

PHI 3934: Science, Ethics, and Othered Minds  
University of North Florida

#### Course description

I designed this special topics course to explore intersections of cognitive science and ethics by considering contemporary research on othered minds. 'Othered' minds are those that historically have been regarded as flatly alien and presently are still seen as non-paradigmatic – in particular, the minds of animals, the disabled (including the mentally ill), and children. We will pair scientific research concerning disability/neurodiversity, nonhuman animal cognition, and human development with related questions in ethics (e.g., incarceration of the mentally ill, the appropriateness of zoos, and the age of autonomy for children).

In some ways, this is an interdisciplinary course – though our approach to all texts will be decidedly philosophical. We will orient our conversations around two central questions: what can we learn from cognitive science and psychology that can inform our answers to ethical questions about othered minds, and how can our ethical questions help to direct research projects? I am optimistic that this kind of dynamic relationship can exist between cognitive science and philosophy and be especially helpful in our efforts to understand, respond to, and respect othered minds.

We will survey a range of articles, roughly half by scientists and half by philosophers. "Science, Ethics, and Othered Minds" offers a unique chance to wed (a) research in cognitive science and psychology concerning children's cognition, emotions, and prosocial behavior with philosophical debates about children's autonomy, responsibility, and the limits of paternalism; (b) research concerning autism, schizophrenia, psychopathy, depression, and anxiety with philosophical debates about how to best understand 'mental illness' and 'disease,' embracing neurocosmopolitanism, the role of phenomenology, and moral responsibility and punishment; and lastly, (c) research concerning primates, cetaceans, elephants, corvids, domestic dogs, pigs, and rats with philosophical debates about ascribing mental states to nonhuman animals, their moral status, the evolutionary origins of morality, and the permissibility of eating meat and having zoos.