to complete work and readings by the required due dates.

Participate in discussion: I'm very interested in what you think of our readings and any light you can shed on them. For example, I encourage you to ask questions in class to *clarify* (e.g. "What exactly is...?") but also to raise *criticism* (e.g. "Couldn't she respond by saying...?"). Speaking up isn't required for getting a good Engagement grade, but it can help it (or hurt it if you're disruptive).

DISCUSSION PIECE

During the first week, you will be assigned one article to briefly summarize and provide some critical questions for discussion in the relevant class meeting. [Note: The article will be one of the PDF readings, not a chapter from the textbook.]

Discussion pieces must be *no more than 500 words* and submitted on the Canvas site *by 5pm the day before the relevant meeting*. Your piece will be evaluated on the quality of exposition and critical questions raised. You should demonstrate that you've done the reading and spent time thinking about it carefully. These short assignments are meant to provide a springboard for discussion during the relevant seminar meeting and also to help you prepare for the kind of work required for the essay (exposition and critical evaluation).

TESTS

These will be either *multiple choice, short answer, or short essay* (or some combination). I'll mix it up so there are a number of different testing methods used. So these may involve some essay writing. *No quizzes can be made up without very special circumstances.*

ESSAY & OUTLINE (+ PRESENTATION)

Essay for 292 students: yours should be about 1500 words (5-7 pages if double-spaced) and will only require minimal critical evaluation and minimal references.

Essay for 492 students: yours should be about 2500 words (between 9-11 pages if double-spaced) and will require substantial critical evaluation and engagement with the relevant literature.

Outline: Both sets of students must submit an outline of the essay. You won't receive a grade for the outline, but it's required for passing the essay (a "hurdle requirement").

Outline Presentation (492 students only): Relevant students will briefly present a version of their outline to the class during the final week of lecture. In about 5 minutes, you will describe your topic, the argument/theory you'll focus on, and the weak points you intend to press on. This too is a hurdle requirement.

More details on the essay and outline will be provided later in the semester.

LATE PENALTIES & MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENTS

In-class assignments (e.g. tests): You can make up such assignments only if you have very extenuating circumstances (e.g. medical, military, jury duty) that you can document. Make sure you let me know as soon as such special circumstances arise; otherwise I might not be able to work something out with you. Moreover, make-ups are conditional on our being able to schedule a mutually convenient time for it and a time that is either soon before or after the original assignment occurred. For example, don't expect to be able to take an exam two weeks after (or before) the rest of the class takes it.

Late penalties: If I accept a late assignment without an agreed upon extension, a 5% penalty applies for the first day late; a subsequent penalty of 2% per day will be applied for the next 13 calendar days after the due date (including Saturdays and Sundays). No assignment can be accepted after more than 14 calendar days, except in exceptional circumstances and in consultation with the professor.

CHEATING (INCLUDING PLAGIARISM)

Don't cheat. I warn against this at the beginning of every semester, and still nearly every time at least one person gets caught! *I take this extremely seriously.* I will give all cheaters a failing grade and report the incidents to the university.

Note that if you cut something from a Web document and paste it into your assignment, you are plagiarizing (even if you mix up the wording a bit). The papers you will be asked to write are not exactly research papers in that there is no need to look to outside sources (including anything on the Internet); you just need to read the material required for class, attend the lectures, and take your time thinking it all through. But if you do poke around the Web, you must of course diligently cite and quote all consulted sources.

