

The University of Western Ontario
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 202526
Philosophy 1040G
Ethics, Law, and Politics

Instructor Information

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course Owl Brightspace.

Prerequisite Checking

No Prerequisites

Course Description

This course will focus on clarifying and understanding the relations between the ethical, legal, and political dimensions of abortion, medical assistance in dying, obligations to the global poor, freedom of expression, public health interventions (including mandatory vaccination), and marriage. This is a course in the area of philosophy known as applied or practical ethics. Our main focus will be select philosophical arguments relating to our topics and how such arguments affect and are affected by law and politics. In our philosophical discussions, we will learn something about the Canadian legal and political environment in which popular and academic discussion of our topics takes place.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, students who have attended class, completed the readings, and completed the assignments will

- Understand the differences and relations between the ethical, legal, and political aspects of the topics discussed in the course.

- Possess a detailed understanding of the differences between some of the most prominent conceptions of ethical reasoning and their implications for law and politics.
- Possess the skills of identifying, properly analysing, criticising and supporting arguments or positions.
- Possess skills for expressing philosophical concepts and arguments clearly and economically in writing and in discussion.
- Possess an understanding of the Canadian legal and political environment in which popular and academic discussion of our topics takes place.

Texts

All course readings are found online – free! – through the course OWL Brightspace page for this course.

Class Success

To make this class a success, you must attend lectures, do the readings in advance of attending the lectures, make a good-faith effort to contribute to classroom discussion, keep abreast of the time and place of the tests, exams and quizzes, and study hard for them. It is important and desirable that everyone feel comfortable to spark and contribute to discussion. Discussion is one way through which we learn from each other. Accordingly, we are duty bound to make the classroom inclusive and inviting to the exchange of ideas.

Course Schedule

Week One (Jan 6 & 8): **Welcome and Introduction**

Reading:

- The Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Canadian Department of Justice, “What is the Law?”
- Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, 1–11.
- Tännsjö, *Understanding Ethics*, 4–6.
- Haramia, “Applied Ethics”

- Mendelovici, “Identifying Statements and Arguments”
- Mendelovici, “Introduction to Validity and Soundness”

Week Two (Jan 13 & 15): **Abortion**

Reading:

- Smith, “Canada Has No Abortion Right Law. Does it Need One?”
- Wilson J, “Morgentaler Decision”
- Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”

Week Three (Jan 20 & 22): **Abortion**

Reading:

- Sherwin, “Abortion Through A Feminist Ethics Lens”
- Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
- Keer, Benjamin, & Dhamanaskar, “Abortion in Canada is Legal For All, But Inaccessible For Too Many”

Week Four (Jan 27 & 29): **MAiD**

Reading:

- Brief Summary of **Carter v. Canada**
- Current Canadian Legislation on MAiD: Overview
- Canada’s New Medical Assistance in Dying Law
- Mercier, Sumner, & Weinstock, “The Ethical Bases of Medical Aid in Dying”
- Resource: Supreme Court of Canada, **Carter v. Canada**

Week Five (Feb 3 & 5): **MAiD**

Reading:

- Zandbergen, “Why Disability Advocates are Worried About Changes to Canada’s Medical Assistance in Dying Bill”

- Moran, “This Woman is Considering Medical Assistance in Dying, Due to a Disability. But Poverty is Also a Factor”
- Rouleau, “Opinion: Bill C-7 Makes People with Disabilities Expendable”
- Pullman, “Slowing the Slide Down the Slippery Slope of Medical Assistance in Dying: Mutual Learnings for Canada and the US”
- Wiebe & Mullin, “Choosing Death in Unjust Conditions: Hope, Autonomy and Harm Reduction”

Week Six (Feb 10 & 12): **Review and Test**

Reading:

- Review of Applied Ethics and the Main Arguments on Abortion and MAiD (10 February)
- Test on Applied Ethics and the Main Arguments on Abortion and MAiD (12 February)

Week Seven (Feb 17 & 19): **Spring Reading Week: No Classes**

Week Eight (Feb 24 & 26): **Obligations to the Global Poor**

Reading:

- Donor Tracker, Donor Profile: Canada
- Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
- Timmerman, “Sometimes There is Nothing Wrong With Letting a Child Drown”
- Canadian Press, “What do Canada’s Political Leaders Want to do With Foreign Aid?”

