

PAR 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Term: Spring 2020	Instructor: Robert Smithson
Time: MWF 9-9:50am	Email: smithsonr@uncw.edu
Room: LT 139	Office: Bear 266
	Office Hours: MWF 11-12 or by appointment

Course Description

Is there an external world? Do we have free will? What is the self? Does God exist? How ought we to live? Does life have meaning? Philosophy is the study of these basic questions about the world and our place in it. In this introductory course, we will consider how philosophical arguments might be used to decide these questions.

Course Goals

1. To provide an overview of six fundamental areas of philosophical inquiry: *epistemology*, *ethics*, *metaphysics*, *metaethics*, *the meaning of life*, and *applied ethics*. By examining these issues, the course aims to show students how philosophy can help us better understand the world and our place in it.
2. To help students develop a variety intellectual virtues: the ability to *think self-critically*, the ability to *think charitably*, and the ability to *reconstruct and analyze arguments*.
3. To develop students' writing and argumentation through a series of short writing assignments throughout the term.

Course Texts

All texts for the course will be posted to the course's Canvas site.

Grading

Three writing assignments (3 pages each): 50%
Final: 25%
Miscellaneous short homework assignments: 15%
Participation/potential unannounced quizzes: 10%

Papers

In light of the third listed goal for the course, there will be a series of writing assignments throughout the term, each 3 pages long (double-spaced). There will be a different prompt (or prompts) for each of the course's five units. Students are required to respond to three of those prompts. Students have the option of submitting papers for four units; if four papers are submitted, the instructor will drop the lowest paper score.

To facilitate anonymous grading, only include your identification number (and not your name) at the top of the document. For helpful advice on writing philosophy papers, see Jim Pryor's introduction: www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html.

Attendance

The participation grade takes into account both attendance and discussion in class. Class attendance is mandatory. Students arriving late will receive reduced credit for attendance that day. Students leaving class early will also receive reduced credit.

The professor will accommodate a reasonable number of excused absences for religious holidays and official off-campus college business such as academic conference presentations and athletic competitions. However, students must discuss with the professor the dates of the anticipated absences no later than the last day of the drop period. Students must present to their professor written evidence of the anticipated absences and discuss with him/her how and when make-up work should be completed prior to missing the class. Students should not expect to receive allowance for excused absences if they do not meet with the professor beforehand and clarify the dates as necessary.

Absences will be addressed by the professor in accordance with his attendance policy. The professor retains the right to determine what would be considered to be a reasonable number of absences (excused or otherwise) for the course. A student will not fail a course because the number of religious observances and/or college business absences exceed the number of absences allowed, except if excessive absences make it impossible to fulfill the expectations of the course. The student's class participation grade in the course, though, may still be affected.

Honor Code

All students enrolled at UNCW are subject to the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code, which is intended to help every member of the UNCW community appreciate the high value placed on academic integrity and the means that will be employed to ensure its preservation. Students are expected to perpetuate a campus culture in which each student does his or her own work while relying on appropriate resources for assistance. In such a climate, students enjoy a special trust that they are members of a unique community in which one's thoughts and words are attributed correctly and with proper ownership, and in which there is little need for systems to sanction those who cheat. As such, all UNCW students shall commit to the principles and spirit of the Honor Code by adhering to the following pledge:

As a student at The University of North Carolina Wilmington, I am committed to honesty and truthfulness in academic inquiry and in the pursuit of knowledge. I pledge to uphold and promote the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code.

More information on the Honor Code is available at the following website:

<http://www.uncw.edu/odos/honorcode/>.

Please be especially familiar with UNCW's position on plagiarism as outlined in the UNCW Student Handbook. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty in which you take someone else's ideas and represent them as your own. Here are some examples of plagiarism:

1. You write about someone else's work in your paper and do not give them credit for it by referencing them.

2. You give a presentation and use someone else's ideas and do not state that the ideas are the other person's.
3. You get ideas from some other reference material and do not reference that material.

