

# Knowledge, Value and Rationality

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**Portland State University**

University Studies

[Course # here]

## Faculty Introduction

The fundamental learning objectives of this course are threefold: 1) to empower students to be trustful of reason and to give them hope that they can make better communities and live better lives, 2) to demonstrate that there are better and worse ways of reasoning morally, and that the process one uses to make moral decisions can either contribute to, or alleviate, real life suffering and misery, 3) to teach student not to withhold moral judgment, but how to make better, more discerning moral judgments.

This class has the potential to disabuse students of ideologies and specious reasoning processes that bring students' beliefs out of lawful alignment with reality. Specifically, it is meant to be both an antidote and a prophylactic to pedagogical constructivism, cultural relativism, radical epistemological subjectivism and faith-based belief systems. As such, this course should be viewed more as a moral and cognitive intervention than as a cannon of information that needs to be disseminated, assimilated and then assessed.

Conspicuously absent from KRV are the traditional staples of moral philosophy: Deontology, utilitarianism, virtue ethics and egoism. Replacing traditional content are hard hitting, no-nonsense, real world articles and videos that force students to grapple with substantive moral issues—from the violent misogyny of the Taliban to the treatment of individuals suffering from cognitive disabilities. With the exceptions of Week 8 and 10, the content for this class is meant to challenge students' fundamental moral assumptions and even their moral orientations. Week 8, Rationality, Cognitive Disability, Social Equity and Morality, allows students to weigh in on uncomfortable questions that may be closer to their lived experience. Week 10, Rationality and Hope: Reconstructing Reason, rebuilds what was destroyed.

Viewed as an intervention, this curriculum can serve as a meaningful alternative to professors who tire of trolley problems, Bentham and Mill, and the intricacies of Kantian exegesis.

<b>Course Title:</b>	
<b>Required Texts:</b>	[with cost]
<b>Professor's Name:</b>	
<b>Class Location:</b>	
<b>Days/Times:</b>	
<b>Email address:</b>	
<b>Office hours:</b>	

**Professor's Bio** (optional)

**Policies and Procedures**

- If you have a disability and exams need to be given in PSU's testing center, then please email the professor one week before the exam date. Please include the name of the class, your full name and your student ID #.
- Silence your cell phone and please do not text during class. If there's an emergency, please step out of class.
- You are responsible for signing the attendance sheet. If you do not sign the attendance sheet you will not get credit for attendance.

**Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty is highly valued at Portland State University. The consequences of academic dishonesty can include removal from the University.

**Controversial Issues**

I hope to challenge you, and to help you question "givens," but I do so in good faith and in the spirit of academic and intellectual integrity and honesty. We will be discussing and analyzing controversial issues (e.g., faith, religion, cognitive disabilities and rights). We will also question traditional, established orthodoxies, like multiculturalism, sustainability, moral relativism, and cultural egalitarianism. If you are easily offended then this is not the course for you.

### ***Description***

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The purpose of this course is to examine better and worse ways of reasoning through the examination of real world, substantive moral issues. Students will learn why it matters to develop and use reliable reasoning processes to examine moral issues.

### ***Themes by Week***

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- *Week One:* Rationality, Relativism and Moral Judgment I
- *Week Two:* Rationality, Relativism and Moral Judgment II
- *Week Three:* Rationality, Evidence, Google and the Internet
- *Week Four:* Rationality, Neuroscience and Morality
- *Week Five:* Rationality, Science and Morality
- *Week Six:* Irrationality, Religion, Values and Social Equity I
- *Week Seven:* Irrationality, Religion, Values and Social Equity II
- *Week Eight:* Rationality, Cognitive Disability, Social Equity and Morality
- *Week Nine:* Rationality and its Impediments: The Enemies of Reason
- *Week Ten:* Rationality and Hope: Reconstructing Reason

