

Science and Morality

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Course Description

Morality and science are often thought of as separate spheres: morality as the realm of personal and cultural values, and science as the realm of value-neutral inquiry into the natural world. But these spheres inevitably collide. Our moral values and judgments are part of the natural world, and are therefore within the purview of scientific study. At the same time, scientific research is a social activity which is itself susceptible to moral evaluation and criticism.

It is the job of moral philosophers to make systematic sense of morality. So, in this course, we will explore the efforts of moral philosophers to grapple with issues at the intersection of morality and science. The course is organized around three units, in which we will consider these questions:

1. Does science undermine morality? Is a scientific worldview compatible with believing in objective moral right and wrong, moral character, and moral responsibility?
2. How can we use science to develop better moral theories?
3. Are scientists morally obligated to pursue or avoid certain kinds of research?

Course Readings

Part 1: Does Science Undermine Morality?

- Sharon Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value”, *Philosophical Studies* (2006).
- Katia Vavova, “Debunking Evolutionary Debunking”, *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* (2014).
- John Doris, “Character and Consistency”, from *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (2002).
- Tim Bayne, “Free Will and the Sciences of Human Agency”, in Swineburne ed. *Free Will and Modern Science* (2011).

Part 2: Scientific Evidence in Moral Theory

- Selim Berker, “The Normative Insignificance of Neuroscience”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (2009).
- Joshua D. Greene, “Beyond Point-and-Shoot Morality: Why Cognitive (Neuro)Science Matters for Ethics”, *Ethics* (2014).
- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “Moral Intuitionism Meets Empirical Psychology”, in Horgan and Timmons ed. *Metaethics After Moore* (2006).
- Felipe de Brigard, “If You Like It, Does It Matter If It’s Real?”, *Philosophical Psychology* (2010).
- Elliot Sober, “Psychological Egoism”, in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (2000).

Part 3: Constraints and Obligations in Scientific Research

- Sociobiology Study Group of Science for the People, “Sociobiology: Another Biological Determinism” / E.O. Wilson, “Academic Vigilantism and the Political Significance of Sociobiology”, *BioScience* (1976).
- Philip Kitcher, “Constraints on Free Enquiry”, from *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (2001).
- Katrien Devolder and Julian Savulescu, “The Moral Imperative to Conduct Embryonic Stem Cell and Cloning Research” *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 15 (2006).