Week Nine (Mar 3 & 5): **Freedom of Expression**

Reading:

- The Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 2

- Fox, “Social Media: How might it be regulated?”
- Ives, “Why ‘Free Speech’ Needs a New Definition in the Age of the Internet and Trump Tweets”

Week Ten (Mar 10 & 12): **Public Health Interventions**

Reading:

- Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 5
- Health Protection and Promotion Act, Sections 3537
- Smith, “A Brief History of Calgary’s Long Relationship with Fluoride Votes”
- Leavitt, “Why the Long, Strange Debate over Fluoride in Tap Water is About to Resurface in Alberta”

Week Eleven (Mar 17 & 19): **Review and Test**

Reading:

- Review of the Main Arguments on Obligations to Global Poor, Freedom of Expression, and Public Health Interventions (17 March)
- Test on the Main Arguments on Obligations to Global Poor, Freedom of Expression, and Public Health Interventions (19 March)

Week Twelve (Mar 24 & 26): **Mandatory Vaccination**

Reading:

- Immunization of School Pupils Act
- Pierik, “Mandatory Vaccination: An Unqualified Defence”
- Saunders, “How Mandatory Can We Make Vaccination?”
- Benjamin & Brown, “New Brunswick’s Mandatory Vaccination Bill Voted Down”
- Kost, “The Charter of Rights and Freedoms vs. Vaccine Mandates – and Government Inaction on COVID”
- Resources: Skelton & Forsberg, “Mandating Vaccination” & “3 Reasons for Making Covid-19 Vaccination Mandatory for Children”

Week Thirteen (Mar 31 & Apr 2): **Marriage**

Reading:

- CBC, “TIMELINE — Same-Sex Rights in Canada
- Eichler, “Same-Sex Marriage in Canada”
- Chambers, “The Marriage-Free State”

Week Fourteen (Apr 7 & 9): **Marriage and Exam Review**

Reading:

- Bennett, “Liberalism, Autonomy and Conjugal Love”
- Exam Review

Requirements

Your grade for this course will be based on two tests, one worth fifteen percent and one worth twenty-five percent, eight quizzes worth twenty percent in total, and one final exam, worth forty percent.

1. Test

Date: Thursday, 12 February 2026

Length: 50 minutes

Value: 15 percent of final grade

2. Test

Date: Thursday, 19 March 2026

Length: 50 minutes

Value: 25 percent of final grade

Note: This is a designated assessment. If you are requesting consideration for a designated assessment, you must include supporting documentation. If you do not include supporting documentation, your request will be denied, and the privilege of undocumented absences is forfeited. It may not be recalled and reapplied.

3. Quizzes

Dates: January, 15, 22, 29; February 5, 26; March 5, 12, 26; April 2, 9.

Length: Two short answers

Value: 20 percent of final grade. Best 8 of 10 will be counted.

Note: This is a flexible assignment. The lowest 2 quiz grades, including missed quizzes, will be dropped from consideration when calculating your final overall grade for quizzes. As such, requests for academic consideration for these quizzes will be denied.

4. Final Exam

Due Date: To be determined by the Office of the Registrar

Length: Three Hours

Value: 40 percent of final grade

Regulations

1. Attendance

You are expected to attend all lectures.

2. Audit

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

3. 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 here. 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.

4. Statement On The Use Of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

If plagiarism or unauthorised AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes and/or drafts of assignments after the assignment has been submitted. Students must keep all notes and first drafts until the assignment is returned to them.

In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. 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.

5. 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](#)

6. 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 students 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:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. 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.

Policy on Academic Consideration Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs

7. 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.

8. Religious Accommodation

Western's Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here. In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than one week prior to the writing of the test.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. E-mail policy

The instructor is not able to respond to philosophical concerns or questions over email. These are to be dealt with in office hours only. Use email only if you wish to make an appointment with the instructor or have some business or administrative issue that can be dealt with briefly. When you write an email to the instructor, please make sure to include your name and student number in the email message.

12. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Feel free to use electronic devices in class, but please use them for academic purposes only. You are not permitted to make audio or video recordings of the lectures or tutorials.

No aids are permitted for any of the tests or the exam. Electronic devices of any kind (including cell phones and smart watches) are not permitted

13. Prerequisites

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol 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.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

14. Statement On Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (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.

15. Support Services

Gender-based and sexual violence
Registrarial Services
Services provided by the USC
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.