Furthermore, it's *your responsibility* to make sure that your work doesn't violate university policies about plagiarism and other academic cheating. (Compare: Ignorance of the law does not excuse.) If you need any help in understanding these standards or are in any doubt about whether your work for this course violates them, check with me. You should also consult UAB's *Plagiarism Tutorial*: <https://www.mhsl.uab.edu/2009/plagiarism/>

For your convenience, here is the link to UAB's page on academic integrity:

<https://www.uab.edu/students/academics/honor-code>

All UAB students are expected to be familiar with the *UAB Academic Honor Code*, as well as any honor codes that are specific to their schools or disciplines. The code represents a commitment to integrity in the academic community and a respect for an individual's educational endeavors:

I have read and, by choosing to become a member of the UAB academic community, accept the UAB Academic Honor Code. I understand that violation of this code will result in penalties as severe as expulsion from the university. I promise and confirm that I will not, at any time and under any circumstances, involve myself with abetting, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or misrepresentation while enrolled as a student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

CALCULATING YOUR GRADE

All assignments will be scored out of 100 (in other words, a percentage) and will be in Canvas. Canvas automatically calculates your grade and you can even see what your final score would be if you get a certain score on future assignments (the "What-If" feature).

I use standard conversions from percents to letter grades (A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, etc.).

Note: For final grades, UAB only uses A, B, C, D, F (no +/-).

GRADE DISPUTES

Ultimately, not everyone will receive the grade they wanted. But please note that I apply the usual standards in the discipline of Philosophy and I apply them fairly. That means I can't make a special exception for anyone (e.g. "I tried really hard" or "I need to get an A for a scholarship" or "I felt I did really well," etc.). Making special exceptions for some students but not others is unfair. I will amend grades only if I made a calculating error or inadvertently misapplied a standard. I will not change the grading standards or extra credit opportunities for individual students.

3. STUDENT SUPPORT

OFFICE HOURS

I encourage you all to *talk with me outside of class* (e.g. in office hours). If you are unable to see me during my regular slot or talk to me before or after class, I'm happy to schedule a mutually convenient time. Talking to me about the material, especially in preparation for an upcoming assignment, is not just for those who fear failing the course; it's also for those who want to secure an "A" (or whatever your goal is).

EMAILING ME

I'm available to contact by email. I can even answer relatively short and specific questions that way. If you have a more detailed and lengthy question, talk to me in person.

WEBSITE

The website for this class has some links that may prove useful in the course.

(Note: My personal website also has some information and links to several resources for philosophy. But what is particularly useful for this course will be provided on the web page for this course, not my personal website.)

See also the Library's Philosophy Guide: <http://www.mhsl.uab.edu/2009/guides/philosophy/>

WRITING SUPPORT

I will be expecting you to do *college-level writing* for this course. Your writing should be clear, organized, professional, and so on. Furthermore, writing in philosophy is often very different from writing in other disciplines. Since philosophy requires the clear communication of often difficult and subtle ideas, weak writing renders high level performance impossible. So I encourage you to talk to me about your essays (and exams) before the due date if you have any questions.

In general, I am happy to discuss with you drafts of your papers before they are turned in. However, I will *not* accept emailed or dropped off drafts. Instead, you are welcome and encouraged to bring your drafts into office hours (or make an appointment) to *discuss* them.

IF YOU FACE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES

If for any reason you are struggling—due to medical issues or otherwise—get in touch with me as soon as possible. I'm happy to work with you to find the best course of action and, if possible, to help you complete the course successfully. But you must get in touch as soon as you know there's a problem. Waiting until the last minute, for example, might mean we can't work anything out. I also recommend getting in touch with UAB's *Office of Student Advocacy, Rights, and Conduct* (<https://www.uab.edu/students/services/advocacy-rights-and-conduct>).

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you're registered with Disability Support Services (DSS), let me know as soon as possible about requested accommodations. If you have a disability but have not yet contacted DSS, please contact them as soon as possible (<https://www.uab.edu/students/services/disability-support-services>). Accommodations for students with disabilities are not retroactive. Students must obtain an accommodation letter from DSS at the *beginning* of each semester, get that letter to the instructor, and contact the instructor several days before the accommodation is required.