### ***Learning Objectives***

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- *Develop* the tools to make better, more discerning moral judgments
  - *Analyze* the various processes that contribute to making poor moral judgments
  - *Understand* the arguments for and against moral and cultural relativism
  - *Investigate* the role evidence should play in belief formation
  - *Acknowledge* the problems with faith-based moral systems
  - *Explore* the relationship between facts and values
  - *Examine* the role religion ought to play in the formation of moral values
  - *Research* the current controversy with regard to the relationship between science and morality
  - *Analyze* controversial moral issues
  - *Formulate* public policies regarding the moral status of the cognitively disabled
  - *Identify* impediments to thinking clearly and critically
  - *Empower* students to make better moral decisions
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**Grading**

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Midterm Exam	
DATE	
Final Exam	
DATE	
Attendance and Participation	
Lead a 15-Minute Discussion in Mentor Session	
Summary and Response Paper (5-6 pages)*	
<b>Point Total</b>	

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\* Late assignments are penalized one full letter grade.

*Week One*

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**Rationality, Relativism and Moral Judgment I**

TOPICS

- Rape and mutilation in the Congo
- AIDS and raping babies in South Africa
- Hunting albinos for body parts in Tanzania
- Goat arrested, judged and incarcerated in Nigeria (for car theft)
- Brain dead people being subpoenaed to give testimony in the US
- Faith healing in the US and Latin America

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Clifford and the Ethics of Belief: [http://myweb.lmu.edu/tshanahan/Clifford-Ethics\\_of\\_Belief.html](http://myweb.lmu.edu/tshanahan/Clifford-Ethics_of_Belief.html)

2. **Watch**

- Acid attacks, rape and the Taliban: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/22/afghanistan-gender-women-taliban> AND [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2MkoTZZ0Ns&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2MkoTZZ0Ns&feature=player_embedded)
- Rape in the Congo: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbZIK9Ce0yM>
- Afghan girls, education and poison gas attacks: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUpCy\\_4b11Q&feature=player\\_embedded#at=62](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUpCy_4b11Q&feature=player_embedded#at=62)
- Baby Farm: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13622679>

**Questions**

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- What is rationality?
  - What is morality?
  - What are values?
    - Are all values commensurate?
  - Do some people misconstrue reality?
  - Do some people misconstrue what's in their own interest? How do you know?
  - Is it possible to make a valid cross-cultural moral judgment?
  - What does it mean to be wrong about a moral judgment?
  - Can a moral judgment/claim be true for me and false for someone else?
  - Is a moral judgment a matter of fact, a matter of taste, or neither?
  - Are some processes for arriving at moral judgments bad? (What does "bad" mean?)
  - Are some processes for arriving at moral judgments less reliable? (What does this assume about the world?)
  - Do we need to have a God's eye view to make a moral judgment? Are we always "bound by culture" in our judgments?
  - When a child dies due the faith healing practices of his parents, who's morally responsible?
  - Should we withhold moral judgment or develop the tools to make better, more discerning moral judgments?
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Week Two

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**Rationality, Relativism and Moral Judgment II**

TOPICS

- Delusions and Culture Bound Syndromes
- The failure of the American Left and Feminism's disgrace:
  - The Taliban and misogyny
  - Infibulation
  - Forced marriage
  - Battery acid and girls learning to read

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Delusional disorder: <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/292991-overview>
- Pierres' "Faith or delusion? At the crossroads of religion and psychosis." Abstract only. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15990520>
- Penis shrinking, penis theft and Koro: <http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/2002/9/16/81843/6555>
- Phyllis Chesler's The Failure of Feminism: <http://www.phyllis-chesler.com/163/the-failure-of-feminism>
- What's the harm?: <http://www.skeptdic.com/refuge/harmarchive.html>
- May 21 Doomsday Consequences: [http://news.yahoo.com/s/livescience/20110524/sc\\_livescience/faileddoomsdayhasrealdeadlyconsequences](http://news.yahoo.com/s/livescience/20110524/sc_livescience/faileddoomsdayhasrealdeadlyconsequences)
- Child rape epidemic in South Africa: <http://www.wnd.com/?pageId=12139>
- Iranian president and black magic: <http://abcnews.go.com/International/iranian-president-ahmadinejad-allies-charged-black-magic-summoning/story?id=13561870>
- The religion virus: <http://religionvirus.blogspot.com/2011/03/evangelical-idioty-death-of-america.html>
- Qaddafi and rape: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/05/28/150901.html>
- North Korea: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/feb/01/northkorea>

2. **Watch**

- Hitchens on the failure of the Left: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axHR8AOxxkc&feature=related>
- Hitchens on the Left's hypocrisy: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mS374kobqbE&feature=related>

**Questions**

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- What does it mean to be irrational?
- What does it mean to be rational?
- What does it mean to be immoral?
- Does rationality matter? What does it mean to matter?
- What's the harm in believing things that are false? Are there any benefits to believing things that are untrue?
- What's the harm in using bad moral processes?
- Is the failure to make moral judgments and moral decisions on the basis of evidence a *moral* problem?

