

PSY 410 MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Course Syllabus (CRN: [26555](#))



MW 2:00 – 3:20 PM

HEDCO 142,

University of Oregon

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Moral psychology is the scientific study of how we determine right from wrong, act or fail to act on those standards, judge and punish others for their moral transgressions, and throughout, maintain that *we* personally are good, even when our actions suggest otherwise. In this course, we will talk about some of the greatest human acts and the most depraved. We will seek to understand those who see the world differently from us and deepen our understanding of ourselves. This course explores topics such as moral licensing and hypocrisy, egoism and altruism, empathy and its limits, blame and moral responsibility, the role of intuition versus reason in moral judgment, moral character evaluation, and moral understanding. There are many ways to approach the study of moral psychology. This course draws most heavily from insights from *social psychology* research, and therefore most topics covered pertain to morality within social contexts, e.g., thinking about, reacting to, influencing, and judging the (im)moral behavior and character of others. However, the course is interdisciplinary by nature, drawing from ideas and research from philosophy, behavioral economics, cognitive psychology, personality psychology, developmental psychology, neuroscience, biology, and other social science fields.

OFFICE HOURS



Instructor

Sarah Dimakis, Ph.D. ("Sarah")

sdimakis@uoregon.edu

R 1:30 – 3:30PM & F 10AM -12PM,
or by appointment

Straub 437

Graduate Teaching Fellow

Fiona DeBernardi

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Graduate Teaching Fellow

Sophia Angleton

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TBD

CONTACTING ME

Please don't hesitate to e-mail me or drop in on my office hours if you have any questions, concerns, or just want to chat. When you e-mail me, please add "moral psychology" and your section ("2pm") to the subject line (e.g., "moral psychology 2pm exam question") so that I know which class you're from. I teach three classes per term, so this really helps me keep things organized and answer your question quickly. When you e-mail me, you can expect to receive a response within two days, and I typically respond same day (except weekends and holidays). If I don't respond to your email within two business days, please resend it because I may have not received it.

COURSE MATERIALS

There is no assigned textbook for this course. The reading list for the course includes empirical articles that conduct original research and review articles that synthesize the research of many scientists. Occasionally the readings will be supplemented with short videos. Please note that the readings for this course vary in difficulty. Some are written for a general audience and use more accessible terminology (usually book chapters, opinion articles, or talks), while others are intended for peers in the field and will take more time to dissect (usually journal articles conducting original research or reviewing research for other scientists). Short readings might be dense and need time to work through, so make sure to leave yourself enough time to read regardless of the length of the article.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will be developing important skills that are valuable outside of university, like introspection, critical thinking, writing, and speaking about your moral values. You will also be working to improve skills that are necessary to be a consumer and/or producer of research, like reading, communicating about, and critically evaluating psychology research. Upon completion of this course, you will be able to (1) describe and identify important theories and research findings in moral psychology, (2) communicate more effectively with others about your moral values, and (3) apply moral psychology theory and research findings to experiences in your life.

COURSE MODALITY

This is an in-person course with a lot of opportunities to discuss the material with other students and with the entire class. Every Monday, we'll have a lecture broken up with short discussion periods and demonstrations. Every Wednesday, we'll have a 30(ish)-minute mini-lecture and then break out into smaller groups to discuss a set of discussion questions. These conversations might involve working through moral dilemmas with your classmates or connecting course concepts to your own life experiences. We will meet during scheduled class meeting times (MW 2:00 – 3:20pm) in *HEDCO 142*, which is located just off Alder St. near the Knight Library. I will accommodate absences as described in the Class Engagement section below. I understand that a course that requires active participation and small group discussions is not for everyone, and I recommend signing up for a different elective course if you think you'll have to miss more than three classes or do not enjoy interacting with your classmates. Lecture slides will be posted on Canvas prior to each class, but for confidentiality reasons (and because it makes in person class a worse experience), I do not record lecture videos.

