

PHIL 450: Metaethics
Fall 2016
MW 5:30 to 6:45, PAH 456
Professor Eric Campbell

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Office hours: MW 4 – 5:15 or by appointment in PAH 460

Course Description

A close study of the nature of ethical discourse and how it relates to the rest of the mind and world. Topics to be considered include: whether there are ethical facts or truths; naturalism vs. non-naturalism about such facts or truths; the relationship between ethical judgments and personal attitudes; whether ethical judgments are inherently motivating; moral relativism; moral skepticism. Readings will be drawn from historical and contemporary sources.

Course Materials

All course materials will be available in Course Reserves or on Blackboard

Methods of Evaluation (dates subject to change)

Short paper: 20%	Oct. 6
Paper proposal: 25%	Dec. 1
Final paper: 35%	Dec. 18
Random quizzes: 20%	

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/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 1 day late, you will receive a B+.

Short paper

You will describe and evaluate the core arguments Mackie and Dworkin make with respect to whether moral properties are “too strange to believe in”. You will be evaluated primarily on the clarity, concision and accuracy with which you characterize their dispute, though there will also be space for you to evaluate who you think gets the better of their disagreement. **5 pages maximum.**

Paper proposal

Rather than having you write three papers, you will write a carefully constructed proposal for your final paper. This will count for the same as a medium-length paper would have counted, but will better contribute toward your final paper being as good as possible. I will want you to identify one question that interests you most in the works we’ve read. If you can’t come up with a question, I will suggest some. You will then think about how you want to approach and answer that question, and ultimately lay out your plan, including at least some references to the texts, in about 3 pages. The idea will be for you to get as clear as possible, and to communicate to me as clearly as possible, how you plan to write your final paper. This is the most important part of writing a good paper—the thinking and planning beforehand. I will give you feedback on the proposal (in writing and perhaps also in person) so your final paper can be as good as possible.

Random quizzes

I will give several random quizzes throughout the semester. These quizzes will ask 1 or 2 short comprehension questions about the reading, answerable in one or two sentences each. They will serve as incentive for you to come to class, since missing a quiz without an excused absence means you lose the points for that quiz, and also incentive to do the reading beforehand. If and only if you do the reading attentively, you should be able to answer the quiz questions correctly. If you do the reading and come to class, it's an easy way to get 20% of your grade to be an A, and as an added benefit, you will be better prepared to participate in lecture and to do well on subsequent assignments!

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](#).

Learning Disabilities

Your success in this course is important to me. If you require special accommodations of any sort, please let me know as soon as possible. To request academic accommodations for a disability, please contact Student Support Services in the Math & Psychology Building, room 213. You can reach them at (410) 455-2459.

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 develop and improve your ideas 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.

Tips for Success

- Don't just read. Read twice and write. For every reading assignment, write down the author's thesis or main claims/ideas in plain language. Outline the main argument. Read it again and write down at least one objection to the argument or a question about what is being claimed or about its evidential support, or just note the evidential support (what evidence is adduced in support of the main thesis). Doing all this will make you understand the material better and help you get a better grade.
- 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 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 better 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, I will ask you to leave the classroom.

Email Policy

- Please do not email me any question the answer to which can easily be found on this syllabus.
- Substantive questions about course content that cannot be answered with a Yes or No should not be emailed, but rather bring those questions to office hours. I'm there anyway and you will get much more out of the course if you come talk to me in office hours.

Accessibility

Your success in this course is important to me. If you require special accommodations of any sort, please let me know as soon as you can.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES

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

Aug. 31: Introductory lecture—no readings

Sep. 5: Labor Day

Sep. 7: Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"

Sep. 12: Garner, "On the Genuine Queerness of Moral Properties and Facts"

Sep. 14: Campbell, "Breakdown of Moral Judgment," Intro through section 2.

Sep. 19: Campbell, "Breakdown" continued.

Sep. 21: Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*, 6.1 – 6.4

Sep 26: Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It," sections I – III.

Sep. 28: Finish Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It"

Oct. 3: Railton, "Moral Realism"

Oct. 5: Railton, "Naturalism and Prescriptivity"

Oct 10: Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma For Realist Theories of Value"

Oct. 12: Street, "Reply to Copp"

Recommended: Copp, "Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism"

Oct. 17: Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*, sections 1.3 – 1.5 and Chapter 2
Oct. 19: Blackburn, *Spreading The Word*, Chapter 5, sections 1-6 and Chapter 6, section 1.

Oct. 24: Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, Chapter 6, sections 2-5.
Oct. 26: Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, section 6.6. Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*, 183-186.
Egan, “Quasi-realism and Fundamental Moral Error”

Oct. 31: Discussion of deflationism and quasi-realism (no reading).
Nov. 2: Street, “Mind-Independence Without the Mystery”

Nov. 7: Korsgaard, “The Sources of Normativity,” lecture 3.
Nov. 9: Street, “Coming to Terms With Contingency”

Nov. 14: Silk, Nietzschean Constructivism
Nov. 16: Finish Silk

Nov. 21: Discussion of competing constructivisms (no reading)
Nov. 23: Joyce, Moral Fictionalism

Nov. 28: Campbell, Breakdown of Moral Judgment, sections III and IV
Nov. 30: Reading to be determined by student interest

Dec. 5: Reading to be determined by student interest
Dec. 7: Flex day

Dec. 12: **Wrapping up**