

# PAR 115: Introduction to Ethics

**Term:** Summer 2019

**Instructor:** Robert Smithson

**Time:** Online

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## Course Description

In this class, we will discuss a central human question: *how ought one to live?* We will first consider how a variety of *moral theories* have sought to answer this question. In this part of the course, we will learn about such ideas as: *moral obligation, moral laws, moral virtues, moral emotions, and moral responsibility*. We will then consider the broader question of what role morality itself should have in our lives; in this part of the course, we will address issues such as *relativism, egoism, non-moral value*. In the third unit, we will consider whether human life has meaning and what that meaning is. In the final unit, we will seek to develop practical skill at *ethical reasoning* by discussing a variety of concrete ethical dilemmas from bioethics, environmental ethics, the political sphere, and interpersonal relationships.

## Course Goals

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand and critically assess a variety of influential moral theories.
2. Assess the broader question of the role that morality itself should have in our lives.
3. Engage in nuanced ethical reasoning about complex ethical dilemmas.
4. Assess the question of what makes a human life meaningful.
5. Defend philosophical theses through philosophical (“argumentative”) writing.

## Online courses

As an online course, all lectures, readings, assignments, etc. will be posted on Canvas. For more information on this, simply click the “Start Here” whenever you first open the course’s Canvas site.

Because the course is entirely online, it is especially important that you email many questions that might come up during the class. This will help ensure that you do not fall behind in the class.

## Course Texts

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

## Grading

Three papers (3 pages each): ~40%

Assignments (1-2 pages each): ~20%

Forum participation: ~20%

Final: 20%

### **Papers**

In light of the second listed goal for the course, there will be a series of writing assignments throughout the term. There will be a different prompt for each of the three units in the course.

To facilitate anonymous grading, only include your identification number (and not your name) at the top of the document that you upload to Canvas. For helpful advice on writing philosophy papers, please see the two documents about writing philosophy papers that have been uploaded to Canvas.

### **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/hono>

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/>
- Supplemental Instruction <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/si/index.html>
- Writing Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/index.html>

### Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, depending on the progress of 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 readings for 05/23 should be completed before class on 05/23, etc.

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Date	Topic
	<b>UNIT 1: MORAL THEORIES</b>
W 05/22	Introduction, syllabus, utilitarianism. <i>Reading:</i> Peter Singer (1972) <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality.</i>
R 05/23	Objections to utilitarianism <i>Reading:</i> Excerpts from J.J.C. Smart & Bernard Williams (1973) <i>Utilitarianism: For and Against.</i> Arnia Srinivasan (2015). "Stop the Robot Apocalypse."
F 05/24	Writing Philosophy Papers. <i>Reading:</i> Vida Yao (unpublished). Intro to Writing Philosophy. "PAR PAPER CHARACTERISTICS" document.

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- M 05/27 Kantianism and motives.  
*Reading:* none.
- T 05/28 Kantianism and the categorical imperative.  
*Reading:* TBA.
- W 05/29 Contemporary Kantianism, objections.  
*Reading:* Tom Hill (1983). "Moral Purity and the Lesser Evil."
- R 05/30 Virtue ethics.  
*Reading:* Susan Wolf (2007). "Moral Psychology and the Unity of the Virtues." (MO4)
- F 05/31 Platonic justice  
*Reading:* Ryan Preston-Roedder (2013). "Faith in Humanity.

**UNIT 2: THE PLACE OF MORALITY IN HUMAN LIFE**

- M 06/03 Moral skepticism, psychological egoism.  
*Reading:* none.
- T 06/04 The Euthyphro problem.  
*Reading:* Plato (380BCE). Euthryphro.
- W 06/05 Relativism, subjectivism.  
*Reading:* David Velleman (ms). Morality Here and There. (pp. 1-5)
- R 06/06 Non-moral value.  
*Reading:* Susan Wolf (1982). Moral Saints. (Can stop at 431, maybe.
- F 06/07 Slave morality and genealogy.  
*Reading:* Nietzsche (2006). *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1.

**UNIT 3: APPLIED ETHICS**

- M 06/10 Genetic screening, genetic engineering.  
*Reading:* Bill McKibben (2003). *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*. (excerpts 1 and 2)
- T 06/11 Interpersonal cases.  
*Reading:* none.
- W 06/12 Interpersonal cases.  
*Reading:* none.
- R 06/13 Medicalization.  
*Reading:* Peter Conrad (2008) *The Medicalization of Society*. Ch. 8.
- F 06/14 Review day.

**UNIT 4: THE MEANING OF LIFE**

- M 06/17 Human lives.  
*Reading:* Susan Wolf (2007). *The Meanings of Lives*.
- T 06/18 Death and immortality.  
*Reading:* Bernard Williams (1973). *The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality*.
- W 06/19 Evil and despair.  
*Reading:* Vida Yao (manuscript). *The Weight of Caring*. (skip section III)
- R 06/20 Review day.

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M 06/24 **EXAM**