

Phil 292: Moral Psychology: Classical and Contemporary Sources Spring 2021

Online (synchronous meetings W 6:00-8:45 PM)
Prof. Karin Brown

Traditionally in Ethical Theory, moral psychology pertains to questions such as: Is human nature altruistic or egoistic? What moves us to action? When are we and when are we not responsible for our actions? More recently empirical research in psychology has been applied to examine classical questions in moral theory where philosophers are interested in finding out which theories empirical evidence supports? As is the case in our discipline (and arguably ought to be the case) instead of answers we find debates. For instance, the debate between internalism and externalism considers the question to what extent people follow their judgments and beliefs? In other words, are ethical judgments intrinsically motivational? Proponents of situation ethics claim that at any given time the current situation is a more dominant determinant of one's actions. Thus they challenge the tradition of virtue ethics. Recent studies, particularly of psychopaths, further the discussion of the role of reason and emotions in moral behavior.

In this seminar we will read selections from classical texts such David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and Sophie de Grouchy, *Letter on Sympathy*. We will also read contemporary articles by Elisabeth Anscombe, Julia Annas, Jonathan Haidt, Joshua Green and John Doris. Last, we will include a segment on moral emotions in Buddhist philosophy.