4. READINGS

WHEN TO READ

Students are expected to *do the assigned reading*. You should aim to do the reading *the day it's covered* in class—or at least around that time. The point of this is: *don't give up on the reading*. If you didn't get to it before we covered it in class, make sure you do it after. This is especially important because philosophy involves close examination of often fairly dense arguments. However, you aren't expected to have figured it all out before the relevant lecture. That's what we're going to try to do in class. (Notice also that I've provided the page numbers of each reading so you can see the length and plan ahead.)

Mental Fatigue: Don't underestimate the power of mental fatigue. When reading, if you find that you can't process it, you may be getting mentally exhausted. Try putting the reading down and coming back to it later, even the next day. It's quite likely that you'll find it much easier after a break, especially after you're well rested (and nourished).

READING LIST

All readings are in the course text, unless marked "**PDF**" (in which case I'll make them available to you online). We'll try to go through these articles following this exact schedule, but it is not set in stone. You'll need to keep up with the class to know where we are exactly.

Notation:

Levy = our text, *Neuroethics* by Neil Levy (2007)

PDF = electronic article on Canvas

pp. = pages (e.g. "pp. 2-3 only"=read pages 2-3 only, while "20pp."=20 pages in length)

PART A: INTRODUCTION**1. Neuroethics and the Mind**

1. **PDF:** Roskies, Adina (2002). "Neuroethics for the New Millenium." *Neuron* [3pp.].
2. **Levy:** Ch. 1 "Introduction: Neuroethics...." **1st Part:** pp. 1-8 [8pp.].
3. **Levy:** Ch. 1 "Introduction: Mind and Brain...." **2nd Part:** pp. 8-43 [35pp.] — *skipping pages 44-68*

PART B (PRACTICAL): THE ETHICS OF NEUROSCIENCE**2. Manipulating the Mind**

1. **Levy:** Ch. 2 "Changing Our Minds." [18pp.].
2. **PDF:** Glannon, Walter (2009). "Stimulating Brains, Altering Minds" *Journal of Medical Ethics* [8pp.].

3. Enhancement

1. **PDF:** Giubilini, Alberto, & Sanyal, Sagar (2015). "Ethics of Human Enhancement." *Philosophy Compass* [10pp.].
2. **PDF:** Sparrow, Rob (2005). "Defending Deaf Culture" *Journal of Political Philosophy* [18pp.].
3. **PDF:** Kamm, Frances (2005). "Is There a Problem with Enhancement?" *Amer. J. of Bioethics* [19pp.].
4. **Levy:** Ch. 3 "The Presumption Against Direct Manipulation." [45pp.].
5. **PDF:** Persson, Ingmar & Savulescu, Julian (2008). "The Perils of Cognitive Enhancement & the Urgent Imperative to Enhance the Moral Character of Humanity." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* [18pp.].

4. Mind Reading

1. **Levy:** Ch. 4 "Reading Minds/Controlling Minds." [24pp.].
2. **PDF:** Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter et al (2008). "Brain Images as Legal Evidence." *Episteme* [15pp.].

5. Memory & Identity

1. **Levy:** Ch. 5 "The Neuroethics of Memory." [40pp.].
2. **PDF:** Strohminger, Nina & Nichols, Shaun (2015). "Neurodegeneration and Identity." *Psychological Science* [~18pp.].

PART C (THEORETICAL): THE NEUROSCIENCE OF ETHICS**6. Self-Control, Addiction, & Responsibility**

1. **Levy:** Ch. 6 "The 'Self' of Self-Control." [25pp.].
2. **PDF:** Schroeder, Timothy & Arpaly, Nomy (2013). "Addiction and Blameworthiness." In N. Levy (ed.), *Addiction and Self-Control*. Oxford University Press [24pp.].

7. Is Free Will an Illusion?

1. **Levy:** Ch. 7 "The Neuroscience of Free Will." [36pp.].
2. **PDF:** Kelly, Dan & Roedder, Erica (2008). "Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias." *Philosophy Compass* [18pp.].
3. **PDF:** Glenn, Andrea, & Raine, Adrian. (2014). "Neurocriminology: Implications for the Punishment, Prediction and Prevention of Criminal Behaviour." *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* [9pp.].