Accessibility Services

It is very important that this classroom be an inclusive environment that meets the learning needs of all of its students. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of academic accommodations in order to fully participate in your classes, please contact the Office of Disability Services (962-7555). Please give me a copy of the letter you receive from Office of Disability Services detailing class accommodations you may need. If you require accommodation for test-taking, please make sure I have the referral letter no fewer than three days before the test.

Title IX Statement

UNCW practices a zero tolerance policy for any kind of violent or harassing behavior. If you are experiencing an emergency of this type contact the police at 911 or UNCW CARE at 962- 2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation can be located at <http://uncw.edu/noharm/resources/index.html>.

University Learning Center

The University Learning Center's (ULC) mission is to help students become successful, independent learners. Tutoring at the ULC is NOT remediation: the ULC offers a different type of learning opportunity for those students who want to increase the quality of their education. ULC services are free to all UNCW students and include the following:

- Learning Services (University Learning Center) <http://uncw.edu/ulc/learning/>
- Math Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/math/index.html>
- Supplemental Instruction <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/si/index.html>
- Writing Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/index.html>

Electronic Device Policy

In order to promote classroom discussion, no laptops, tablets, phones, etc. are permitted during class except by instructor permission.

In order to protect the integrity of the classroom experience, the use of recording devices is limited to either the expressed permission of the faculty member or with proper documentation from the Office of Accessibility Services.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, depending on the progress of the discussion in the class. If there are changes, I will make note of them in class and will send out an email about the changes. Next to each class period, there is an assigned reading. The reading for 08/26 should be completed before class on 08/26, etc.

In addition to the listed reading, there is typically a handout summarizing the material discussed in class. This handout will be made available on Canvas. If it is helpful to you, you are able to read the handout prior to class, but this is not required.

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Date	Topic
	UNIT 1: EPISTEMOLOGY
M 01/13	Introduction, syllabus, external world skepticism. <i>Reading:</i> none.
W 01/15	Heroic responses to skepticism. <i>Reading:</i> none.
F 01/17	Concessive responses to skepticism. Skepticism and human life. <i>Reading:</i> David Chalmers (2005). The Matrix as Metaphysics. Sections 1-8.
M 01/20	Peer disagreement: setting up the problem. <i>Reading:</i> Richard Feldman (2012). Reasonable Religious Disagreements. (excerpts) HW: Feldman discusses a variety of possible responses to religious disagreements. What do you think is the most plausible response he considers, and why? (1/2 page)
W 01/22	Peer disagreement: privileged standpoints? <i>Reading:</i> none.
F 01/24	Peer disagreement: descriptive vs. normative disagreements.
M 01/27	Writing philosophy papers. <i>Reading:</i> Vida Yao (ms) Intro to Writing Philosophy. PAR Paper Characteristics. Example paper (with sample comments added).
	UNIT 2: ETHICS
W 01/29	Utilitarianism <i>Reading:</i> Peter Singer (1972) Famine, Affluence, and Morality.
F 01/31	Objections to utilitarianism. <i>Reading:</i> Excerpts from J.J.C. Smart & Bernard Williams (1973) <i>Utilitarianism: For and Against.</i>
M 02/03	Kantianism and the Motive of Duty <i>Reading:</i> Hill (1979) Symbolic Protest and Calculated Silence. HW: Identify a protest (from the news, from history, etc.) that seems to meet Hill's definition of a "symbolic protest". Hill discusses many possible reasons why someone might engage in a symbolic protest: which of these reasons (if any) might apply to your specific example? Do you agree with Hill that this is a good (or bad) reason to engage in symbolic protest? (1/2 page)
W 02/05	Kantianism and the Categorical Imperative. <i>Reading:</i> Hill (1973) Servility and Self-Respect.

