

# **Social Cognition and Moral Development**

## **Syllabus**

### **EDHD 850**

Department of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology

How do children acquire concepts of fairness and justice? What are the obstacles and catalysts for making moral judgments? How do other factors of social life such as biases and stereotypes about others influence the development of morality? These issues provide foundational knowledge for home- and school-based intervention programs designed to promote healthy child development. In this course we will read current articles covering a range of topics including how social cognitive capacities facilitate moral reasoning and, at the same time, how prejudicial attitudes often hinder moral development. There exists exciting new research on the origins of morality in infancy, connections between theory of mind and morality, intergroup attitudes and moral judgment, social justice in school settings, comparative and evolutionary studies of morality, as well as the role of morality in educational and school contexts. We will read current research as well as selected classic review articles.

***Course Requirements and Grading.*** Students will be required to give oral presentations, raise discussion questions, bring typed questions on the reading each week to class, submit a term paper proposal for feedback, and write a research term paper which involves a review and a critical analysis of theoretical frameworks and current research findings. Grading will be as follows: 50% for oral presentations and weekly questions, and 50% for the paper.

***Course Structure and Readings.*** Students will take turns leading the class discussions. The class will include a brief overview and background to the topic, followed by a critical discussion of the readings from the *Handbook of Moral Development* (2014). Student presentations are designed to highlight current research, to raise theoretical questions for discussion, and to receive feedback on research literature reviews.

**Required Book:**

Killen, M., & Smetana, J. G. (2014). *Handbook of moral development, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. NY: Psychology Press.

**Course Objectives.** To help students:

- Gain knowledge about theory and research in social cognition and moral development.
- Understand the scientific method and acquire the ability to formulate research questions.
- Develop critical reading, writing, and presentational skills through reading assignments, writing assignments, group discussions of theoretical material, and class presentations of current research findings.

**Class Attendance.** Students should attend each class session, except in the case of illness and/or extenuating circumstances. Please inform the instructor of missed absences with an explanation.

**Academic Dishonesty.** It is assumed that all students understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at the University of Maryland. If you do not, please consult the graduate catalog or course registration booklet to become familiar with how cheating, fabrication, facilitation of academic dishonesty, and plagiarism are defined by the University.

**Students with Disabilities.** If you are a student with a documented physical or learning disability, please contact me by the first week of class so that we can make arrangements for the necessary accommodations.

Aug 30                    **Introduction: Social Cognition, Morality, and Moral Development**

Sep 6                      **Concepts of Justice, Fairness, and Rights**

Turiel, E. *Epistemology, Development, and Social Opposition*.  
Chapter 1

Smetana, Jambon, & Ball. *Domain Approach to Children's Social and Moral Judgments*, Chapter 2

Presenters: \_Melanie Killen\_\_\_\_\_

Sep 13                    **Concepts of Justice, Fairness, and Rights**

Helwig, Ruck, & Peterson-Badali, *Rights, Civil Liberties, and Democracy*. Chapter 3

Wainryb & Recchia, *Heterogeneity and Conflict*, Chapter 12  
Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Sep 20

**Prejudice, Unfair Treatment and Social Cognition**

Horn & Sinno. *Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Discrimination*,  
Chapter 15

Killen & Cooley. *Morality, Exclusion, and Prejudice*. Chapter  
16

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Sep 27

**Emotions, Prosocial Behavior, and Aggression**

Dunn. *Moral Development in Early Childhood*. Chapter 7

Malti & Ongley. *The Development of Moral Emotions and Moral Reasoning*, Chapter 8.

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Oct 4

**Culture, Cooperation, and Development**

Vaish & Tomasello. *The Early Ontogeny of Human Cooperation and Morality*. Chapter 13

Arsenio. *Moral Emotion Attributions and Aggression*. Chapter  
11

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Oct 11

**Socialization, Conscience, and the Family**

Thompson. *Conscience Development in Early Childhood*,  
Chapter 4

Kuczynski & Knafo. *Innovation and Continuity in Socialization, Internalization, and Acculturation* Chapter 5

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Oct 18 No class meeting – Term paper research groups

Oct 25 **Morality, Intentionality, and Deception**

Lagatutta & Weller. *Interrelations Between Theory of Mind and Morality*. Chapter 18

Nucci. *The Personal and the Moral*. Chapter 25

Evans & Lee. *Lying, Morality, and Development*. Chapter 17.

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Nov 1 **Empathy, Prosocial Behavior, and Aggression**

Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Morris. *Empathy-Responding in Children*. Chapter 9

Carlo. *The Development and Correlates of Prosocial Moral Behaviors*. Chapter 10

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Nov 8 Vote! **Precursors to Morality: Cognitive and Comparative Approaches**

Wynn & Bloom. *The Moral Baby*. Chapter 20

Jensen & Silk. *Searching for the Evolutionary Roots of Human Morality*. Chapter 22

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Nov 15 **Precursors to Morality: Neurobiological and Neuroscience Approaches**

Hastings, Miller, Kahle, & Zahn-Waxler. *The Neurobiological Bases of Empathic Concern for Others*. Chapter 19

Decety & Howard. *A Neurobiological Perspective on Morality*. Chapter 21

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Nov 29

**Evolutionary Basis for Morality**

Tomasello. *A Natural History of Morality*. Chapters 1, 2, 3 (pages 1-84), available as a pdf distributed in class.

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

Dec 6

**Final Research Presentations**

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

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