8. Self-Deception & Rationalization

1. **Levy:** Ch. 8 "Self-deception: The Normal and the Pathological." [23pp.]. [Recommend but not req'd]
2. **PDF:** Batson, Dan (2011). "What's Wrong with Morality?" *Emotion Review* [~10pp.].
3. **PDF:** Mazar, Nina & Ariely, Dan (2015). "Dishonesty in Scientific Research." *Journal of Clinical Investigation* [~8pp.].

9. Moral Reasoning

1. **Levy:** Ch. 9 "The Neuroscience of Ethics." [33pp.].
2. **PDF:** Greene, Josh. (2014). "Beyond Point-and-Shoot Morality." *Ethics* [31pp.].
3. **PDF:** Machery, Edouard. (2014). "In Defense of Reverse Inference." *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* [18pp.].
4. **PDF:** Mikhail, John. (2008). "Moral Cognition & Computational Theory." *Moral Psychology* [11pp.].
5. **PDF:** Kahane, Guy. et al (2012). "The Neural Basis of Intuitive and Counterintuitive Moral Judgment." *Social Cognitive & Affective Neuroscience* [9pp.].

SCHEDULE

(Note: Subject to minor revision, but unlikely.)

Wk	Date	Topic	Readings*	Events	Disc. Pc.
1	1/12	1.1-2 What is Neuroethics?	Roskies, Levy, Syllabus		-
	1/14	1.2-3 Mind-Brain Relationship	Levy		-
2	1/19	2.1-2 Changing Minds	Levy; Glannon		Brian
	1/21	3.1 Ethics of Enhancement	Giubilini & Sanyal		Nicholaus
3	1/26	3.2 Enhancement & Disability	Sparrow	Honors House!	Xiola, Cody
	1/28	3.3 A Moderate Position	Kamm		Quentin
4	2/2	3.4 Manipulation & Treatment	Levy	Test 1	-
	2/4	3.5 Moral Enhancement	Persson & Savulescu	Test 1	Jon
5	2/9	4.1 Reading/Controlling Minds	Levy		-
	2/11	4.2 Legal Evidence	Sinnott-Armstrong et al		Ramsha, Tamara
6	2/16	5.1 Memory	Levy		-
	2/18	5.2 Identity	Strohmingier & Nichols		Ben, Emily
7	2/23	6.1 Self-Control	Levy	Test 2	-
	2/25	6.2 Addiction & Responsibility	Schroeder & Arpaly	Test 2	Jeremy
8	3/1	7.1 Free Will	Levy		-
	3/3	7.2 Unconscious Biases	Kelly & Roedder		Michelle
9	3/8	No class – sick day	N/A		-
	3/10	Test in Class	N/A	Test 3	-
10	3/15	7.3 Punishment & Psychopaths	Glenn & Raine		Remy, Brennan
	3/17	8.2-3 Rationalization	Batson; Mazar & Ariely	Test 3	Lauren, Whitsett
<i>Spring Break: 3/21 - 3/25</i>					
11	3/29	9.1 Moral Reasoning	Levy		-
	3/31	Test in Class	Handout on Essay	Test 4	-
12	4/5	9.2 Debunking Deontology	Greene		Suzie, Ty
	4/7	9.3 Reverse Inference	Machery		Aashka
13	4/12	9.4 The Linguistic Analogy	Mikhail		Isabella
	4/14	9.5 Contrary Data	Kahane et al	Outline	Kelli
14	4/19	Final Thoughts, Presentations	N/A	Present	-
	4/21	Outline Presentations	N/A	Test 4 Present	-
15	4/25	Essay Due: April 25th (first day of finals week)			

* Read the listed pieces for the corresponding lecture. Match authors' last names with the Reading List.