- Can a person be unjust towards himself?
  - Why has the Left failed to address cross-cultural moral horrors?
  - Do people knowingly do bad things?
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*Week Three*

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**Rationality, Evidence, Google and the Internet**

TOPICS

- Filter Bubbles
- Evaluating Evidence

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Levitt S & Dubner SJ (2005) *Freakonomics*. Introduction.
- Scientific criteria of adequacy – Schick T & Vaughn L (2011) *How to Think About Weird Things*. New York: McGraw Hill. Chapter 6.
- Evaluating Personal Experience:  
<http://skepdic.com/essays/evaluatingexperience.html>

2. **Watch**

- Ethan Zuckerman's TED talk, "Listening to global voices"
- Eli Pariser's TED talk, "Beware online 'filter bubbles'"

**Questions**

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- What does and does not count as evidence?
  - What evidence can I give you that you should formulate your beliefs on the basis of evidence?
  - What is a "filter bubble" and why should you care? Is there any solution to this problem?
  - Is personal experience a reliable guide to reality?
  - How would one know if a problem was "outside the bounds of reason"?
  - What do Schtick and Vaughn have to say about how you should think about weird things? What are their main points? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
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*Week Four*

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**Rationality, Neuroscience and Morality**

TOPICS

- The biological basis of belief
- Covariance: Culture and biology
- Disgust and belief: Homosexuality and moral judgment
- The God Helmet
- The brain as an engine of belief
- Moral hardwiring

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Michael Shermer's The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies---How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths. Chp. 6, The Believing Neuron. (pp. 111-140).
- Steven Pinker, The Moral Instinct: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/magazine/13Psychology-t.html>
- Religious belief and human nature: <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/05/12/religious-belief-is-human-nature-huge-new-study-claims/?hpt=T2>
- Disgust and Moral Judgment: <http://psp.sagepub.com/content/34/8/1096.abstract> (abstract only)

2. **Watch**

- The God Helmet: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCVzz96zKA0>

**Questions**

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- Can moral judgment be based on our feelings? Should it be?
  - Is there any relationship between disgust and morality?
  - What does it mean to say that belief has a biological basis?
  - Are humans morally predisposed to certain beliefs?
  - Does morality exist "out there," independent of brains?
  - Are we wired for spirituality?
  - Is attempting to disabuse people of their biological, moral impulses misguided?
  - How could Pinker be wrong?
  - What does it mean to say that we're "wired for belief"?
  - What's wrong with the nature vs. nurture model?
  - If everyone who went into the God Helmet and had feelings of community with a particular deity (e.g., Zeus), what, if anything, would that be evidence of?
  - According to Pinker, what are the five moral spheres?
  - Fill in the blank: The five moral spheres a cogent explanatory process for \_\_\_\_\_ . What does this help to explain?
  - What is "belief dependent realism"? What is Shermer's evidence for this?
  - What is "patternicity" and "agenticity"? According to Shermer, what role do these play in belief formation?
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*Week Five*

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**Rationality, Science and Morality**

TOPICS

- Deriving an ought from an is
- Can science determine moral values?
- Steven Jay Gould's Overlapping Magisteria
- Well being and human flourishing

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Sam Harris' *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-55
- On matters zero-sum: <http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/on-matters-zero-sum/>
- John Searle's "How to Derive an Ought from an Is," in *The Philosophical Review*, pp. 43-44 only
- Read the following:
  - David Hume: In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given; for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.

