

PHIL 452: 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

Functional Competency Satisfied by this Course: Critical Analysis and Reasoning

Course Description

A close study of the nature of ethical discourse and its relation to the mind and the world. Topics to be considered include: whether there are ethical facts; naturalism vs. non-naturalism about ethical facts; the relationship between ethical judgments and personal attitudes; whether ethical judgments are inherently motivating; whether ethical judgments can be true or false; 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: 25%	Oct. 6
Paper proposal: 25%	Nov. 25
Final paper: 40%	Dec. 15
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/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+.

Paper proposal

Rather than having you write one short-medium paper and one longer final paper, I have decided to have you write a carefully constructed proposal for your final paper. You may begin doing this at any point, but I recommend you start to think seriously about it several weeks before the final paper is due. I will want you to identify one question that interests you most in the works we've read. 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 2 pages. The idea will be for you to get as clear as possible, and to communicate to me as clearly as possible, what your final paper will be about and how you plan to write it. 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 when you turn it in. You will not be bound to write the paper that you present in your proposal; you might make substantial changes based on my feedback or for another reason. But in my experience these proposals help students write much better papers than they would otherwise. This is good for you and for me.

Lectures and Participation

You are expected to come to class each day prepared to discuss the readings intelligently. If you can't attend class, let me know ahead of time, whether the absence is excused or not. Classes will generally involve lectures and discussion. You must attend regularly to get full credit. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in less than full credit for participation, and your grade will continue to drop as you miss more classes, no matter how much you participate when you are there. You are encouraged to participate in class, but 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.

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: Harman, selection from The Nature of Morality

Sep. 19: Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations"

Sep. 21: Campbell, "Breakdown of Moral Judgment," Intro through section 2.

Sep 26: Joyce, The Evolution of Morality, 6.1 – 6.3

Sep. 28: Joyce, finish Chapter 6 of The Evolution of Morality

Oct. 3: Railton, "Moral Realism"

Oct. 5: Railton, "Naturalism and Prescriptivity"

Oct 10: Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It," sections I – III.

Oct. 12: Finish Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It"

Oct. 17: Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma For Realist Theories of Value"

Oct. 19: Schroeder, Noncognitivism in Ethics, Chapter 1

Oct. 24: Schroeder, Chapter 2

Oct. 26: Schroeder, Chapter 4

Oct. 31: Schroeder, Chapter 8

Nov. 2: Korsgaard, "The Sources of Normativity," lecture 3.

Nov. 7: Street, "Constructivism About Reasons"

Nov. 9: Street, "Coming to Terms With Contingency"

Nov. 14: Street, "Mind-Independence Without the Mystery: Why Quasi-Realists Can't Have it Both Ways"

Nov. 16: Silk, "Nietzschean Constructivism"

Nov. 21: D'Arms and Jacobsen: Projectivism and Sentimentalism

Nov. 23: Prinz, selection from The Emotional Construction of Morals

Nov. 28: Lewis, "Quasi-Realism is Fictionalism"

Nov. 30: Campbell, finish Breakdown of Moral Judgment

Dec. 5: Flex day (Reading determined by student interest)

Dec. 7: Flex day

Dec. 12: Wrapping up