

PAR 495: Iris Murdoch

Term: Spring 2023	Instructor: Robert Smithson
Time: TR 11-12:15pm	Email: smithsonr@uncw.edu
Room: BR 261	Office: BR 266
	Office Hours: TR 2-3pm (or by appointment)

Course Description

Iris Murdoch, known to many primarily as a novelist, is also one of the most important, innovative, and exciting philosophers of the 20th century. According to Murdoch, modern moral philosophy is in an alarming state of disrepair. With an exclusive focus on choice and action, ethicists have lost sight of the more basic fabric of our moral being: our moral vision of the world and other people. Furthermore, modern philosophers have abandoned the idea that philosophy should involve our whole life; ethicists talk about right and wrong, but they no longer see ethics as a practice to help us become good. This advanced seminar will provide an overview of Murdoch's thought. We will discuss topics such as: moral vision, the imagination as a moral phenomenon, the relationship between truth and goodness, the relation between philosophy and religion; the human tendency towards selfish fantasy, the moral significance of art, virtue ethics, and the role of the Good as the "magnetic center" of human life.

Course Goals

1. To provide students with a systematic picture of Murdoch's moral philosophy.
2. To develop students ability to read critically through a close examination of Murdoch's philosophical writings.
3. To develop students' writing and argumentation through a series of writing assignments throughout the term.

Course Texts

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

Grading

Three papers (3-4 pages each) OR one term paper (15-20 pages): 40%

Final exam (taken on Canvas): 10%

Miscellaneous short homework assignments: 35%

Participation: 15%

Papers

Students have the option of completing three shorter papers (3-4 pages each) on assigned prompts OR one longer term paper on a prompt of their choosing. The topic for a term paper must be approved by the instructor. An outline of the paper is due by week 9 of the class. A rough draft of the paper is due by week 12 of the class.

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 the “Writing Philosophy Papers” resources found on Canvas.

Attendance

The participation grade takes into account both attendance and discussion in class. Class attendance is mandatory. **Attendance is especially important in PAR 495 since class discussion will be driven by your responses to the reading assignment for the day.** 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.

Please do not come to class when you are not feeling well or are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms. Absences due to possible illness do not count against your attendance grade, and I am very glad to work with you to make alternative arrangements for covering the material. If you have been exposed to COVID-19 or are concerned about exposure, please contact the Student Health Center at (910) 962-3280. Thank you for your help and compliance.

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 com-

mitted 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.

Students should also refrain from using large language models (such as ChatGPT) to write their papers. This point will be discussed in class.

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 01/17 should be completed before class on 01/17, 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.

Date	Topic
	Unit 1: Moral philosophy in disrepair
R 1/12	Vision vs. choice, the nature of moral concepts, <i>Reading:</i> Murdoch (1956), Vision and Choice in Morality (first half-starts p. 32)
T 1/17	Liberal vs. natural law moralities, the “naturalistic fallacy” <i>Reading:</i> Vision and Choice in Morality (second half)
R 01/19	History of modern ethics, liberal vs. natural law moralities. <i>Reading:</i> Murdoch (1955). Metaphysics and Ethics.
T 01/24	Writing philosophy papers.
R 01/26	Behaviorism, M&D, existentialism, scientism, normative vocabulary. <i>Reading:</i> Murdoch (1971), The Idea of Perfection (up to 33, skip: last paragraph of 4 to first full paragraph of 7) Available at: https://archive.org/details/sovereigntyofgoo00murd (create a free account, then “borrow” the book for one hour intervals as necessary)
T 01/31	Catch-up day.
R 02/02	Freedom, angst, obedience, grace. <i>Reading:</i> Murdoch (1971), The Idea of Perfection (bottom of 35 until end)
T 02/07	Freedom, self-knowledge, suffering, demythologization. <i>Reading:</i> Murdoch (1969), On ‘God’ and ‘Good’ (first half- through 347)

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- R 02/09 Existentialism, conceptions of freedom, original sin, grace, God, attention.
Reading: Murdoch (1969), On 'God' and 'Good' (second half)
- T 02/14 The modern age, Romanticism, beauty, art, true and false unity.
Reading: Murdoch (1985), The Sovereignty of 'Good' Over Other Concepts (first half- through 88)
- R 02/16 The Good, its unity, its indefinability, love, humility.
Reading: Murdoch (1985), The Sovereignty of 'Good' Over Other Concepts (second half)
- T 02/21 The Good, its unity, its indefinability, love, humility.
Reading: Murdoch (1985), The Sovereignty of 'Good' Over Other Concepts (second half)
- R 02/23 Catch-up day.

Unit 2: Platonic passage

- T 02/28 Plato's criticisms of art, anamnesis, the theory of Forms.
Murdoch (1967) *The Fire and the Sun*. pp. 1-30.
- R 03/02 The way of justice, the way of Eros, the guise of the Good, Freud.
Murdoch (1967) *The Fire and the Sun*. pp. 30-41.
- SPRING BREAK**
- T 03/14 The cosmic way, distrust of art, the Demiurge
Murdoch (1967) *The Fire and the Sun*. pp. 41-53.
- R 03/16 The Demiurge, evil, art and religion.
Murdoch (1967) *The Fire and the Sun*. pp. 53-72 (skip 62-64).
- T 03/21 Absurdity, beauty, a paean to art
Murdoch (1967) *The Fire and the Sun*. pp. 73-89.

Unit 3: Art, beauty, sublimity

- R 03/23 Murdoch (1993) Comic and Tragic (first half)
Available at: <https://archive.org/details/metaphysicsasgui00murd>
- T 03/28 Murdoch (1993) Comic and Tragic (second half)
Available at: <https://archive.org/details/metaphysicsasgui00murd>
- R 03/30 Murdoch (1959) The Sublime and the Good.
- T 04/04 Murdoch (1959) The Sublime and the Good (second half).
- R 04/06 No class- holiday.
- T 04/11 No reading- class lecture on "Against Dryness".

UNIT 4: Metaphysics as a guide to morals

- R 04/13 Smithson & Yao (2023) A Hard Gemlike Flame: Murdoch's Ontological Proof. (first half)
Recommended: Murdoch (1993) The Ontological Proof (first half)
Available at: <https://archive.org/details/metaphysicsasgui00murd>
- T 04/18 **No class- new baby (!).**
- R 04/20 Smithson & Yao (2023) A Hard Gemlike Flame: Murdoch's Ontological Proof. (second half) (available on Canvas)
Murdoch (1993) The Ontological Proof (second half)
Available at: <https://archive.org/details/metaphysicsasgui00murd>

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- T 04/25 Murdoch (1993) Void
Available at: <https://archive.org/details/metaphysicsasgui00murd>
- R 04/27 Murdoch (1986) Above the Gods: A Dialogue about Religion
https://archive.org/details/acastostwoPlaton00murd_0