PHIL 2700G: Introduction to Ethics and Value Theory
M/W/F 1:30 – 2:30 PM, Weldon Library 258

Instructor: Dr. Alida Liberman **Email:** aliberm3@uwo.ca
TA: Lauren Sidlar **Email:** lauren.sidlar@uwo.ca

Instructor Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:45 – 4:00 PM, and by appointment
Office location: Stevenson Hall 2157 (knock on the door!)
TA Office Hours and Location: TBD

Course description:

Everyone wants to live a good life. But not everyone agrees about what a good life is. Is a good life one in which we behave morally? What does moral or virtuous behavior look like? In this course, we'll be studying ethical theories, or systematic answers to these questions. We will analyze answers that historical and contemporary thinkers have proposed, and reflect on our own answers, as well.

First, we will address whether and why we should be moral in the first place. We will then carefully analyze a wide variety of different substantive ethical theories, including consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, and feminist ethics. These theories are not merely abstract and historical; as we learn about these theories, we will be grappling with contemporary ethical issues such as our ethical duties to the extremely poor and to refugees, climate change and the protection of endangered species, and the ethics of dating and college life. Finally, we'll think about some obstacles to acting morally, focusing on the problems of weakness of will and implicit bias.

Course materials:

All readings will be available for free online with links in this syllabus and on OWL, or as PDFs or Word documents posted on the course OWL site. We will also be listening to podcasts, which are all available for free online, to listen to on any computer or smartphone; links to the podcasts will be on the OWL site. **Let me know ASAP if you require accommodation for this (e.g., if you are deaf or hard of hearing.)**

Podcast abbreviations: Philosophy Bites podcast (PB); RadioLab podcast (RL)

Assignments

Assignment	**Percentage of final grade**
Paper 1 (1250 – 1500 words) **Tentative deadline: February 12**	30%
Paper 2 (1250 – 1500 words) **Tentative deadline: April 1**	30%
Homework assignments (weekly)	40%

Papers: You will write two argumentative philosophical papers, in which you will explain and defend your views on an issue we've covered in class. I'll give detailed instructions and grading standards when the paper assignments are handed out. Papers exist to give you the opportunity to really engage with some of the hardest questions we've covered, and to work out what you think about these as best you can. The topics and structure of the assignments will be chosen accordingly. For the first paper, you will be required to write a first draft, and engage in a peer review of another student's paper.

Homework: You will also complete regular homework assignments throughout the semester. I'll announce these assignments in class, and they will also be posted on OWL. Most of these assignments will involve answering questions about a reading. The homework is for your benefit: it will help you read carefully by directing your attention to the most important issues in the text. It will also improve class discussion, since we'll all be better prepared. And it will allow me to assess your understanding of the reading, and adapt our classes as need be. **These assignments are in lieu of tests or quizzes.**

All homework assignments will be weighted equally, and no late assignments will be accepted. **You must upload your homework assignment to OWL by noon on the day it is due in order to receive credit.** (And if you ever have problems uploading it, you must email it to Lauren by noon instead.)

Reading: All readings must be done before class starts on the day the reading is assigned.

Course goals and objectives:

GOALS: As a result of taking this course, you will learn to . . .	**Activities: Some of the things we will do to promote these goals are . . .**	**Assessment: We will know how well you have attained these goals by evaluating . . .**
Distinguish descriptive claims from different kinds of normative claims	Discussing these concepts during the first week, and reviewing them as needed	Whether you keep track of these distinctions in your writing and discussion
Understand and assess classic and contemporary philosophical texts	Reconstructing arguments from philosophical texts together in class	How you reconstruct arguments on your own in your papers and homework
Write a clear and argumentative paper	Writing two papers, and engaging in a peer review	Whether your papers meet the grading rubric standards
Engage in rigorous, respectful debate	Large and small group classroom discussion	Whether our discussion is productive and respectful
Analyze contemporary moral issues in light of the theories we learn	Analyzing contemporary case studies	How well you analyze cases in class discussion and in your papers
Learn about new ethical traditions with which you may be unfamiliar	Reading about non-Western and feminist approaches to ethics	Only you will know whether you have expanded your horizons!

Policies:

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. If you miss a class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed. Absences for reasons like illness or injury, religious observances, and family emergencies will not count against you, but you must inform me of these absences in advance (or as soon as possible.) Please see the University Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

You are permitted three unexcused absences. After this, your grade will be reduced by 2% for each class you miss.

Class participation: Humans learn best in social environments. Therefore, coming to class on time and prepared, and actively participating every day, is essential to your success. Coming to office hours and engaging in productive online discussion also counts. If you have anxiety about speaking in class, please see me early in the semester.

