COG401H1 -- Winter 2017 -- Seminar in Cognitive Science: Moral Psychology
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Course Description:
The topic of this seminar is Moral Psychology, which is the psychological study of moral behaviour. In particular, we will examine the cognitive science of moral attitudes and moral decision-making, applied to several social issues of immediate concern, including the polarization of political views, political correctness on campus, and responses to climate change. These are emotionally charged issues on which students will likely strongly disagree, but in this course we will embrace those disagreements as an opportunity for learning.

The aims of the course are to understand why well-meaning people disagree, to find ways of communicating effectively about divisive moral issues, to change minds and find consensus rather than polarize debates, to understand why well-meaning people often fail to act according to their values, and to seek ways of convincing people to act morally. These issues can be approached from many angles, however, we will focus our attention on empirical evidence from the cognitive sciences.

Evaluation:
In-class Exercises 15%
Short Reading Responses (5) 25%
Longer Reading Responses (2) 20%
Annotated Bibliography 10%
Course Project 30%

In-class Exercises:
Throughout the semester, short assignments, activities, and quizzes will be done in class. These will typically not be announced in advance. Your full participation in these exercises is expected, which will require coming to class having done the readings.

Reading Responses:
One reading response paper may be handed in each week before class begins. You may choose which weeks to hand in these papers, as long as you write a total of 5 short responses and 2 longer responses over the course of the semester.

Short responses (300 – 400 words) should express the main points made in the readings, any criticisms you may have, additional questions you might want answered, and/or corroborating evidence from other readings or your own experience.

Longer responses (4 – 5 pages) should go into considerably more detail in response to the week’s readings. You may focus your attention on select aspects of the readings, and should give detailed arguments for or against a thesis. Feel free to consider additional material from the recommended readings, and beyond.

Annotated Bibliography:
This is the first step toward developing a Course Project idea. Choose a project topic, and research it. Pick the 5 most relevant texts you found in your research, provide full bibliographic information for each, and annotate each entry with 1-2 paragraphs summarizing the main points of the text and how it is relevant to your project. Although the
project may be done in groups, each student should submit their own bibliography reflecting their own reading on the topic, with individually written annotations.

Course Project:
Working either alone or in groups of up to 4 students, choose an issue that involves an element of moral reasoning. Research the factual background of the issue, and make an informed decision about what the moral response should be. Also research any psychological factors that may shape how people actually behave. (This may involve conducting your own experiments, in addition to reading.) Develop a plan to convince people to accept and/or act according to your chosen moral response. Implement the plan, and report on the results in the form of an empirical research paper.

For example, if your issue is household energy conservation, your research might lead you to the conclusion that the lights in your apartment should be turned off at certain times of day. You might then research what factors lead your roommates to leave the lights on, including running some experiments to test their responses. Implement a strategy to change their behaviour, and evaluate its success.

Relatively superficial issues like this are ok, but more substantial issues are great too.

Main Texts:

2. The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion, by Jonathan Haidt (2012), Pantheon. (Available in the University Bookstore.)

3. A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change, by Stephen Gardiner (2011), Oxford University Press. (Download from the library website.)


Optional Background Texts:


Additional Readings:
A selection of the readings listed below will be assigned each week, along with chapters from the main texts. Any texts not readily available for download will be posted on Blackboard.

Introduction to Moral Psychology

**Moral Intuitions**


**Moral Emotions**


**Moral Convictions**


**Moral Politics**


**Origins of Morality**


**Neurodiversity and Morality**

Koenigs, M., Young, L., Adolphs, R., Tranel, D., Cushman, F., Hauser, M., et al. (submitted). Damage to the prefrontal cortex increases utilitarian moral judgments.


Moral Cognition


The Flexibility of Morality


Moral Failings