ESTIMATED STUDENT WORKLOAD

When you complete this course, you will earn four credits toward your degree. A four-credit course from the University of Oregon is equivalent to 120 hours of work across the term, or 12 hours per week for 10 weeks. I expect that you will spend 30 hours in class (three hours per week), 40 hours on readings and annotations (for about four hours per week), and the remaining 50 hours completing case studies and studying for exams (five hours per week).

GRADING

Your learning will be assessed through two in-person exams (40% of your grade), near-weekly case studies applying class concepts to real life cases (40% of your grade), reading annotations (10% of your grade), and class engagement assessed by you and your peers (10% of your grade).

In-Person Exams (x2)	40%
Case Studies (x8, drops 2 lowest)	40%
Reading Annotations (x10, drops 2 lowest)	10%
Class Engagement	10%

The following grid provides the letter grade associated with each percent. If you are within .5% of a grade category (e.g., 89.5%), your grade will be rounded up if you have an "A" (90 – 100%) in the class engagement category. A student may be assigned an "A+" for a final grade if they demonstrate exemplary understanding of the course material across all assessments (> 97% on all four grade categories). Usually this is 1 – 3 students per class of 50. During week 10 of the course, an **extra credit** opportunity will be announced for 1 - 2% added onto your final grade.

A 93-100%	B 83-86.99%	C 73-76.99%	D 63-66.99%
A- 90-92.99%	B- 80-82.99%	C- 70-72.99%	D- 60-62.99%
B+ 87-89.99%	C+ 77-79.99%	D+ 67-69.99%	F 59.99% or below

EXAMS

There will be two non-cumulative, in-person exams. Each exam has 30 multiple choice questions and five short answer questions that may ask you to interpret data, apply course concepts to examples, or generate examples based on a theory or model. You may bring a 3" by 5" notecard with handwritten or typed notes to use during the exam (front and back), food/ drink (try not to spill it on your exam though), and headphones if you want to listen to music or sounds (e.g., white or brown noise, café background noise, ocean sounds). A study guide will be posted **at least one week before each exam**, which will contain **all topics** that could be on the exam. There may be topics covered only in readings or videos (not in class), but those topics will be clearly specified on the study guide. Notecards will be provided in class the week before each exam, or you are welcome to use your own. Exams will be held in our classroom **on Monday, February 9th at 2pm (class time) and Tuesday, March 17th at 2:45pm**.

CASE STUDIES

There are eight case studies for this course that will test your ability to apply moral psychology theories and findings to real world case studies. You are welcome (and encouraged) to collaborate with other students in the class on **brainstorming ideas**, but the work you submit must be your own (i.e., your write up should not be identical to another student in the class). For each case study, you will research a given case and apply what you are learning in class readings, lecture, and discussions to gain a deeper understanding of why the event unfolded as it did. For instance, I may ask you to research a specific case of fraud and ask you to apply course concepts to better understand why the fraud occurred. Case studies are due **Sundays at 11:59pm** and can be turned in up to five days late (**Friday at 11:59pm**). After five days, an 'answer key' of the class's best ideas will be released to the class, so you will no longer be able to turn in the assignment. However, **we will drop your lowest two grades** to account for possible illness or unexpected life circumstances that might arise during the term.

CLASS ENGAGEMENT

Learning to have potentially uncomfortable conversations about moral issues with others is an important learning goal of the course. You must come to class and have these discussions, or you have failed to fully meet that learning goal. To assess your engagement with the class, you will have two opportunities (one in week 5 and one in week 10) to self-report your engagement and the engagement of others in your group. Your grade is subject to adjustment by the instructor based on your justification (and what your peers said about you) and is based on the following criteria (graded independently for **each half of the course**):

