

The University of Western Ontario
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2024–25
Philosophy 3720F
Normative Ethics

Instructor Information

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course OWL BrightSpace.

Prerequisite Checking

Prerequisite(s): A grade of at least 60% in a 1.0 Philosophy course at the 2000-2999 level, or permission from the department.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the prerequisites for this course or have special permission to take the course without the prerequisites.

Course Description

This course is devoted to exploring six topics in contemporary normative ethics.

1. Trolley problems. Suppose you can save five people from certain death only by killing one person. Is it permissible to kill the one? If so, why?
2. Moral aggregation. Suppose you can save either one person from dying or five people from dying. But you cannot save all six. Do the claims of the five outweigh the claim of the one? If not, why not?
3. Population ethics. A great many things we do affect which people come existence and how many. What is the most desirable population size? It is ever wrong to bring someone into existence?

4. The nature of well-being. Well-Being seems to be a central preoccupation of our moral thinking. What does well-being consist in? What makes a life go well for the individual living it?
5. The ethics of care. What is the ethics of care? How have gender biases affected moral theorizing? Does focussing on ‘care’ provide a basis for a viable alternative ethical theory?
6. Abortion. Does a fetus have a right to life? Is abortion permissible? If abortion is permissible, why?

Objectives

At the conclusion of this course students will

- Possess a detailed understanding of some of the most prominent questions in contemporary normative ethics, some answers offered to those questions, and the shortcomings (if any) with these answers.
- Possess a detailed understanding of the differences between some of the most prominent conceptions of ethical reasoning and their implications.
- Possess advanced skills for conducting research in normative ethics, including the skills of identifying, properly analyzing, criticizing and supporting arguments or positions.
- Possess advanced skills for expressing philosophical concepts and arguments clearly and economically in writing and in discussion.

Texts

All readings found on-line through OWL BrightSpace.

Course Presuppositions

This course will presuppose some familiarity with the basic concepts and main problems of contemporary moral philosophy. For those wishing to be reminded of these, a good source is R. Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, fifth edition.

Class Success

To make this class a success, you must attend lectures on a regular basis, do the readings in advance of attending the lectures, and make a good-faith effort to contribute to

classroom discussion. It is important and desirable that everyone attempt to spark and contribute to classroom discussion. In-class discussion is one way through which we learn from each other and sharpen and clarify our views. Accordingly, we are duty bound to make the classroom inclusive and inviting to the exchange of philosophical ideas.

Course Schedule

Week One (Sept 5): **Organization and Introduction**

Reading:

- No Reading

Week Two (Sept 10 & 12): **Trolley Problems**

Reading:

- Foot, ‘The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect’
- Anscombe, ‘Who is Wronged? Philippa Foot on Double Effect: One Point’

Week Three (Sept 17 & 19): **Trolley Problems**

Reading:

- Thomson, ‘The Trolley Problem’
- Thomson, ‘Turning the Trolley’

Week Four (Sept 24 & 26): **Moral Aggregation**

Reading:

- Taurek, ‘Should the Numbers Count?’

Week Five (Oct 1 & 3): **Moral Aggregation**

Reading:

- Scanlon, ‘Aggregation’
- Otsaka, ‘Scanlon and the Claims of the Many Versus the One’
- Kumar, ‘Contractualism on Saving the Many’

- Timmerman, ‘The Individualist Lottery: How People Count, But Not Their Numbers’

Week Six (Oct 8 & 10): **Population Ethics**

Reading:

- Parfit, ‘Overpopulation and the Quality of Life’
- Overall, ‘An Obligation Not to Procreate?’

NOTE: First Essay Assignment is due on Friday, 11 October 2024.

Week Seven (Oct 14 – 18): **Autumn Reading Week: No Classes**

Week Eight (Oct 22 & 24): **Well-Being**

Reading:

- Parfit, ‘What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best’

Week Nine (Oct 29 & 31): **Well-Being**

Reading:

- Sumner, ‘Welfare and Happiness’

Week Ten (Nov 5 & 7): **Ill-Being**

Reading:

- Bruno-Nino, ‘Ill-Being as Hating the Bad?’
- Woodard, ‘The Value and Significance of Ill-Being’

NOTE: Second Essay Assignment is due on Friday, 15 November 2024.

Week Eleven (Nov 12 & 14): **Care Ethics**

Reading:

- Calhoun, ‘Justice, Care, Gender Bias’
- Kittay, ‘The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability’

Week Twelve (Nov 19 & 21): **Care Ethics**

Reading:

- Halwani, 'Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics'

Week Thirteen (Nov 26 & 28): **Abortion**

Reading:

- Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion'
- Mackenzie, 'Abortion and Embodiment'

Week Fourteen (Dec 3 & 5): **Review**

Reading:

- No Reading

Requirements

Your grade for this course will be based on two 1000-word essays, each worth 30 percent, in-class participation, worth 10 percent, and one final examination, worth 30 percent.

1. Essay

Due date: Friday, 11 October 2024
Length: No more than 1000 words
Value: 30 percent of final grade

2. Essay

Due date: Friday, 15 November 2024
Length: No more than 1000 words
Value: 30 percent of final grade

3. Attendance and participation in class

Value: 10 percent of final grade

4. Final Examination

Due Date: To be determined by the Office of the Registrar
Length: Three Hours
Value: 30 percent of final grade

Regulations

1. Audit

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

2. Department of Philosophy Policies

The Department of Philosophy policies that govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses are available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

3. Submission of essays

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

In order to submit your assignment, visit the OWL BrightSpace site for this course. A corrected version of your paper will be returned to you through the OWL BrightSpace site.

4. Late essays and penalties

An essay will be considered late if it is handed in after the due date without a prearranged extension (or after the extended date, in the case of an extension). Late essays will be penalized at the rate of three percentage points per day late. Essays more than ten days late will not be accepted.

5. Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may 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 for such checking will be included as source 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.

6. Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the

instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found [here](#). The Student Medical Certificate is available [here](#).

7. Academic Consideration

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a substantial but temporary impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

- (a) Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of Faculty in which the student is registered.
- (b) Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - Supporting documentation as relevant

Requests without supporting documentation are limited to one per term per course.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner. Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term always require formal supporting documentation.

8. Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for preliminary research purposes, including using AI tools to search for ways to organize essays, look up definitions of key terms, research alternative phrasing of key points and ideas, and for initial philosophical inspiration. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploration; however, students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. Assignments should reflect the students' own thoughts and independent written

work. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and allows them to produce original written contributions.

Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs

9. Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, here.

10. Evaluation of Academic Performance

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive an assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

11. Course Assignments

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

12. Academic Advising

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here.

13. E-mail 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 have dealt with. When you write an email please make sure to include your name and student number in the email message.

14. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Feel free to use electronic devices in class, but please use them for academic purposes only. No aids are permitted for in the examination for this course.

15. Prerequisites

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

16. Support Services

Registrarial Services
Services provided by the USC
Student Development Centre
Student Support Services

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 had by phoning 519.661.3030 during class hours or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

17. Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western University is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, here. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.