

UMBC UGC New Course Request: PSYC 353

Date Submitted: 2/15/2016

Proposed Effective Date: immediately

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COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number(s)	PSYC 353
Formal Title	Morality and Psychology
Transcript Title (≤30c)	Morality and Psychology
Recommended Course Preparation	PHIL 150 or PHIL 152 or PHIL 350 or PSYC 100
Prerequisite NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a "D" or better.	One course in Philosophy with a grade of C or better
Credits	3
Repeatable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Max. Total Credits	<small>This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.</small>
Grading Method(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reg (A-F) <input type="checkbox"/> Audit <input type="checkbox"/> Pass-Fail

PROPOSED CATALOG DESCRIPTION (no longer than 75 words):

An examination of some of the central issues connecting psychological research to ethical inquiry. Topics to be covered may include: psychological egoism; the nature of moral judgment and moral motivation and their relations; the role of reasoning vs. emotional processes in moral judgments; the social and evolutionary functions of moral sentiments and concepts; how psychological research might shape our understanding of and responses to the questions about whether morality is objective and whether we can be morally responsible for our actions.

RATIONALE FOR NEW COURSE:

Dr. Eric Campbell is a recently hired, tenure-track assistant professor in the Philosophy Department specializing in ethics. He has taught the course 'Morality and Psychology' successfully at other universities, it constitutes his research focus, and he plans to teach this course at least once every two years and to teach related topics at the 400-level. The topic – on connections between psychological research (in social, evolutionary and cognitive psychology) and ethical inquiry – has received a great deal of attention within both psychology and philosophy in the past 20 years, as well as in popular media, and is now a standard component in the curriculum of many philosophy and psychology departments.

Although several of the courses in Psychology touch upon topics related to moral reasoning and its development, none of our existing courses provides in-depth or extensive coverage of this topic.

The Psychology Department has agreed to cross list this course with PHIL 353, and to allow it to count towards the electives requirement of the psychology major. We expect this course to draw strong enrollments from across the university, particularly philosophy students (for whom it will count as fulfilling the Ethics requirement of the major) and psychology students (for whom it will fulfill upper-division major elective credit). The course will be taught at the 300-level so that students will have some background in philosophy, and as a survey course, in order to prepare students for related, more advanced courses at the 400 level.

The recommended course preparations are introductory courses in ethics – PHIL 150: Contemporary Moral Issues, PHIL 152: Introduction to Moral Theory – as well as the Philosophy Department’s 300 level intermediate level survey course PHIL 350: Ethical Theory. PSYC 100: Introduction to Psychology is a recommended course preparation for non-majors (psychology majors will have taken PSYC 100 as a foundational requirement for the major.) Each of these courses will provide solid preparation for PSYC 353.

Students will have the option of auditing, taking P/F or for a grade. Per Department policy, PSYC 353 will count towards the major only if a grade of “C” or better is earned.

We are going along with the Philosophy Department’s standard prerequisite in all of their 300 level courses to require one course in philosophy with a grade of C or better, since they are the lead Department for the course.

ATTACH COURSE OUTLINE (mandatory):

PHIL 353/PSYC 353: Morality and Psychology
University of Maryland Baltimore County
Fall 2016

Professor Eric Campbell
e-mail: ecampbel@umbc.edu
OH: MW 2:30 – 3:30 at PAHB 460

Location:
MW 4 – 5:15

Functional Competency Satisfied by this Course: Critical Analysis and Reasoning

Course Materials:

- Simon Blackburn, *Being Good*
- Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*
- Other materials on Blackboard free of charge

Course Description

For better or worse, morality has become increasingly interesting to psychologists, neuroscientists, evolutionary theorists and other cognitive scientists over the last few decades. Some of these researchers argue that discoveries of one kind or another threaten (or promise) to undermine deeply held conceptions of morality or our status as responsible (moral) agents. In this course, one of our concerns will be to address whether, why and in what sense any such broadly psychological research could harbor any insidious, dangerous, or even fatal seductions. In order to approach questions of this sort fruitfully, it will be crucial to develop and sharpen our philosophical tools as well as increase our relevant scientific understanding.

Course Goals and Expectations:

In this course we will examine some of the most important and interesting connections between philosophical ethics and research into human psychology. Central topics will include (1) whether and how psychological research can inform our ethical inquiries, (2) the nature of and relationships between “reason” and “passion”, (3) the extent to which we can explain our moral (and religious) psychology in terms of our development as “ultrasocial” creatures, (4) what is the domain of the “moral” and how might psychological research bear on this question, (5) whether and in what sense morality is “objective” and how psychological research might influence our understanding of and answer to this question, and (6) whether and in what sense can we be morally responsible for our actions, and how psychological research might influence our understanding of and answer to this question.

