

COURSE SYLLABUS
Philosophy 498/Irrationality
MW 2:30-3:45/ Spring 2015
PAHB 456

Prof. Steve Yalowitz
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office hours: Wednesday 1:30-2:30pm and by appointment

Course Goals

This course looks at problems in understanding irrational mental phenomena – instances where one acts or believes contrary to one's own best judgment or intention concerning what one should do or think. Topics to be covered include the nature of rationality and irrationality, the possibility and structure of weakness of will, wishful thinking, and self-deception, and the rational status of emotions. The bearing of irrational and emotional phenomena on questions concerning responsibility and freedom will also be addressed. Students will also write in-depth expositions and critiques of issues and positions covered in the course, which will sharpen their analytical skills and help enhance their comprehension of the central course themes. Prerequisites: one course in philosophy with a grade of C or better or permission of the instructor.

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](#).

Required Texts:

All required readings are available through Electronic Reserves (see below)

Electronic Reserves:

To access electronic reserves, go to the UMBC Library web page and click on Electronic Reserves. Select the Philosophy Department, and then click on PHIL498 under my name. To access material, click on it and then type in the following (all lower case, no spaces):

username = phil498sp15
password = sunnyhebb

If you are having problems accessing or printing readings, try a different web browser.

Written Work:

two in-class examinations – study questions to be handed out prior to exams
one 8 page essay

the lowest grade will count 20% towards the final grade; the two highest grades will count approximately 35% each. 10% of the final grade will be determined by class participation

Attendance

class attendance is required; the final grade will be affected by more than three unexcused absences; always alert me ahead of time when you not be able to attend to class.

Schedule of Readings (approximate dates, subject to change):

- Jan. 26-28: - Introduction
- Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'
- Feb. 2-4: - Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'
- Frankfurt, 'The Problem of Action', sections I-III, pp. 69-75
- Stout, 'Deviant Causal Chains'
- Feb. 9-11: - Davidson, 'How is Weakness of the Will Possible ?'
- Feb. 16-18: - Watson, 'Skepticism about Weakness of Will'
- Feb. 23-25: - Smith, 'Rational Capacities, or: How to Distinguish Recklessness, Weakness and Compulsion', pp. 17-21, 29-38
- Smith and Kennett, 'Philosophy and Commonsense: The Case of Weakness of Will'
- Mar. 2-4: **REVIEW**
MIDTERM EXAM
- Mar. 9-11: - Stocker, 'Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology'
- Holton, 'Intention and Weakness of Will'
- McIntyre, 'Is Akratic Action Always Irrational ?'
- Mar. 16-18: **SPRING BREAK**
- Mar. 23-25: - Davidson, 'Paradoxes of Irrationality'
- Mele, 'Strict Akratic Action: A Paradox of Irrationality'
- Mar. 30-Apr. 1: - Davidson, 'Deception and Division'
- Mele, 'Self-Deception'
- Bermudez, 'Self-Deception, Intentions, and Contradictory Beliefs'
- Apr. 6-8: - Baron, 'What's Wrong with Self-Deception ?'
- Levy, 'Self-Deception and Moral Responsibility'
- Apr. 13-15: - Wood, 'Self-Deception and Bad Faith', pp. 207-08, 215-227
- Williams, 'Deciding to Believe', esp. pp. 107-11
- Cook, 'Deciding to Believe Without Self-Deception'
- Apr. 20-22: **REVIEW**
MIDTERM EXAM
- Apr. 27-29: - Bedford, 'Emotions'
- Solomon, 'Emotions and Choice'
- May 4-6: - Solomon, 'Emotions and Choice'
- Solomon, 'The Rationality of Emotion'
- May 11: - Greenspan, 'Emotional Strategies and Rationality'

FINAL PAPERS DUE DURING FINAL EXAM WEEK – DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED

Grading:

Here is how the grading process for the course works:

A = 4.0
A- = 3.66
B+ = 3.33
B = 3.0
B- = 2.66
C+ = 2.33
C = 2.0
C- = 1.66
D = 1

The lowest of the three grades counts for 20% of the final grade, the higher two grades for 40% each.

Since UMBC currently only has final grades of A, B, C, D, and F (i.e. no pluses or minuses), the final grade will be rounded up or down from the average of the three grades depending on where that average falls.

Example One: A-, B-, A

B- = 2 x 2.66 = 5.32
A- = 4 x 3.66 = 14.64
A = 4 x 4.0 = 16

total: 35.9 = 3.59

3.59 is closer to A- (3.66) than to B+ (3.33). So the final grade would be A-, and thus rounded up to A.

Example Two: A- , A-, B-

B- = 2 x 2.66 = 5.32
A- = 4 x 3.66 = 14.64
A- = 4 x 3.66 = 14.64

total: 34.6 = 3.46

3.46 is closer to B+ (3.33) than to A- (3.66). So the final grade would be B+, and thus rounded down to B.

Example Three: C, A, A

C = 2 x 2.0 = 4
A = 4 x 4.0 = 16
A = 4 x 4.0 = 16

total: 36 = 3.6

3.6 is closer to A- (3.66) than to B+ (3.33). So the final grade would be A-, and thus rounded up to A