- **A (Excellent)** = I missed one or no classes. During group discussions, I contributed regularly, was respectful during disagreements, and helped deepen the conversation. In full-class discussions, I spoke up as much as I felt comfortable and actively engaged with my peers' ideas. I was regularly prepared for class and attentive. My peers say I was very engaged in our discussions. I even talked about course concepts with others outside of class.
- **B (Good)** = I missed two or three classes. During group discussions, I sometimes contributed but was not the most consistent. In full-class discussions, I spoke occasionally, though I could have participated more. I was usually prepared and engaged in class.
- **C (Passing)** = I missed between four and half of the classes. During group discussion, I contributed only occasionally and tended to let others carry the conversation. In class discussions, I rarely spoke and was not always prepared and engaged in class.
- **D (Needs Improvement)** = I missed more than half of the classes. During group discussions, I rarely or never contributed. Admittedly, I was often unprepared or disengaged.
- **F (Failing)** = I missed most classes and made little or no effort to participate in discussions.

*Please note that missing classes due to religious observance, AEC accommodation, military deployment, or a University-sponsored event **do not count** toward absences when you estimate how many classes you missed. Illness or other unexpected events should count.*

READING ANNOTATIONS

To encourage close reading of the course materials, one paper each week has been selected to annotate with Perusall. Perusall is a free software that enables you to view annotations from other students as you read an article. You can access Perusall assignments through Canvas. When accessing Perusall for the first time, you will be prompted to create an account if you do not already have one (see: [A student's guide to navigating Perusall](#)). In the first week, we will practice using this platform by annotating the syllabus. Your grade for these assignments (after the practice syllabus assignment) will be based entirely on participation, meaning you will earn full credit if you contribute **at least three substantive comments** per assignment. For example, a certain section might make you think of a real-world application, or a connection to another reading or theory. You may find a concerning limitation of the study. You may have a question you want to pose to other students. Replying to another student will count towards your comments. Reading annotations are due **Sundays at 11:59pm** and can be turned in up to five days late (**Friday at 11:59pm**). We will also drop **your lowest two grades** to account for possible illness or unexpected life circumstances that might arise during the term.

LATE ASSIGNMENT AND MAKE-UP EXAM POLICY

To make it easy to remember, homework assignments in this course are always due **Sundays at 11:59pm**. In the case that you fall ill or otherwise encounter unexpected difficult personal circumstances during the term, I have built flexibility into the course in the following ways:

- You can turn in your homework assignments (case studies and reading annotations) up to **five days late**.
- We will drop your two lowest scores for the case studies and reading annotation assignments.
- If an assignment is turned in **more than 24 hours** after the due date, the assignment will be marked off 5% (max score is now 95%). If 48 hours have passed, the assignment will be marked off 10% (max score is now 90%). Any homework after 72 hours will receive the max late penalty of 15% off (max score is now 85%) **until the assignment is locked five days after the due date**.
- You have ONE late penalty waiver to turn in an assignment late **for any reason**, no questions asked. If you wish to use your waiver, comment on the assignment “I am using my late penalty waiver” when you submit it to Canvas. You’ll have to e-mail me for the annotation assignments. **A waiver cannot reopen a closed assignment.**
- If you need to miss the midterm exam, you can sign up to take a make-up exam via the link on Canvas. Please only sign up for one if you really need one (e.g., illness, family emergency), as spots are limited and first come/first serve. You must complete the midterm by **Wednesday, February 18th** when exams are passed back out in class.

ACCESS & ACCOMMODATIONS

The University of Oregon and I are dedicated to fostering inclusive, equitable, and accessible learning environments for all students. The [Accessible Education Center](#) (AEC) assists students with disabilities in reducing barriers in the educational experience. You may be eligible for accommodations for a variety of disabilities – apparent disabilities, such as a mobility or physical disability, or non-apparent disabilities, such as chronic illnesses or psychological disabilities. If you have or think you have a disability and experience academic barriers, please contact the Accessible Education Center (Location: 360 Oregon Hall; 541-346-1155; uoaec@uoregon.edu) to discuss appropriate accommodations or support. The details of your disability will be kept confidential with the AEC, and you are not expected to share this information with me. I invite you to discuss any approved accommodations or access needs at any time with me.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

The University of Oregon respects the right of all students to observe their religious holidays, and will make reasonable accommodations, upon request, for these observances. If you need an extension on an assignment this term because of a religious obligation or observance, please fill out the [Student Religious Accommodation Request form](#) and send it to me within the first weeks of the course so we can make arrangements in advance. No need to fill this out for attendance!