Class conduct: Respect for each other as people—as well as for each other's ideas, opinions, and values—is crucial for a good learning environment. This is especially important for a class like this one, where we will be discussing sensitive, controversial, and emotionally-charged topics. Always remember: criticizing *arguments* is an essential part of philosophy. Criticizing *people* is not allowed in this class.

Computers: Laptops are to be used as learning tools only. If I see that you are using your laptop in a way that distracts you or those around you from learning, I will issue one warning to you (in private). If I see you misusing your laptop again, you will be banned from using your laptop for the rest of the semester.

Also, you might want to read this article about how people learn best when they take notes on paper, instead of on computers: http://tinyurl.com/mxj577g

Cell phones: Please silence all phones, and refrain from texting or otherwise looking at your phone during class.

Grading policy: Lauren will be handling all of the grading for the course. Grading rubrics will be distributed in advance of each paper.

- All work must be your own: you may not co-write or collaborate on papers.
- No extra credit will be given.
- If you have a concern about your grade, you must you must make a formal complaint to Lauren in writing (by email) within 48 hours of receiving your grade, that explains what you are concerned about (or, if relevant, why you think your grade should be altered.) If you are unsatisfied with whatever solution you reach, you may then make a formal complaint to me.

Late papers: To count as submitted, papers must be uploaded to Turn-it-in. If you are having trouble uploading a paper, email it to Lauren, too. For each day your paper is late (without a prior approval from me for an exceptional mitigating circumstance), your grade will be reduced by 1/3 (so, from an A to an A-, or from a B+ to a B, etc.)

Email policy: For substantive questions about course content, come to office hours rather than emailing me whenever possible. Direct all questions about papers to Lauren (by email or during office hours).

Academic integrity and scholastic offenses: Plagiarism—using someone else's words or ideas as if they are your own—is forbidden by the university. It is also a form of stealing, and is seriously unethical. All cases of expected plagiarism will go directly to the Undergraduate Chair, who will assign penalties as appropriate. As per University policy, all papers must be uploaded to Turnitin through OWL.

If you are tempted to turn in work that is not your own in order to meet a deadline, remember: turning in a paper late results in a reduced grade. Turning in a plagiarized paper might result in something much worse (such as a disciplinary F for the course.)

Scholastic offenses include (and are not limited to): paying someone to write an essay, turning in an essay you found online, copying someone else's homework, quoting directly from another source without citing it, and paraphrasing another source without citing it.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Disability accommodation: Please see me early in the semester if you need any sort of special accommodation. As per university policy, students who need accommodations based on a disability should talk to their assigned Academic Counselor, who will decide what sort of accommodation is appropriate, and will inform me directly. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western: http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

SCHEDULE:

****Subject to change!****

Week 1: Introduction

- Monday 1/4: Why study ethics?
- Wednesday 1/6: Philosophical methodology
- Friday 1/8: Reading philosophy
    - **READ:** "How to Read Philosophy" - David Concepción

Week 2: Why Be Moral?

- Monday 1/11: The contingency of morality
    - **READ:** "But I Could Be Wrong" – George Sher
- Wednesday 1/13: The immoralist's challenge
    - **READ:** Selections from *The Republic* – Plato
- Friday 1/15: Moral relativism
    - **READ:** Four short *NY Times* opinion pieces (three online, one on OWL)

- "Condemnation Without Absolutes" – Stanley Fish
  - http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/15/opinion/condemnation-without-absolutes.html
- "The Maze of Moral Relativism" – Paul Boghossian
  - http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/the-maze-of-moral-relativism/
- "Does Philosophy Matter?" – Stanley Fish
  - http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/01/does-philosophy-matter/?scp=2&sq=boghossian&st=cse
- "Does Philosophy Matter? It Would Appear So" – Paul Boghossian

Week 3: Consequentialism

- Monday 1/18: *Case study:* Obligations to the extreme poor
  - **READ:** "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" – Peter Singer
- Wednesday 1/20: Utilitarianism
  - **READ:** from *Utilitarianism* – John Stuart Mill
- Friday 1/22: The importance of integrity
  - **READ:** "A Critique of Utilitarianism" – Bernard Williams

Week 4: Consequentialism, cont'd

- Monday 1/25: Critique of Williams
  - **READ:** "Utilitarianism and Integrity" – Sarah Conley
- Wednesday 1/27: Rule consequentialism
  - **READ:** "Rule Consequentialism" – Brad Hooker
- Friday 1/29: Case study: sacrificing one to save many
  - **LISTEN:** RL Podcast: The Rhino Hunter