2. **Watch**

- Sam Harris at Oxford (with Richard Dawkins)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm2Jrr0tRXk>

3. **Assignment**

- 5-6 page "Summary and Response" paper. Write a 2-3-page summary and a 2-3-page critique of Harris' main thesis in *The Moral Landscape*. Incorporate elements from his Oxford lecture into your paper. In your own words, what is Harris's conclusion? What is the evidence/reasoning that leads him to this conclusion? Why does he claim that this is important? Do you agree or disagree with Harris' reasoning? Why or why not?

**Questions**

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- What is "the Moral Landscape"?
- How does Harris define "bad"?
- What does Harris mean by "well being"?
- What is the relationship between science and moral values?
- What does it mean to derive an ought from an is? What is Harris' argument against this "academic orthodoxy"? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
  - Does Searle think that an ought can be derived from an is? Why or why not?

**Knowledge, Value and Rationality**

- What is Harris main point with regard to science and morality? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
  - What are the objections to Harris' idea of a moral landscape?
  - For knowledge to mean anything, must some voices be excluded from the conversation?
  - The Stanford physician who sits on President Obama's Council on Bioethics: According to Harris, what does it mean to say her positions on issues are morally wrong?
  - Is there such a thing as: Mathematical genius? Artistic genius? Moral genius?
  - Is developing morality akin to developing a muscle? That is, the more one works it the better one gets at it.
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Week Six

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**Irrationality, Religion, Values and Social Equity I**

TOPICS

- Islam and honor killings
- Islam and apostasy
- The Catholic Church and child rape
- The Catholic Church, birth control and AIDS
- What do Scientologists really believe?
- The myth of religious egalitarianism
- Religious delusion and the DSM IV
- Doxastic closure and belief revision
- The institutionalized inversion of moral priorities
- The three Es of sustainability
  - Environment, Equity, Economics

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation*, intro-chp. 2 (to page 50)
- Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, Chps. 8 and 9 (8: What's Wrong with Religion?; 9: Childhood, Abuse and the Escape from Religion)

**Questions**

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- Are all religions equally good, bad, correct, incorrect, dangerous?
  - Morally, is it worse to rape a child or to shift child rapists from parish to parish so that they do not get caught? (Does it make a difference if the child rapist continues to rape?)
  - Are *all* religious beliefs delusions?
  - What is the relationship between doxastic closure and belief revision? Why is this important?
  - If a religious delusion makes one happy, should one try and shed it? What about a non-religious delusion?
  - What are Harris' main arguments in *Letter to a Christian Nation*? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
  - Is Dawkins unfair to religion? Why or why not? Is there anything in particular about his critique that you agree with or disagree with? What and why?
  - What is the controversy regarding the DSM IV, delusion and religion?
  - Which of the claims of Scientology are empirical claims? How would one test these claims?
  - What, if anything, is the relationship between religious authority and moral authority? Is there such a thing as a moral authority?
  - Is it bad to brainwash people into doing good things?
  - Should society tell people that there's a hell so as to frighten them into not doing bad things?
  - Is sustainability just an ideology?
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*Week Seven*

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**Irrationality, Religion, Values and Social Equity II**

TOPICS

- Deriving morals from religion
- Deriving morals from ancient religious texts
- Was Mother Theresa really a virtuous woman?
- The myth of the non-violent Buddhist
- Morality in the bible and the Koran
- The 10 Commandments

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Christopher Hitchens' God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, Chps. 13 and 16 (13: Does Religion Make People Behave Better?, 16: Is Religion Child Abuse?)
- Christopher Hitchens' on Mother Teresa: <http://www.slate.com/id/2090083/> AND [http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/hitchens\\_16\\_4.html](http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/hitchens_16_4.html)
- Sam Harris' Verses from the Koran: <http://www.truthdig.com/images/diguploads/verses.html>
- The Old Testament, Deuteronomy: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+1&version=NIV>
- Michael Parenti's God and His Demons, chp. 17. Good-bye Shangri-la (pp. 207-215).