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- F 02/07 The Kantian vision.
Reading: Hill (1984) *Autonomy and Benevolent Lies*.
HW: Identify and explain a potential instance of a benevolent lie (meeting Hill's definition). Analyze whether this particular lie was morally justified. (1/2 page)
- M 02/10 Virtue Ethics
Reading: Wolf (2007) *Moral Psychology and the Unity of the Virtues*.
- W 02/12 Virtue Ethics and Platonic Justice
Reading: none.
- F 02/14 **NO CLASS (baby- makeup class TBA)**
- UNIT 3: METAPHYSICS**
- M 02/17 Incompatibilism and moral responsibility.
Reading: Listen to "Life Is a Coin With One Side", *This American Life* segment by David Kestenbaum.
<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/662/where-there-is-a-will>
- W 02/19 Incompatibilism and moral responsibility. (continued)
Reading: None.
- F 02/21 Compatibilism: why does freedom matter?
Reading: Selections from the work of Frederick Douglass; George Moses Horton, "On Liberty and Slavery," Emma Lazerus, "The New Colossus," Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address."
HW: What types of freedom do the above authors discuss, and why are these types of freedom important? (1/2 page)
- M 02/24 Sanity and the deep self.
Reading: Susan Wolf (1987). *Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility*.
- W 02/26 **NO CLASS (conference, makeup class TBA)**
- F 02/28 The problem of evil
Reading: Dostoevsky (1879) *The Brothers Karamazov* (excerpt).
- M 03/02 Responses to the problem of evil.
Reading: none.
- W 03/04 Design arguments.
Reading: none.
- F 03/06 Catch-up class
- 03/09 - 03/13 **NO CLASS: Spring break**
- UNIT 4: METAETHICS (and the place of ethics in human life)**
- W 03/11 Moral skepticism, psychological egoism
Reading: none.
- F 03/13 The Euthyphro problem
Reading: Plato (380BCE) *Euthyphro*.
- M 03/15 Relativism.
Reading: David Velleman (ms) *Morality There and Here*.

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- W 03/18 Non-moral values.
Reading: Susan Wolf (1982) *Moral Saints*
HW: Describe someone who exhibits a non-moral virtue. Discuss whether the fact that they have this virtue is in tension with this person's having moral virtue. (1/2 page)
- F 03/20 Genealogical critiques.
Reading: Nietzsche (2006) *The Genealogy of Morals* (read Essay 1, starting on p. 51 of .pdf).
- M 03/23 Catch-up day.
Reading: none.

UNIT 5: THE MEANING OF LIFE

- W 03/25 Human lives.
Reading: Susan Wolf (2007) *The Meaning of Lives*.
- F 03/27 Death and Immortality.
Reading: Bernard Williams (1973) *The Makropulos Case*.
HW: Assess whether Williams is correct that immortality would be a barrier to us having meaningful lives. (1/2 page)
- M 03/30 Evil, despair and compassion
Reading: Vida Yao (ms) *The Weight of Caring* (skip section 3).

UNIT 6: APPLIED PHILOSOPHY

- W 04/01 Genetic engineering.
Reading: Bill McKibben (2003). *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age* (excerpts).
HW: Describe what you consider to be the best argument McKibben offers against germline genetic engineering. (1/2 page)
- F 04/03 Everyday ethical decisions.
Reading: none.
- M 04/06 Everyday ethical decisions, continued.
Reading: none.
- W 04/08 Medicalization.
Reading: Conrad (2008) *The Medicalization of Society* (ch. 8).
HW: Describe a potential example of medicalization. Discuss whether or not medicalization is beneficial or harmful in this case. (1/2 page)
- F 04/10 **NO CLASS (Easter break)**
- M 04/13 Propaganda.
Reading: W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) *The Propaganda of History*.
- W 04/15 Epistemic bubbles and echo chambers.
Reading: Thi Nguyen (2018). *Escape the echo chamber*.
<https://aeon.co/essays/why-its-as-hard-to-escape-an-echo-chamber-as-it-is-to-flee-a-cult>

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F 04/17	The media, bias, fake news. Reginia Rini (2018). How To Fix Fake News. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/opinion/facebook-fake-news-philosophy.html
M 04/20	TBA
W 04/22	TBA
F 04/24	TBA
M 04/27	Review session.
W 04/29	Review session.
M 05/04 (8-11am)	FINAL EXAM