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE

You are permitted to use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Grammarly) to assist with brainstorming ideas or refining your writing. However, keep in mind that AI can and often does provide inaccurate or overly simplistic responses, and you are responsible for the accuracy and quality of the work that you submit. If you choose to use these tools, then **they must not prevent you from achieving the learning goals of the course**. Relying on AI to think for you (such as copying a response directly from ChatGPT and submitting it as your own) will hinder your learning and therefore is considered a violation of the academic integrity policy for this course. We need to learn to strike a balance between using AI to make us more productive and losing or failing to gain important mental skills due to overreliance.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Any form of academic dishonesty, including getting outside help on assignments (you should only be collaborating with students currently in the class), plagiarizing of any kind, improper use of AI (as outlined in the policy above), or lying to the instructor clashes with the spirit and mission of our course and our university. I'm committed to working with you to complete your assignments while maintaining your integrity. If you have questions about what is considered academic dishonesty for this course, please reach out to me and I am happy to clarify. If I detect academic dishonesty, I have to follow the procedure to handle misconduct as outlined by the University, meaning that instances of suspected lying, cheating, and plagiarizing must be reported to the University.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

While studying moral psychology, we are bound to hear from others who do not agree with our moral values, which will cause us to feel deeply uncomfortable. There's nothing we hold more sacred than our moral beliefs. I do not expect to agree with you on everything, and I do not expect you to agree with your classmates on everything. We are a group with diverse backgrounds and experiences. You will never be graded on your moral views and opinions, only the rigor of psychological evidence you provide to support your claims and arguments. For discussions, we will follow the guidelines outlined below:

- (1) Treat others with respect, even when you disagree with them about their ideas or beliefs. For instance, instead of attacking the speaker, focus on disagreeing with the claim or idea by providing contradictory research findings or personal experiences.
- (2) Listening is just as important as sharing your ideas. Make sure to allow others the chance to contribute to the conversation. If you have been speaking too much (or too little), make sure to adjust accordingly so that we hear from a lot of different perspectives.
- (3) Allow others (and yourself) to make mistakes and learn from them. We don't always say what we mean, and there are things we don't know yet. Open yourself up to learning new things about yourself and give others the space to do the same.

If you do not feel comfortable participating in a class discussion or believe there is more that I could be doing to promote a more effective learning environment, I urge you to come talk to me. I will always listen to your concerns with respect and an open mind and will make adjustments when appropriate.

INTERESTED IN GRADUATE SCHOOL IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

Please don't hesitate to come to office hours if you'd like to talk to me about graduate school in psychology. I am a recent (2024) graduate of UO's PhD program in Social and Personality Psychology and am always happy to share my experience (the highs and the lows). I can't speak too much to graduate school in mental health fields (more so to research psychology), but I am happy to give general advice and direct you to people who know more than me.

YOUR WELLBEING

During your college experience, you may feel overwhelmed or stressed, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationships, or just need help navigating challenges in your life. If you're facing such challenges, you don't need to handle them on your own. [University Health Services](#) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates. University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more at counseling.uoregon.edu or by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number).

BASIC NEEDS

Being able to meet your basic needs is foundational to your success as a student. If you are having difficulty affording food, don't have a stable, safe place to live, or are struggling to meet another need, visit the [UO Basic Needs Resource](#) page for information on how to get support. They have information food, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, technology, finances (including emergency funds), and legal support. If your need is urgent, please contact the Care and Advocacy Program by calling 541-346-3216, filling out the [Community Care and Support form](#), or by [scheduling an appointment](#) with an advocate.

ACADEMIC DISRUPTION DUE TO CAMPUS EMERGENCY

In the event of a campus emergency that disrupts academic activities, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to change. Information about changes in this course will be communicated as soon as possible by email, and on Canvas. If we are not able to meet face-to-face, students should immediately log onto Canvas and read any announcements and/or access alternative assignments. Students are also expected to continue coursework as outlined in this syllabus or other instructions on Canvas.

