



MPRG / Consortium Conference 2024

[Press release](#)

Friday, November 15

These public keynote lectures are in Foster Auditorium in Paterno Library on Penn State's campus. This is about a 10-minute walk from the [Nittany Lion Inn](#) where guests are staying.

3:00-4:00

Taya Cohen (Professor of Organizational Behavior and Business Ethics, Tepper School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University)

Guilt Proneness, Moral Awareness, and the Use of AI-Powered Tools

Guilt proneness, a moral character trait associated with a heightened sense of interpersonal responsibility, predicts positive work behaviors, including reduced deviance and dishonesty. This presentation explores the relationship between guilt proneness and moral awareness to make the case that differences between people in ethical decision-making are traceable to upstream differences in the way that they disambiguate and give meaning to the situations they encounter. The "character lens" hypothesis holds that sensemaking is an inherent part of a person's character, and that character traits, such as guilt proneness, provide a lens through which people filter the world around them. This lens shapes answers to the questions "What is this

situation? What considerations are important here?”. Studies of MBA students and online participants indicate that high moral character individuals are more chronically aware of the ethical implications of the situations and choices they face (see Helzer, Cohen, & Kim, 2023, *Journal of Business Ethics*; Helzer, Cohen, Kim, Iorio, & Aven, 2024, *Journal of Research in Personality*). My new research with Sofia Rodriguez Chaves applies these ideas to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) at work. The rapid integration of AI-powered tools in business raises critical ethical considerations about their development and deployment. In a recent survey of 200 U.S. adults, we find that guilt proneness positively correlates with moral awareness and ethical considerations when deciding whether and how to use AI-powered tools. This finding underscores the importance of moral character, and guilt proneness in particular, in navigating the ethical challenges posed by AI and has implications for organizations seeking to promote responsible innovation and ethical AI development, deployment, and use.

4:15-5:15

Larisa Heiphetz Solomon (Associate Professor, Psychology, Columbia University)

The Psychology of Redemption

Moral violations are a daily occurrence: people speak unkindly to others, fail to fulfill their responsibilities, and commit a host of other wrongdoings against each other. Given the frequency with which people experience—and commit—moral transgressions, a society without a means to redeem transgressors risks becoming one that cannot sustain social bonds. To avoid this outcome, people need ways to decide when individuals have made good on their past wrongs and changed for the better—that is, when they have been redeemed. Despite the foundational role redemption plays in maintaining the social contract, a well-developed psychological science of redemption does not yet exist. In an effort to build such a science, the present work asked two main questions: How do children and adults understand the current moral character of people who have transgressed, and what expectations do they hold about these people's future morality? Using incarceration as an example of a system that is ostensibly designed to rehabilitate people who have transgressed, we found that children were more likely than adults to view imprisoned individuals as bad people. Yet children were also more likely than adults to report that people would change for the better as a result of receiving punishment for their transgressions, demonstrating a developmental change in perceptions regarding the capacity for redemption. While currently existing theories do not account for the totality of these results, I propose a novel theoretical framework to account for how it can be that children are both particularly likely to attribute immoral essences to others and also particularly likely to see people as capable of moral improvement. Taken together, these studies

shed light on moral cognition across development and highlight the need for a more robust psychological science of redemption.

6:00-8:00 Dinner at [Allen Street Grill](#) – this is about a 5-minute walk down the Pattee Mall from the Library to downtown State College

8:00- Socializing in State College

[Antifragile](#); [Elixir Coffee](#); [Zeno's Pub](#); [Local Whiskey](#); [Central Reservation](#)

Saturday, November 16

All Saturday & Sunday Events in 127 Moore Building

Moore Building is a short 5-minute walk down Fischer Road from Nittany Lion Inn

8:30-9:00 Breakfast Buffet in the Atrium (main lobby) of Moore Building
Catering by [Webster's Bookstore and Café](#)

9:00-10:00 Guided Walk around Penn State Campus ([Arboretum](#), Old Main)

Session 1: Virtues

10:00-10:30 **Lisa Silvestri (Associate Teaching Professor, Communication Arts and Sciences, Penn State)**

Doing Peace Through Practical Wisdom

This talk revisits, reforms, and revives the ancient Greek virtue, phronesis (practical wisdom), for twenty-first century application.

