Days and times: Tues. & Fri. 11 – 12:20
Instructor: Ben Sherman
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Office Hours: TBD

**Course Description**
Traditional ethical theories tell us how we should deliberate about our decisions so as to be good people, or at least avoid wrongdoing. But in the last few decades, psychological research has shown that unconscious biases influence a tremendous amount of our decision-making, attitude formation, and behavior toward others. We are usually unaware of the influence these biases exert, and frequently they lead us act and think in ways contrary to our conscious intentions. In this course, we will look at the ethical and epistemological implications of recent psychological work on bias, and consider how we can better live up to our ethical and intellectual standards, in spite of our unconscious mental processes. How can we make responsible plans for the future if bias systematically distorts our judgments? How can we live up to our egalitarian ideals if unconscious prejudices and stereotypes influence our reactions to others?

Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)
Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

**Learning Goals**
1. Introduce students to current findings about the prevalence and effects of unconscious psychological biases
2. Enable students to understand how biases influence ethical decision-making and reasoning in general
3. Equip students with strategies and conceptual analyses offered by contemporary philosophers for understanding and managing biases
4. Develop student skills at thinking analytically about the connections between thought and behavior

**Laptop Policy**
No laptops, please; it will be both easier and less distracting if you take notes on paper instead.

**Academic Integrity**
All material submitted for a grade should be the student’s own original, independent work. All uses of others’ work should be properly documented through notes and citations. Unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, and any other violation of University policies on academic integrity will result in disciplinary action, which can include grading penalties, suspension, or dismissal.
If you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult the Rights and
Responsibilities Handbook, contact the Office of Student Development and Conduct, or ask the instructor. More information can be found at http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/index.html.

Disability
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

Communication
Announcements to the class will be sent on email by way of Latte. Any changes to the course schedule (including snow days and adjustments to deadlines) will be announced through the class email list.

Course Texts
Three books are required for this course:

- *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman
- *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* by Claude M. Steele
- *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People* by Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald

All other readings will be available on Latte

Requirements
All students are expected to participate in class discussion and take responsibility for understanding key materials. Grades will be based largely on two exams and two papers, though participation will also be taken into account.

- Mid-term Exam: 10%
- Mid-term paper: 30%
- Final Exam: 10%
- Final Paper: 40%
- Prepared Participation: 10%

Schedule

**Background**

Week 1 (Jan 17-20): Ethics and Epistemology

- Jeremy Bentham, excerpt from *Principles of Morals and Legislation*
- Immanuel Kant, excerpt from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- Renee Descartes, excerpt from *Discourse on Method*
- Joseph Butler, excerpt from *The Analogy of Religion*

Week 2 (Jan 23-27): Ethics of Belief and Dual-process Psychology

- W. K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief”
- Lorraine Code, excerpt from *Epistemic Responsibility*
- Timothy Williams, excerpts from *Strangers to Ourselves*
Unit I: Cognitive Biases

Week 3 (Jan 30-Feb 3): Cognitive Dissonance, Confirmation Bias, and Responsible Decision-Making
Leon Festinger, excerpts from *Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*
Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* Ch. 7
Daniel Sperber and Hugo Mercier, “Thinking as a Social Competence”

Week 4 (Feb 6-10): The Fundamental Attribution Error, Character, and Virtue
Richard E. Nisbett and Lee Ross, excerpts from *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment*
Ross and Nisbett, excerpts from *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology*
John Doris, excerpts from *Lack of Character*

Week 5 (Feb 13-17): Prospect Theory, Hedonic Psychology, and Utility
Kahneman, *TF&S* Ch. 25-6
Marc D. Street, Chris Robertson, and Scott W. Geiger, “Ethical Decision Making: The Effects of Escalating Commitment”
Kahneman, *TF&S* Ch. 35-6
Mark Kelman, “Hedonic Psychology and the Ambiguity of ‘Welfare’”

Note: No class Feb 20-24

Week 6 (Feb 27-March 3): The Status Quo, Self-Image, and Self-Deception
Kahneman, *TF&S* Ch. 28
Melvin Lerner and Dale Miller, “Just World Research and the Attribution Process”
Claire Andre and Manuel Velasquez, “The Just World Theory”
Shelley Taylor and Jonathon Brown, “Illusion and Well-Being”
Jeff Greenberg, “Understanding the Vital Human Quest for Self-Esteem”
Jonathan Lowell, “Managers and Moral Dissonance: Self Justification as a Big Threat to Moral Management?”

Week 7 (March 6-10): Framing Effects and Responsible Choices
Kahneman, *TF&S* Ch. 34
Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, excerpts from *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*
Jamie T. Kelly, excerpts from *Framing Democracy*

Mid-term Exam
Unit II: Implicit Prejudices and Stereotypes

Week 8 (March 13-17): Epistemic Injustice and Ignorance
Miranda Fricker, excerpts from *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*
Charles W. Mills, “White Ignorance”
Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi* Ch. 1-2

Week 9 (March 20-24): Stereotype Threat and Identity-Based Injustice
Steele, *WV* Ch. 3, 6-9
Stacey Goguen, “Stereotype Threat, Epistemic Injustice, and Rationality”
Lawrence Blum, “The Too Minimal Political, Moral and Civic Dimensions of Claude Steele’s ‘Stereotype Threat’ Paradigm”

*Mid-term Paper Due*

Week 10 (March 27-31): Implicit Bias and Responsible Doubt
Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, *Blindspot* Ch. 3-5
Tamar Szabo Gendler, “On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias”
Jennifer Saul, “Scepticism and Implicit Bias”

Week 11 (April 3-7): Implicit Bias and Systemic Injustice
Ian Hacking, “The Looping Effects of Human Kinds”
Elizabeth Anderson, excerpt from *The Imperative of Integration*

*Note: No class April 10-18*

Week 12 (April 18-21): Implicit Bias and What to Do about It
Banaji and Greenwald, *Blindspot* Ch. 6-8
Daniel Kelly and Erica Roedder, “Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias”
Daniel Kelly, Edouard Machery, and Ron Mallon, “Race and Racial Cognition”
Clea Rees, “A Virtue Ethics Response to Implicit Bias”

Week 13 (April 24-28): The Logic and Psychology of Generics
Adam Lerner and Sarah-Jane Leslie, “Generics, Generalism, and Reflective Equilibrium: Implications for Moral Theorizing from the Study of Language”
Sarah-Jane Leslie, “The Original Sin of Cognition: Fear, Prejudice, and Generalization”

Week 14 (May 1-3): Catch-up, Review, and Final Discussion

*Final Exam: TBA*
*Final Paper Due Date TBA*