ACADEMIC DISRUPTION DUE TO CAMPUS EMERGENCY

It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If it becomes necessary to cancel class while the University remains open, this will be announced on Canvas and by email. Updates on inclement weather and closure are also communicated as described on the [Inclement Weather](#) webpage.

REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

I am a designated reporter. For information about my reporting obligations as an employee, please see [Employee Reporting Obligations](#) on the Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance (OICRC) website. Students experiencing sex- or gender-based discrimination, harassment or violence should call the 24-7 hotline 541-346-SAFE [7244] or visit safe.uoregon.edu for help. Students experiencing all forms of prohibited discrimination or harassment may contact the Dean of Students Office at 541-346-3216 or the non-confidential Title IX Coordinator/OICRC at 541-346-3123 to request information and resources. Students are not required to participate in an investigation to receive support, including requesting academic supportive measures. Additional resources are available at investigations.uoregon.edu/how-get-support. I am also a mandatory reporter of child abuse. Please find more information at [Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect](#).

Winter 2026 Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Required readings	Due Sunday
1 M Jan. 5	Moral psychology: The science of good and evil	Syllabus*	
1 W Jan. 7	Empathy: The imperfect root of goodness	Bloom (2017); Zaki (2018)	A1*
2 M Jan. 12	Egoistic altruism: Helping others helps me	Dunn et al. (2014)*	
2 W Jan. 14	Effective altruism: Psychological barriers to effective giving	Singer (2013); Caviola et al. (2021)	A2*; C1
3 M Jan. 19	NO CLASS (University holiday – MLK Day)		
3 W Jan. 21	Bad barrels: The impact of anonymity, unidentified victims, peer influence, and prosocial motives on unethical behavior	Baumeister (2012); Lammers et al. (2015)*	A3*; C2
4 M Jan. 26	Bad apples: The impact of psychopathy, Machiavellianism, narcissism, sadism, and perpetual victimhood on unethical behavior	Campbell (2016); Glenn (2017)*	A4*; C3
4 W Jan. 28	Moral hypocrisy: Preaching but not practicing our values	Monin & Merritt (2012)	
5 M Feb. 2	Self-concept maintenance: Maintaining a positive moral self-concept when we do bad things	Shalvi et al. (2015)*; Moore (2015)	A5*; C4;
5 W Feb. 4	Moral accounting: Good behaviors license us to misbehave	Merritt et al. (2010)	E1
6 M Feb. 9	MIDTERM EXAM		
6 W Feb. 11	Social intuitionism: What harmless wrongs like consensual incest reveal about moral judgment	Haidt (2001)*; Royzman et al. (2015)	A6*
7 M Feb. 16	Trolley problems: Sacrificing one life for many and other moral dilemmas	Greene et al. (2009)	
7 W Feb. 18	Prosocial lying: Morally acceptable deception	Stroud (2022); Levine & Lupoli (2022)*	A7*; C5
8 M Feb. 23	Moral impressions: Evaluating the moral character of others	Hartman et al. (2022); Yip & Schweitzer (2015)	A8*; C6
8 W Feb. 25	Empty signals: Doing good but not receiving credit	Berman & Silver (2022)*	
9 M Mar. 2	Blame: Excusing someone from moral responsibility	Alicke et al. (2018)	A9*;
9 W Mar. 4	Punishment: Why we harm wrongdoers	Tullett (2022)*	C7
10 M Mar. 9	Moral disagreement: Why we can't agree on what's right	Haidt (2008); Schein & Gray (2017)*	A10*; C8;
10 W Mar. 11	Moral understanding: Bridging moral divides	Gray (2025)	E2
11 T Mar. 17 @ 2:45p.m.			FINAL EXAM

A* = Reading annotation

C = Case study

E = Class Engagement Report

Required Readings

Week 1

- Bloom, P. (2017). Empathy and its discontents. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 21(1), 24-31.
- Zaki, J. (2018). Empathy is a moral force. In K. Gray & J. Graham (Eds.), *Atlas of Moral Psychology* (pp. 49–58). Guilford Press.