10:30-11:00 **Patrick Lee Plaisance (Don W. Davis Professor in Ethics, Bellisario College of Communications, Penn State)**

Humility: Conceptualization of a Foundational Virtue for Digital Life

Humility is considered a vice in many corners of our proclamatory digital environment; its opposite, hubris, is arguably the order of the day. Bold pronouncement of opinion, rather than honest inquiry, too often defines our digital lives. Yet this project argues that the virtue of humility will play a curative role in any effort to address our largely toxic world of online communication. We argue that a reassertion of the virtue of humility, and the cultivation of strategies to encourage a more honest sense of self, will be critical in the construction of a digital *ethos*. We build on a recent resurgence of scholarship on humility, which serves to usher self-awareness and transcendence.

11:00-11:30 **Jessie Sun (Assistant Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Washington University in St. Louis)**
Moral Opportunities and Tradeoffs in Everyday Life
How often do people notice moral opportunities and face moral tradeoffs in everyday life? Using the Day Reconstruction Method, we find that people often experience opportunities to express virtues, but rarely face virtue tradeoffs (e.g., honesty vs. compassion) in everyday life. A follow-up study provides more detailed information about how people experience and resolve virtue tradeoffs.

11:30-11:50 Roundtable Discussion about Virtues, Continued Q+A

12:00-1:00 Lunch on your own in State College

Session 2: Group Divisions

1:00-1:30 **Meltem Yucel (Post-Doctoral Fellow of Psychology and Neuroscience, Duke University)**
Bridging divides: Children's understanding of group norms
One noticeable way that people differ across groups is in the norms that they follow. Perhaps in some encounters, noticeable differences are unproblematic, or even spark interest and curiosity. But it is easy to imagine cases where one's group identity or the contrast between norms of different groups can create conflict, divisiveness, or intolerance. I will present our recent work on when, if ever, children across cultures do or do not expect others to abide by their norms.

1:30-2:00 **Simone Tang (Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior, SC Johnson College of Business, Cornell University)**
Explaining vicarious kin derogation—when people mock the innocent relatives of public figures
People often derogate the innocent children and spouses of leaders they dislike, despite the general human aversion to harm, and especially harming the innocent. We suggest that people do so because they believe doing so causes more suffering to disliked leaders than targeting them directly. We denote targeting someone's vulnerable loved one to cause them suffering as "vicarious kin derogation." Based on research on people's lay understanding of special obligations to family ties, we argue that people assume that even hardened public figures have soft spots for their kin—especially when those innocent family members are seen as vulnerable. Six experiments in the context of online trolling within American politics support this hypothesis and rule out alternative explanations. Mediation analyses reveal that although people feel more satisfied with the increased suffering caused to politicians by derogating their relations, this satisfaction is also tempered by

the aversion to harming the innocent. Together, these findings explore a feature of toxic discourse in modern America: mocking the children of political opponents.

- 2:00-2:30 **Kyle Law (Post-Doctoral Associate, Psychology and Neuroscience, Boston College)**
Compassion Cartography: Mapping the Psychological Landscape of Equitable and Effective Altruism
I present evidence from an investigation exploring empathy, reasoning, and prosocial behavior among three groups: effective altruists (EAs—impact-prioritizing philanthropists), extraordinary altruists (XAs—living organ donors), and controls (N=360). While XAs have higher empathic ability and EAs demonstrate stronger reasoning skills, both increased empathy and reasoning predict greater equitable and effective altruistic behaviors across groups. These findings challenge the idea that empathy and reasoning are in conflict and suggest that exceptional altruism often requires both working together.

- 2:30-2:50 Roundtable Discussion about Group Boundaries, Continued Q+A

Session 3: Zoom Talks and Student Talks

- 3:00-3:30 **Christopher Olivola (Associate Professor of Marketing, Tepper School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University)**

Title TBD

Abstract forthcoming.

- 3:30-4:00 **James Floman (Associate Research Scientist, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence)**

The Weight of Moral Decisions: The Psychological Causes and Consequences of Moral Injury

Abstract forthcoming.