2. **Watch**

- Sam Harris' Bible/Koran are the works of God?: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7vYDs6BP2M>
- Christopher Hitchens' The New Commandments: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I\\_IM61aDyPg&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_IM61aDyPg&feature=player_embedded)

**Questions**

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- If God asked you to kill all left handed people, and you were absolutely positive it was God, should you do so? Would you do so?
  - What does it mean for a book to be perfect?
  - Do the 10 Commandments have any shortcomings?
  - Can the 10 Commandments be improved upon?
  - Is the peaceful interpretation of violent and misogynist passages from religious texts dishonest? Does this accord with authorial intent? How does one know?
    - Is there a correct interpretation of a religious text (or a non-religious text or film)?
  - What are some of Hitchens' claims about Mother Theresa? Do you agree or disagree?
  - If Hitchens is correct in his empirical assertions about Mother Theresa, what, if anything, does this say about her moral authority?
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*Week Eight*

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**Rationality, Cognitive Disability, Social Equity and Morality**

TOPICS

- Cognitive disability and morality
- Capability and moral status
- Equal rights and cognitive disability
- Institutionalizing the rights of the cognitively disabled
- Vegetarianism and sentience

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Kittay and Carlson (Eds.), *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy*. Chps 19, 20 and 22 (19: Peter Singer: Speciesism and Moral Status; 20: Jeff McMahn Cognitive Disability and Cognitive Enhancement; 22: The Personal is Philosophical is Political: A Philosopher and Mother of a Cognitively Disabled Person Sends Notes from the Battlefield).

**Questions**

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- Are “profoundly mentally retarded [human beings]...superior to pigs or dogs or animals of that sort?” Peter Singer
  - Should there be a relationship between capability and moral status?
  - Should severely cognitively disabled people be allowed to sit on juries?
  - Should the moral impulses of the severely cognitively disabled be allowed to enter into the formation of public policy (e.g., by allowing the cognitively disabled to vote)?
  - Should the moral arguments of geniuses receive extra weight in public policy discussions?
  - Should the treatment of a species, or of an individual, depend on its cognitive status?
  - What’s the relationship between cognitive ability and our willingness to dine on those species with low cognitive ability?
  - Are sexual relations between the cognitively abled and the cognitively disabled immoral?
  - What does it mean for a cognitively disabled person to give sexual consent?
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*Week Nine*

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**Rationality and its Impediments: The Enemies of Reason**

TOPICS

- Confirmation bias
- The Big Sort
- Science and its detractors
- Blasphemy
- Adult and children's tables
- Dan Dennett: Belief in belief

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Confirmation bias: [http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/c/confirmation\\_bias.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/c/confirmation_bias.htm) AND <http://www.skeptdic.com/confirmbias.html>
- The Big Sort: <http://www.economist.com/node/11581447>
- Mooney C (2011) The science of why we don't believe science. *Mother Jones*, Mon-18-April. <http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/03/denial-science-chris-mooney?page=1>
- Sagan C (1996) *The Demon-Haunted World*, chapters 24 & 25 (24: Science and Witchcraft; 25: Real Patriots ask Questions)
- Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*, chp. 8 pp. 200-249, (8: Belief in Belief)

2. **Watch**

- Freedom Under Fire: U.N. Anti-Blasphemy Resolution: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ji-qdC5zYd4>

**Questions**

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- Morally, who gets to sit at the adult table and who has to sit at the children's table?
  - Does moral reasoning cause moral judgment? Should it? Is moral reasoning a post hoc construction, generated after a judgment has been reached?
  - Is it blasphemy if one doesn't buy into the system that's being insulted?
  - Are there secular blasphemies (flag burning, questioning diversity or anthropogenic global warming, stating that there are cognitive differences between races)? What are the implications of this?
  - Do we have an obligation not to offend others? Can you think of an example that supports your argument?
  - Is religion an immutable characteristic? Why does this matter?
  - Some religious and political leaders have claimed that drawing the Muslim Prophet Mohammad is akin to using racial slurs. Do you agree or disagree? Are there any fundamental differences that make this argument disanalogous?
  - For Dennett, why is belief in belief so important?
  - What are the consequences of belief in belief?
  - What's the problem with starting with a belief first, and then reasoning from there? Can you think of specific examples when this would not steer one in the direction of the truth?
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*Week Ten*

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**Rationality and Hope: Reconstructing Reason**