Week 2

- Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2014). Prosocial spending and happiness: Using money to benefit others pays off. *Current directions in psychological science*, 23(1), 41-47.
- Singer (2013). The why and how of effective altruism. [\[Video\]](#)
- Caviola, L., Schubert, S., & Greene, J. D. (2021). The psychology of (in) effective altruism. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 25(7), 596-607.

Week 3

- Baumeister, Roy F. (2012). Human evil: The myth of pure evil and the true causes of violence. In M. Mikulincer & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *The social psychology of morality: Exploring the causes of good and evil* (pp. 367–380). American Psychological Association.
- Lammers, J., Galinsky, A. D., Dubois, D., & Rucker, D. D. (2015). Power and morality. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 15-19.

Week 4

- Campbell, K. (2016). The psychology of narcissism [\[Video\]](#).
- Glenn, A. (2017). Personality Disorders and Character. In Sinnott-Armstrong, W., & Miller, C. B. (Eds.). *Moral psychology, Volume 5: Virtue and character*, 5. Mit Press.
- Monin, B., & Merritt, A. (2012). Moral hypocrisy, moral inconsistency, and the struggle for moral integrity. In M. Mikulincer & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *The social psychology of morality: Exploring the causes of good and evil* (pp. 167–184).

Week 5

- Shalvi, S., Gino, F., Barkan, R., & Ayal, S. (2015). Self-serving justifications: Doing wrong and feeling moral. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(2), 125-130.
- Moore, C. (2015). Moral disengagement. *Current opinion in psychology*, 6, 199-204.
- Merritt, A. C., Effron, D. A., & Monin, B. (2010). Moral self-licensing: When being good frees us to be bad. *Social and personality psychology compass*, 4(5), 344-357.

Week 6

- Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological review*, 108(4), 814.
- Royzman, E. B., Kim, K., & Leeman, R. F. (2015). The curious tale of Julie and Mark: Unraveling the moral dumbfounding effect. *Judgment and Decision making*, 10(4), 296-313.

Week 7

- Greene, J. D., Cushman, F. A., Stewart, L. E., Lowenberg, K., Nystrom, L. E., & Cohen, J. D. (2009). Pushing moral buttons: The interaction between personal force and intention in moral judgment. *Cognition*, 111(3), 364-371.
- Stroud (2022). Ethical dilemma: Would you lie? [\[Video\]](#).

- Levine, E. E., & Lupoli, M. J. (2022). Prosocial lies: Causes and consequences. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 43, 335-340.

Week 8

- Hartman, R., Blakey, W., & Gray, K. (2022). Deconstructing moral character judgments. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 43, 205-212.
- Yip, J. A., & Schweitzer, M. E. (2015). Trust promotes unethical behavior: Excessive trust, opportunistic exploitation, and strategic exploitation. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 216-220.
- Berman, J. Z., & Silver, I. (2022). Prosocial behavior and reputation: When does doing good lead to looking good? *Current opinion in psychology*, 43, 102-107.

Week 9

- Alicke, M., Rogers, R., & Taylor, S. (2018). What is blame and why do we love it? In K. Gray & J. Graham (Eds.) *Atlas of moral psychology*, 382-390.
- Tullett, A. M. (2022). The limitations of social science as the arbiter of blame: An argument for abandoning retribution. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 17(4), 995-1007.

Week 10

- Haidt (2008). The moral roots of liberals and conservatives [Video].
- Schein, C., & Gray, K. (2018). The theory of dyadic morality: Reinventing moral judgment by redefining harm. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 22(1), 32-70.
- Gray, K. J. (2025). Understanding: Telling stories of harm. In *Outraged: Why we fight about morality and politics and how to find common ground* (Ch. 10). Pantheon Books.