- 4:00-5:15 **Student Flash Talks**

Becca Ruger (Psychology, Penn State)

How bad they would have been: The role of counterfactual thought in moral judgments of actions, inactions, and outcome severity

Moral judgments of inaction have typically been studied in the context of trolley dilemmas or omission biases. The current work expands knowledge of moral inaction judgments outside of these frameworks by testing the impact of counterfactual thought and outcome severity on judgments of both actions and inactions. Beyond further insight into how inactions are judged,

the work illustrates important factors to consider when conducting research on inaction.

Clara Sandu (Psychology and Neuroscience, Duke University)

Appraisals of the New Other: Social Perceptions and Moral Attributions towards Artificial Intelligence versus Humans in an Economic Trust Game

This study explores how people make trust-based decisions and moral attributions when interacting with AI versus human advisors in an economic trust game. Participants assessed the praiseworthiness, blameworthiness, and intentionality of advisors after learning trust game outcomes, revealing how subjective perceptions of warmth, competence, social reciprocity, and moral status shape behavior toward AI as a social "other." Our findings offer insight into the cognitive dimensions involved in human-AI interactions and their broader moral implications.

Joshua Wenger (Psychology, Penn State)

Participant preferences for human versus AI empathy expressions

Great ethical debate exists around empathic AI, with many discounting its empathy expressions as "fake". Despite this, people consistently rate AI messages as more empathetic than human messages. Although past work has explored these ratings of AI empathy expressions, little research has examined whether people actively seek out such messages, or instead prefer human messages. The present research investigates whether people choose to receive empathetic expressions more from human or AI interaction partners. Participants read and imagined themselves in vignettes depicting various unfortunate circumstances (stepping on a thumb tack, losing a job, etc.). Following each individual vignette, participants chose between receiving an empathetic response from a human or AI. Participants also rated how empathetic they found each response. This research explores overall choice preference between human and AI empathy expressions, whether this preference varies between empathy and compassion or physical and emotional suffering, and how this preference relates to response ratings of empathy (i.e., if AI empathy expressions are rated as more empathetic, whether this actually translates to choosing to receive empathy from AI).

Jerry Richardson (Psychology, Cornell University)

Vividly Imagining Others' Experiences Influences Moral Judgments of Their Actions

Humans represent the thoughts and feelings of others to better empathize with, understand, or predict their behavior. These processes could involve a fleeting thought about what a friend or colleague might be experiencing, or they could involve a more vivid conception of another person's experiences—which may have consequences for judgments about their

behavior and moral character. Across three preregistered studies (n=1060) we found evidence that vividly imagining another's situation as if it were happening to oneself—similar to an actor embodying a role—moderates moral judgments of a target other in morally ambiguous situations. In Study 1 (n = 160), participants randomly assigned to act out a role in a scene from a play over Zoom (in pairs) rated their own character more favorably than those randomly assigned to play the opposing character. Study 2 (n = 451) replicated this effect, with participants evaluating the behavior and moral character of the role they “played”—by reading their lines aloud as if reflecting their own thoughts and feelings—more positively than those playing the other character. Moreover, these less harsh judgments of the target character were not found in a control group who simply read the scene in silence. In Study 3 (n = 449), we identified a boundary condition: playing an unambiguously immoral character did not produce the same effect, although the effect failed to replicate using a scene from a different play.

Jillian Meyer (Psychology and Cognitive Science, Indiana University)

Moral Values Education: Enhancing Moral Decision Making Through an Interdisciplinary Framework

Moral decision making plays a critical role in how individuals navigate complex social landscapes. Yet, as moral values are shaped by diverse philosophical, psychological, biological, and cultural factors, current measures often fail to fully capture the intricacies of human morality. This presentation proposes an interdisciplinary framework for moral values education, grounded in the "Big Three" of Morality (Shweder et al., 1997)—autonomy, community, and divinity—and drawing from fields such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and more. In addition to presenting this theoretical framework, the talk will be interactive, inviting participants to engage in a collaborative discussion on how to measure moral behaviors using this interdisciplinary model. By integrating diverse perspectives, we will explore how to effectively capture and assess the values that influence moral decision making across various contexts. Through this combination of theory and hands-on discussion, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how to apply this framework to both research and educational settings. This approach not only advances theoretical insights into moral psychology but also offers practical applications for improving character education and fostering moral development.