TOPICS

- Rationality, reason and hope
- Personal reflections on your morality
- Navigating the moral landscape
- Obligations

**Assignments**

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1. **Read**

- Carl Sagan's *The Demon-Haunted World*, chp. 2, Science and Hope, pp. 23-41.
- Sam Harris' *The Moral Landscape*. Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

**Questions**

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- What does it mean to have hope?
  - What's the difference between hope and faith?
  - Why does Harris believe there's reason for hope?
  - What does it mean to tolerate the intolerant?
  - It has been argued that Western democracies are ill suited to deal with religious radicals. Do you agree or disagree? Can you think of examples or policies that support your point?
  - "What can I do to decrease the likelihood that my moral judgments will be incorrect"?
  - "How can I increase the likelihood that my moral judgments will be correct"?
  - "Do I have a moral obligation to help others to rid themselves of delusions"?
  - "Do my obligations extend to helping others to fulfill their obligations"?
  - "How much control do we have over who we become"?
  - "What obligations do you have towards others"? "What obligations do you have to your family"?
  - Is one type of life just as good as any other type of life?
  - "When confronted with a moral horror, should I suspend judgment? Why or why not? When, if ever, should I suspend judgment?"
  - What is the moral landscape? Why does this matter?
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### Test Bank Essay Questions

#### *Midterm*

1. How would Sam Harris answer the following questions: Are there good lives and bad lives? How do we tell the difference? What does “bad” mean? Why does this matter?
2. Can some people be wrong about what constitutes a good life? Can entire cultures be wrong? Explain. How could they be wrong? Provide specific examples that Harris would agree with. Why would Harris agree? Is Harris correct? What is your opinion?
3. What does Harris mean by “The Moral Landscape”? What, exactly, is the moral landscape? Provide examples. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
4. Can science inform human values? How? What would Harris say? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. In the *Moral Instinct*, Pinker writes:

“According to Noam Chomsky, we are born with a ‘universal grammar’ that forces us to analyze speech in terms of its grammatical structure, with no conscious awareness of the rules in play. By analogy, we are born with a universal moral grammar that forces us to analyze human action in terms of its moral structure, with just as little awareness”.

Pinker goes on to note the “primary colors of our moral sense”: “harm, fairness, community (or group loyalty), authority and purity”

*It has been claimed that this is also a cogent explanatory mechanism for the differences between liberals and conservatives. How so? On which categories do liberals score higher, and on which categories do conservatives score high lower? Do you think that Pinker is correct in his claims? Why or why not? Can you think of specific examples demonstrating that Pinker is correct/incorrect?*

6. Use the information from the question above, to answer the following question: How do the five universal moral spheres (which Pinker describes as “a legacy of evolution”) explain the differences in practice between and among different individuals in different parts of the world? For example, extremely religious members of the US community are quite different from extremely religious members of other communities in other countries. How could this be if all humans have the same categories of moral understanding? What is your opinion about this explanatory mechanism? Is it accurate?
7. Can an ought be derived from an is? Why or why not? Explain exactly what this means. What would Sam Harris say? Do you agree with his argument? Why or why not?

#### *Final*

1. Explain what Daniel Dennett means by “belief in belief”. According to Dennett, what is the problem with belief in belief? Note two specific examples where belief in belief makes it difficult to dislodge a belief. How do these examples relate to Dennett’s main thesis about belief in God?
2. Does an individual who suffers from severe cognitive disability have rights equal to an individual of average cognitive functioning? If you answered in the affirmative, does this

include allowing the severely cognitively disabled to sit on a jury or to voting? Please explain your answer. If you answered in the negative, what is your argument for this? Please explain how rights relate to capacities.

3. Hitchens argues that religion does not make people more moral. Do you agree or disagree? What are the examples Hitchens uses? Are they fair? Why or why not? What would Harris say about Hitchens's claims? What would Dawkins say about Hitchens' claims?
4. What does Dawkins mean by "the God delusion"? What is the God delusion? What would Dennett and Harris say? Why? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. It has been argued that if there's no God then there can be no morality. How would Harris respond to this? How would Hitchens respond to this? What is your opinion?