

## Honors 2013 Fall 2008: Biology and Evolution of Morality

John Protevi / Department of French Studies / [www.protevi.com/john](http://www.protevi.com/john) / [protevi@lsu.edu](mailto:protevi@lsu.edu)

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This is a broad introductory course on three subfields (affective neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and neuroethics) in the current research into the biological underpinnings and evolutionary origins of morality. The course is interdisciplinary, combining psychology, biology, neuroscience, and philosophy. We will maintain a critical eye to the scientific and philosophical literature, with particular attention to any unexamined reliance on the classic dualism of freedom and determinism, and its corollary, materialism and spiritualism. The course should thus be both an introduction to cutting-edge research and a chance to revisit perennial questions.

### COURSE CONTENT:

*Goals, objectives, and learning outcomes:* at the conclusion of the course, students will be able to (1) identify the key concepts and critical issues in EACH of these fields: affective neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and neuroethics (measured by essay examination after assignment to study groups); (2) conduct research into and develop a critical relation to the literature in ONE of these fields (measured by a 2000 word term paper on a topic in one of these fields); (3) communicate their findings to classmates (measured by a 10 minute multimedia presentation during last week of classes). Students will be *encouraged* to work collaboratively on assignment 2 submitting jointly authored work if desired. They will be *required* to work collaboratively on assignment 3.

#### *Required reading:*

Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: Avon, 1994). ISBN: 0-390-72647-5

Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail."

<http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/articles/haidt.emotionaldog.manuscript.pdf>

Joshua Greene and Jonathan Haidt, "How (and where) does moral judgment work?" *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 6.12 (2002): 517-523.

William Casebeer, "Moral cognition and its neural constituents." *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 4.10 (October 2003): 841-847.

Joshua Greene, "From neural 'is' to moral 'ought': what are the moral implications of neuroscientific moral psychology." *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 4.10 (October 2003): 847-850.

Karsten Steuber, "Empathy" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy):

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/empathy/>

Frans de Waal, *Primates and Philosophers* (Princeton University Press, 2006). ISBN: 0-691-12447-7

Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (MIT Press, 2007). 0-262-60072-2

Michael Gazzaniga, *The Ethical Brain* (Washington: Dana Press, 2005). 1-932584-01-9

*Course technology:* we will use the Moodle system for forums for students to post reactions to the readings and to circulate rough drafts. Students are required to use PowerPoint or another multimedia presentation software for their final presentation.

**ACADEMIC CONDUCT STATEMENT:** students will be provided with the University and Honors College plagiarism statement.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** students will be expected to attend each class meeting and to have posted a reaction to the reading in the book forums before the class.

**GRADING POLICY:** standard criteria for letter grades will be used:

A =  $\geq 90\%$  = excellent

B =  $\geq 80\%$  = good

C =  $\geq 70\%$  = competent

D =  $\geq 60\%$  = poor

F =  $\leq 59\%$  = unacceptable

### GRADING COMPONENTS

1. Two essay examinations (weeks 8 and finals week): 20% each for a total of 40%
2. Term paper of 2000 words due in finals week, with preliminary steps required (paper is to be preceded by a thesis statement and outline due in week 9, an annotated bibliography in week 11, and a rough draft due in week 13): 40%
3. Final presentation: 20%
4. Class participation and reading reactions: no set percentage, but outstanding work will be taken into account for borderline grades.

**ENGLISH 2000:** the course design and assignments fulfill the requirements for English 2000 in terms of research requirements, use of writing-to-learn strategies, technology use, and collaborative projects.