6:00-8:00

Dinner at [India Pavilion](#)

Sunday November 17

8:00-9:00 Breakfast Buffet in the Atrium (main lobby) of Moore Building
Catering by [Webster's Bookstore and Café](#)

Session 4: Morality and Person Perception

- 9:00-9:30 **Evan Bradley (Associate Professor, Psychology and Linguistics, Penn State Brandywine)**
Lost in Translation? Multilingual (Mis)gendering
What happens when languages that encode gender in very different ways interact with each other? We're studying multilingual individuals to better understand how grammar, individual attitudes and societal norms interact to shape languages and conversations. I'll share some quantitative data from a study of L2 English users from different backgrounds, and qualitative findings from interviews with Maltese LGBTQ+ people.
- 9:30-10:00 **Terri Vescio (Professor of Psychology, Penn State)**
Endorsement of Hegemonic Masculinity Predicts Voting in 2024 and Participation in Violence against LGBTQ People
Within a given culture, there is an idealized form of masculinity that is elevated above other forms of masculinity and femininity. Most people – regardless of gender identification – endorse and accept the idealized form of masculinity as normative and beneficial. However, the idealized form of masculinity is founded on the gender binary, assumptions of heteronormativity, and the acceptance of violence from those who strive to embody idealized forms of masculinity. This leads to attitudes and behavior that justify and legitimate violence against LGBTQ people. I will discuss research showing that those who endorse culturally idealized forms of masculinity – regardless of one's gender identification – are more likely to vote for status quo maintaining candidates and are more prejudiced toward and accepting of policies that limit the rights of LGBTQ people. I will also describe research showing that some interactions with LGBTQ people provide threats to White, heterosexual, cisgender men's conceptualizations of masculinity that leads to the acceptance and participation in violence toward LGBTQ people. Together, we will discuss how to challenge binary based conceptualizations of gender that legitimate and justify violence toward gender non-conforming people.
- 10:00-10:30 **David Puts & Sojung Baek (Professor of Anthropology, Graduate Student in Anthropology, Penn State)**
How and why: Endocrine and ecological approaches to understanding empathy

A multidisciplinary approach is applied to understand the mechanisms and social functions of empathy across two ongoing studies. The first study investigates the roles of ovarian steroids, measured from metabolites of estradiol and progesterone, individual characteristics, and their interactions in predicting empathic behaviors across the ovulatory cycle. Multilevel time-lagged analysis will be used to test temporal relationships between changes in hormone concentrations and changes in empathic interactions. The second study explores how empathic interactions (receipt, provision) are associated with the formation and maintenance of social capital, including social networks, subjective well-being, and belongingness, among women in rural Matlab, Bangladesh. Multilevel (dyad level) and multivariate (individual level) analysis indicated that empathy receipt and provisioning had differential impacts on social capital, and that recently married daughters-in-law provide higher levels of empathic provisioning than other women.

10:30-11:00 **Sean Laurent (Assistant Professor, Psychology, Penn State)**

Unexpected dimensions of person perception

Moral evaluations are often straightforward, such as when a person harms another and is morally condemned for doing so. Yet, because people are naturally imaginative, they sometimes use information to construct narratives that travel beyond the bounds of what they actually know, leading them to negatively evaluate others (or evaluate them more negatively) when doing so might be inappropriate.

11:00-12:30 Downtime for Coffee and Conversations + Digital Roundtable Recording

- Philosophy-Psychology Roundtable 1: Ana Gantman, Dan Kelly, Paul Davies, Brett Karlan
- Philosophy-Psychology Roundtable 2: Jordan Wylie, Evan Westra, Stylianos Syropoulos, Taylor Davis
- Student Roundtable 1: Faruk Yalcin, Jerry Richardson, Sarah Mowrey, Madhulika Shastry
- Student Roundtable 2: Josh Wenger, Wiktorina Pedryc, Clara Sandu, Sofia Rodriguez Chaves
- Student Roundtable 3: Ivy Gilbert, Iris Chung, Becca Ruger

12:30-1:30 Box Lunch from [Webster's Cafe](#) in the Atrium in Moore Building

2:00 Conference Ends

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