

The University of Western Ontario  
Department of Philosophy  
Graduate Course Outline 2022-23  
Philosophy 9131  
Ross's Ethics

Term: Autumn 2022  
Class Hours: M, 11:30-2:30  
Instructor: Anthony Skelton

Office Location: WIRB 7178  
Office Hours: T, 2:00-3:00; Th, 3:00-4:00  
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## Course Description

This graduate course will grapple with the moral philosophy of Sir William David Ross (1877-1971). Ross's book *The Right and the Good* (1930) is one of the most important works in moral philosophy published in the 20th century. In it and other works, Ross defends a novel form of deontology rivalling Kantianism and utilitarianism. At the core of his view is the idea of a *prima facie* duty, the notion of a consideration making a difference to, but not determining, what we morally ought all things considered to do. Ross's theory comprises a plurality of both *prima facie* duties and non-instrumental goods. We will clarify and wrestle with the arguments Ross provides to support his main theses. While doing so we shall investigate some of the meta-ethical positions he relies on. Our focus will be on analysis and criticism rather than interpretation. The course will aim to provide students with an understanding of Ross's unique contribution to normative ethics, a deeper appreciation of the core problems of moral philosophy, and the skills requisite for conducting advanced research in moral philosophy.

## Objectives

This course has four main objectives.

- To provide students with an understanding of Ross's unique contribution to

normative ethics.

- To provide students with a deeper appreciation of the core problems of moral philosophy, including Ross's influence on them.
- To equip students with some of the skills required for conducting advanced research in moral philosophy, including the identification, clarification and evaluation of arguments.
- To equip students with some of the skills required for expressing philosophical concepts and arguments clearly and economically in writing.

## Texts

W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*. Available at the UWO Bookstore.

All other texts are available online through our course OWL site.

## Course Schedule

Week One (Sept 12): **Organization and Introduction**

Reading:

- Anthony Skelton, "William David Ross".

Week Two (Sept 19): **Some background**

Reading:

- Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, Book IV, ch. i.
- Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?"

Week Three (Sept 26): ***Prima Facie* Duties**

Reading:

- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 1-15.

- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 16-47.

Week Four (Oct 3): ***Prima Facie* Duties with Guest Lecturer David Phillips**

Reading:

- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 16-47.
- David Phillips, *Rossian Ethics*, 13-114.

**NOTE: First Essay Assignment is due on Friday 7 October 2022.**

Week Five (Oct 10): **Thanksgiving: No Class**

Week Six (Oct 17): **Lying**

Reading:

- Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:402-405.
- Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy”.
- Ross, *Kant’s Ethical Theory*, 28-36.

Week Seven (Oct 24): **Punishment**

Reading:

- Hoskins and Duff, “Legal Punishment”, sections 1-4.
- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 56-64.

Week Eight (Oct 31): **Reading Week: No Class**

Week Nine (Nov 7): **Value Pluralism with Guest Lecturer Lisa Forsberg**

Reading:

- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 65-74 & 134-141.

- Moore, *Principia Ethica*, sections 18-22.

**NOTE: Second Essay Assignment is due on Friday 11 November 2022.**

Week Ten (Nov 14): **Pleasure and Pain**

Reading:

- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 24-26, 142-145.
- Ross, *The Foundations of Ethics*, 271-289.
- Shaver, “Ross on Self and Others”.

Week Eleven (Nov 21): **Degrees of Goodness and Moral Goodness**

Reading:

- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 145-154 & 155-173

Week Twelve (Nov 28): **Moral Knowledge**

Reading:

- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 16-47.
- Ross, *The Foundations of Ethics*, 168-190.
- Mackie, *Ethics*, 36-42.
- Parfit, “Moral Agreement”.

Week Thirteen (Dec 5): **Moral Knowledge / Wrap-up**

Reading:

- Calhoun, “Justice, Care, Gender Bias”.

**NOTE: Third Essay Assignment is due on Friday 16 December 2022**

## Requirements

1. Essay

Due date: Friday 7 October 2022

Length: No more than 650 words

Value: 10 percent of final grade

2. Essay

Due date: Friday 11 November 2022

Length: No more than 3000 words

Value: 40 percent of final grade

3. Essay

Due date: Friday 16 December 2022

Length: No more than 3000 words

Value: 40 percent of final grade

4. Class Participation

Value: 10 percent of the final grade

## Regulations

1. Submission of assignments

Please submit your assignments electronically. Do not submit a paper copy.

In order to submit your assignment, visit the OWL site for this course. On the left-hand navigation menu you will find the assignment tool. Click on this tool and you will find the assignment guidelines and basic instructions for submitting your assignment. To submit your assignment upload it and click on the submit button at the bottom of the page.

A corrected version of your paper will be returned to you through the OWL site.

2. Turnitin.com

All required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as course documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com

3. Email Policy

I am **not** able to respond to philosophical concerns or questions over email. These are to be dealt with in my office hours only. Use email only if you have some brief business or administrative item that you would like to communicate to me.

4. Auditing

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

5. Incompletes

Incompletes are granted at the exclusive discretion of the Graduate Program Chair, and only on the basis of documented medical or compassionate grounds. If, during the course, you envisage any difficulty completing all of the required work by the completion deadline, consult immediately with the instructor and the Graduate Program Chair.

6. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is unacknowledged copying or paraphrasing of words or ideas of another person. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. For full details, see Scholastic Discipline for Graduate Students in the *Academic Handbook, Rights and Responsibilities*.

7. Students in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be accessed by phoning 519-661-3030 (during class hours) or 519-433-2023 (after class hours and on weekends and holidays).