It will be vital for you to come to class regularly and do the readings **beforehand**. I will lecture on the assumption that you have done the reading and I expect you to make that assumption correct. It will be important for your participation grade to do so, but that is the least of it. You just will not be able to perform at a high level in the course otherwise. Lecture it not only or even always primarily a matter of explaining the readings to you. There is

some of that, but I will build on the readings, talk about things that are not in the readings, criticize the readings, and so on. If you have not done the reading, are not paying attention, ready to ask or answer questions and take notes on points I emphasize, you will not do well in the course. I have high standards for student performance. Fortunately, this stuff is super-interesting! Take advantage of this opportunity to learn and think about some really cool stuff! Most people don't ever get it so good.

Methods of Evaluation:¹

- Short paper: 20% (due Sunday at midnight prior to beginning of 5th week)
- Midterm: 30% (Wednesday of week 11)
- Final paper: 40% (due during finals week)
- Participation: 10%

Unless you have a very good excuse (serious illness, death in the family, etc.) and you notify me before the assignment is due, late exams or papers will be graded down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late. For example, if your work earns an A, but you take the exam/turn in the paper 1 day late, you will receive a B+.

Your grade is for participation. Attendance alone is not participation. If you cannot get yourself to speak in public, you may receive full participation credit by discussing the material with me in office hours. You are encouraged to come to office hours in general, but doing so can boost your participation grade only if you regularly attend class.

Academic Freedom and Opportunity

You should feel free to engage in reasoned disagreement with me without any penalty to your grade. I will feel free to challenge any belief, ideology, worldview, or attitude you have, including those beliefs you hold sacred. Students likewise should feel free to engage in this way with each other. Everyone should not only feel free to express his or her views without fear of bullying or reprisal, but you are all positively encouraged to do so. The classroom and the university is a forum for the pursuit of truth. We are all ignorant and mistaken about many things. One of the most common ways of remaining ignorant and mistaken is to try to keep others from airing and defending their viewpoints. Another, related way is to avoid the attempt to defend your own viewpoint. You are all very lucky to have this opportunity to improve your views on the questions we'll discuss in this course, as well as your ability to defend them. I want you to take advantage of that opportunity.

Student Integrity:

UMBC Statement of Values for Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the [UMBC Student Handbook](#), or the [Office of Undergraduate Education](#).

Tips for Success

- Don't just read. Write. For every reading assignment, write down the author's thesis or main claims/ideas in plain language. Outline the main argument or evidence base. Write down one objection to the argument or a question about what is being claimed or about its evidential support, or just note the evidential support. Doing all this will make you understand the material better and help you get a better grade.

¹ Descriptions of assignments is at the end of the syllabus.

- If you need help, I encourage you to come to my office hours. There's no reason to make this class harder than necessary. I want you to succeed.

Electronics Policy

No laptops or other electronic gadgetry whatever are allowed in class (unless for a documented disability).

Even for those noble and disciplined few who would really only take notes on them if I allowed them, research indicates that taking notes by hand facilitates understanding and recall. More important, most people cannot or do not resist using them in naughty ways (social media, sports, movies) and this distracts that student and other students as well. Also, I think it's very easy to get too focused on taking notes. I want you to come to class *having done the readings carefully* and ready to listen, think about what I'm saying, ask questions and discuss. You should take notes when reading, and I am perfectly happy for you to take notes when I'm talking, but what is most important in lecture is that you're paying attention and *thinking*. The notes you take should be limited to main ideas and/or things not in the readings. It should take only a few minutes to transfer them to your computers after class (I will also post lecture notes, but not necessarily for every lecture, and not necessarily in great detail). If you expect to receive a vitally important message while in class, sit in the back and leave the class to take the call or message. Nobody's perfect. I'll give you a friendly reminder if you forget. If it happens again, you will get a 0 for participation.

Accessibility

Your success in this course is important to me. If you require special accommodations of any sort, please let me know on the first day of class. **Is there a link I can provide them for disability info?**

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND TOPICS

This schedule is subject to change. I will announce any changes in class and via email.

Part I: Morality

Week 1

Monday, January 25: Introduction

Wednesday, January 27: *Being Good*², Chapters 1 and 2

Week 2:

Being Good, Chapters 3 – 4

Being Good, Chapters 5 – 7

Week 3

Being Good, Chapters 11, 12, 15

Being Good, Chapters 16 – 18

Week 4

Being Good, Chapters 19 – 21

Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"³

Part II: Moral Motivation, Judgment and Reasoning

Week 5

Asch, 'Opinions and Social Pressure'⁴; Milgram, 'The Perils of Obedience'⁵

Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*⁶: Intro and Chapter 1

² *Being Good*. Simon Blackburn, 2001, Oxford University Press. (the chapters are quite short).

³ Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring, 1972), pp. 229-243.

⁴ Solomon Asch, "Opinions and Social Pressure", *Scientific American*, 1955. Vol. 193, No. 5. pp. 31 – 35.

⁵ "The Perils of Obedience". Stanley Milgram, *Harper's*, 247:1483 (1973:Dec.) pp. 62 – 77.