Week 5: Deontology

- Monday 2/1: The Categorical Imperative
  - **READ:** Sel. from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* – Immanuel Kant
- Wednesday 2/3: The Categorical Imperative, cont'd.
  - **LISTEN:** Philosophize This! Podcast: Episode 59: Kant, Part 4: Categorical Trolley Cars
- Friday 2/5: Prima facie duties
  - **READ:** "What Makes Right Acts Right?" – W.D. Ross

Week 6: Deontology, cont'd

- Monday 2/8: Is morality categorical?
  - **READ:** "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" – Philippa Foot
- Wednesday 2/10: Is morality too demanding?
  - **READ:** "Moral Saints" – Susan Wolf
- Friday 2/12: *Case study:* Philosophers on the Syrian Refugees
  - **READ:** Daily Nous: http://dailynous.com/2015/11/25/philosophers-on-the-syrian-refugees/

Week 7: Virtue ethics:

- Monday 2/22: Ancient virtue ethics
  - **READ:** Selections from the *Nichomachean Ethics* – Aristotle
  - **LISTEN:** PB Podcast Julia Annas: What is Virtue Ethics For?
- Wednesday 2/24: Modern virtue ethics
  - **READ:** "Normative Virtue Ethics" – Rosalind Hursthouse
- Friday 2/26: Case study: College virtues
  - **LISTEN:** *Ethics Talk* podcast*:* The Art of Partying

Week 8: Non-Western conceptions of virtue

- Monday 2/29: Buddhist virtues
  - **READ:** "Mindfulness, Non-Attachment, and Other Buddhist Virtues" – Leesa S. Davis
- Wednesday 3/2: African virtues
  - **READ:** "The Virtues of African Ethics" – Thaddeus Metz
- Friday 3/4: Case study: climate change
  - **LISTEN:** PB Podcast: Dale Jamieson on Green virtues
  - **READ:** *Daily Nous:* Philosophers on Climate Change:
    - http://dailynous.com/2015/12/08/philosophers-on-climate-change/

Week 9: Feminist ethics:

- Monday 3/7: Care ethics
  - **READ:** "Virtue and a Feminist Ethics of Care" – Ruth Groenhout
  - **READ:** "Caring and Evil" – Claudia Card
- Wednesday 3/9: A feminist critique of mainstream ethics
  - **READ:** "Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects" – Alison Jaggar
- Friday 3/11: *Case study:* Acting virtuously online:
  - **READ:** https://geekessays.wordpress.com/2015/09/30/virtue-or-utility-being-an-ethical-online-citizen/

Week 10: Value:

- Monday 3/14: Theories about self-interest
  - **READ:** "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best?" – Derek Parfit
- Wednesday 3/16: The value of "real" experiences
  - **READ:** "The Experience Machine" – Robert Nozick
  - **READ:** "The Chamber of Life" – G. Peyton Wertenbaker (short story)
- Friday 3/18: *Case study:* Balancing risk and value
  - **LISTEN:** RL Podcast: "American Football, Part 2: The Ghosts of Football Future"
  - **READ:** http://www.theplayerstribune.com/why-i-play-football/

Week 11: Challenges to acting morally: weakness of will

- Monday 3/21: The source of akrasia
  - **READ:** "On the Social and Political Sources of Akrasia" – Amélie Rorty
  - **LISTEN:** PB Podcast: Jessica Moss on Weakness of Will
- Wednesday 3/23: "Inverse" akrasia
  - **READ:** "On Acting Rationally Against One's Best Judgment" – Nomy Arpaly
- **Friday 3/25: NO CLASS; University holiday**

Week 12: Challenges to acting morally: bias and self-deception

- **Monday 3/28:** *Case study*: racial preferences in dating
  - Racial preferences in dating:
    - http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/11/racial-preferences-are-racist/
    - http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2014/04/okcupid_and_race_is_it_racist_to_date_only_people_of_your_own_race.html
- Wednesday 3/30: Implicit bias
  - **READ:** "Implicit Bias, Character, and Control": Jules Holyrod and Dan Kelly
  - **LISTEN:** PB Podcast: Jennifer Saul on Implicit Bias
- Friday 4/1: Self-deception:
  - **READ:** "The Ethics of Self Deception" – Julie Kirsch
    - http://www.iep.utm.edu/eth-self/
  - **LISTEN:** RL Podcast: Lying to Ourselves
    - http://www.radiolab.org/story/91618-lying-to-ourselves/

Week 13: Overflow days if we are running behind, or students' choice of theoretical issues or contemporary case studies (we'll take a vote)

- Monday 4/4
- Wednesday 4/6