Week 6

Haidt, Chapter 2
Haidt, Chapter 3

Week 7:

Haidt, Chapter 4
Haidt, Chapters 5 – 6

Week 8:

Haidt, Chapters 7 - 8
Haidt, Chapter 9

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10:

Haidt, Chapter 10
Jacobson, 'Does Social Intuitionism Flatter Morality or Challenge It?'⁷

Week 11:

Haidt and Bjorkland, 'Social Intuitionists Reason, In Conversation'.⁸
Midterm Exam

Part III: Free Will, Moral Responsibility, Praise and Blame

Week 13:

Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility'⁹
Frankfurt, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person'¹⁰

Week 14:

Nahmias, 'Is Neuroscience the Death of Free Will?'¹¹
Strawson, 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility'¹²

Week 15:

April 13: Peter Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment'¹³
April 15: Sommers, 'The Illusion of Freedom Evolves'¹⁴

Week 16

Flex day (I might add a reading here, or use this day to talk about a topic I feel we didn't spend enough time on, or if necessary to make up a missed lecture).

Summing up: I try to give a kind of grand narrative of what we've done in the course, the questions we started with and how we (hopefully) got a better understanding of those questions and some tools to address them.

⁶ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*. Pantheon Books, 2012.

⁷ From *Moral Psychology* (2008), edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. Vol. 2: 182 – 217..

⁸ *Moral Psychology* pp. 219 - 254.

⁹ Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibilities," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 66, No. 23 (1969), pp. 829-839.

¹⁰ Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1): 5-20 (1971).

¹¹ Eddy Nahmias, "Is Neuroscience the Death of Free Will", *The New York Times* ("The Stone" blog), Nov. 13, 2011.

¹² Galen Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Studies* (1994) (75): 5 – 24.

¹³ Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment", from *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. xlviii (1962), pp. 1-25.

¹⁴ Tammler Sommers, "The Illusion of Freedom Evolves," In Don Ross, David Spurrett, Harold Kincaid & G. Lynn Stephens (eds.), *Distributed Cognition and the Will: Individual Volition and Social Context* (Chapter 4). MIT Press (2007).

Week 17:

Final Paper due

Short Paper

The short paper will ask students to respond to one of three prompts in 2 double-spaced pages. The main purposes are to get them some early practice at writing about the topics we're discussing and to get a sense of my standards and requirements via feedback. A central focus will be on clearly articulating an argument involving (somewhat) difficult concepts in a short space, with maximal clarity and accuracy. Part of the task is to make judgments about what does and does not need to be included in order to accomplish the task. Topics include psychological egoism, divine command theory and categorical vs. hypothetical imperatives. The first topic is obviously connected to psychology, but so are the latter two. A central theme of the course will be (roughly put) to examine why believing in categorical imperatives (reasons for action that don't depend on anyone's desires or attitudes) would be important for humans, especially in large-scale societies. Very generally, thinking of one's own desires as the source of reason or duty has very important motivational costs. Divine command theory at first appears to solve this problem by locating the source in God. But on examination this theory fails to provide the needed psychological fixed point, since it cannot explain why God's will might not be arbitrary. These aspects of these latter two topics will only be touched upon briefly in the early part of the course, but will come into greater focus over the next several weeks.

Midterm

The midterm contains 10 short answer questions and five medium answer questions (one – two paragraphs each). Topics include:

- The difference between normative and non-normative claims.
- What it means to say "reason is the slave of the passions" and what evidence there is in favor of this claim.
- How "selfish genes" can give rise to unselfish people.
- Why "reproductive fitness" is not to be identified with "welfare".
- Understanding "the free rider problem" in evolutionary accounts of human eusociality.
- "Categorical reasons" and why their absence can seem deeply threatening to morality.
- Evidence that religious and political opinions are often driven more by a will to (signal) in-group solidarity than a will to truth.
- Understanding gene-culture co-evolution with examples (e.g. lactose tolerance)

Final paper

Tentatively, I plan to ask students to write on one of the following topics.

One of the primary themes in *The Righteous Mind* is that "morality binds and blinds". This means that morality (and religion) has the function of binding people together in groups, and that sacralising moral norms prevents us from thinking about them clearly. One potential paper topic will ask students to explain what this phrase means, and why morality (and religion) might have to "blind" in order to bind. When reading Haidt, as well as in the Sommers reading on moral responsibility, we will have discussed some reasons to think that the human (animal) tendency toward dynamic inconsistency of preference (in the context of human ultrasociality) can help explain some basic features of moral concepts (including categorical reasons and "true" or "deep" moral responsibility).

Another potential topic will ask them to argue (more speculatively) about whether Haidt's work threatens to undermine morality, on his own view. It seems to threaten it because Haidt argues that morality "binds and blinds". But Haidt's work (and that of many others) lifts the veil, so to speak. If the veil is lifted, but the "blinding" aspect of morality (and religion) is central to its function, then is Haidt undermining what he is ostensibly attempting to not only explain, but in some way legitimize (especially in the case of religion)?

The paper option will ask students to answer the question whether we are ever "truly" morally responsible. Students will argue for their own view, then describe what they take to be the strongest objection to that view, then rebut that objection as well as they can. Emphasis is laid on the students' ability and willingness to characterize the strongest objection to their own view.

