

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2024-25
PHILOSOP 2700F (650):
An Introduction to Ethics and Value Theory

Summer Distance Studies 2025
Asynchronous

Instructor: Dr. Ryan Robb
Office: Zoom
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30 –
4:30 p.m. on Zoom, or by appointment
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DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the attempts by scholars to understand whether, and the degree to which, humans can/should be held responsible for their actions. Do humans have ethical duties and responsibilities toward one another or themselves? If so, what are the foundations of those ethical duties, and what do they demand? Our survey of the scholarly responses to these questions will be separated in two parts: First a review of prominent positions on meta-ethics, followed by a survey of four dominant ethical theories.

TEXTS

Wilfrid J. Waluchow, *The Dimensions of Ethics; An Introduction to Ethical Theory*. (Broadview Press, 2003).

H. Geirsson and M.R. Holmgren, *Ethical Theory: A Concise Anthology*. 3rd ed. (Broadview Press, 2018).

The texts can be purchased bundled together for a discount at Western's Dellelce Family Bookstore, for a total cost of \$89.25.

OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this course is to introduce students to and/or build upon a set of standard philosophical skills. The combination of readings, lectures, and essay assignments in this course will help students develop their ability to identify what it is that makes the set of reasons that support the conclusions of an argument either convincing or implausible by requiring them to formulate well-reasoned responses to the arguments engaged throughout the course.

The secondary goal of this course is to introduce students to the historically dominant discussions of ethical concerns undertaken by philosophers. Student understanding of those discussions will be assessed on the mid-term and final exams.

REQUIREMENTS

20% - Mid-Term Exam

30% - Final Exam

50% - two 1100 – 1300 word essays, worth 25% each

DUE DATES

Mid-Term Exam – opens on Thursday May 22nd at 9 a.m. and must be taken by Monday May 26th by 11:59 p.m. EDT.

Essays – 1. Tuesday May 27th by 11:59 p.m. EDT
2. Friday June 13th by 11:59 p.m. EDT

Final Exam – To be scheduled by the Registrar during the Summer Distance Studies Final Exam period.

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION

Essay #1 – The first essay is due on Tuesday **May 27th no later than 11:59 p.m. EDT. Essays submitted after that time will be subject to a 5% per day late penalty**, weekends included, up to a maximum of 10 days (i.e., Friday, June 6th), or 50% of your grade on the essay. At that point, a grade of 0 will be recorded.

Students who wish to avoid the late penalty will **need to submit formal supporting documentation** to the Academic Advising office of the Faculty in which the student is registered, meaning students **cannot** submit an ‘undocumented absence’ to avoid the late penalty. A suitable alternative deadline for the submission of the essay will be established in consultation with Professor Robb once consideration has been granted.

Essay #2 – The second essay is due on the last day of classes in the course, i.e., Friday, June 13th by 11:59 p.m. EDT on OWL. Owing to Senate regulations barring the submission of course work after the last day of classes for the term, **a failure to meet that deadline will automatically result in a grade of 0.**

Essay submissions after the final day of the course will only be permitted when **supporting documentation** is submitted to the Academic Advising office of the Faculty in which the student is registered. A suitable alternative deadline for the submission of the essay will be established in consultation with Professor Robb once consideration has been granted.

Exams – The Mid-Term and Final exams will be timed; students will have 3 hours of writing time once they begin for the Mid-Term, and 4 hours of writing time once they begin for the final. The Mid-Term Exam will be open for students from May 22nd – 26th. The Final Exam will be scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during the Summer Distance Studies 2025 Final Exam period (with an anticipated 3-day writing window). Owing to the flexibility included in this exam scheduling, students who fail to complete an exam during the designated period will be unable to write a make-up without the submission of formal supporting documentation to the Academic Advising office of the Faculty in which the student is registered.

NOTE: All requests for academic consideration for the duration of this course are to be made to the Academic Advising office of the student’s Faculty of Registration, NOT to Professor Robb.

GENERATIVE AI

In this course, the use of AI (e.g., ChatGPT...) is **prohibited**. If unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for **research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines**, and other materials used in **preparing assignments**. Students are expected to **retain** these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.

SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES

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

Statement on the use of plagiarism-checking software

All student papers will be submitted 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 (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Statement on the use of proctoring software

Examinations in this course will be conducted using ProctorTrack remote proctoring service. By taking this course, you are consenting to the use of this software and acknowledge that you will be required to provide **personal information** (including some biometric data) and the session will be **recorded**. Completion of this course will require you to have a reliable internet connection and a device that meets the technical requirements for this service. More information about this remote proctoring service, including technical requirements, is available on Western's Remote Proctoring website at: <https://remoteproctoring.uwo.ca>.

E-MAIL POLICY

I am **not** able to respond to philosophical concerns or questions over e-mail (i.e., I don't have the time to discuss concepts/arguments covered in the course materials by e-mail). I will address those concerns or questions during my Zoom office hours (or by appointment) **only**. If you need to make an appointment with me or you have some private issue you would like to communicate to me, feel free to use e-mail. Otherwise, please attend my Zoom office hours (or make an appointment).

SYLLABUS

W = The Waluchow text

G&H = The Geirsson and Holmgren anthology

NOTE: The **Geirsson and Holmgren** anthology is the **PRIMARY** text for the course (the Waluchow text is intended to simplify the primary readings from the G&H text). Unfortunately, the publisher does not produce an electronic version of that text, meaning you'll need to order a hard copy (which, as noted above, is being sold bundled with the Waluchow text for a discount at Western's bookstore).

ALSO NOTE: The 3rd edition of the G&H text is necessary... not all the readings are the same as the first or second editions, and the pagination is different in all three.

FINALLY NOTE: The electronic versions of the Waluchow don't have consistent page numbers ... so I've included both the page numbers and the headings from the Waluchow text.

Week 1 (May 5th – 11th): **Defining our Terms (What is Philosophy? What is Ethics?)**

- What is Ethics? – **W, pgs. 13 – 30** (i.e., all of Chapter One).
- Terminology – **W, pgs. 30 – 42** (i.e., from the start of Chapter Two, up to the heading 'The Language of Rights').
- Non-Cognitivism – **W, pgs. 58 – 64** (i.e., from the heading 'The Meaning of Moral Judgments: Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism' up to the end of Chapter Two).

Week 2 (May 12th – 18th): **Meta-Ethics Part I – Anti-Realism and Relativism**

- Harman's Anti-Realism – **G&H, pgs. 26 – 32**.
- Three Arguments for Moral Relativism – **W, pgs. 65 – 71** (i.e., from the start of Chapter Three up to the heading 'Alleged Consequences of Moral Conventionalism').
- Objections to Moral Relativism – **W, pgs. 71 – 78** (i.e., from the heading 'Alleged Consequences of Moral Conventionalism' up to the heading 'Relativism: A Partial Defence and Lessons to be Learned').
- Shaw's Critique of Relativism/Defence of Realism – **G&H, pgs. 5 – 24**.
- Responses Relativists Can Make – **W, pgs. 78 – 94** (i.e., from the heading 'Relativism: A Partial Defence and Lessons to be Learned' to the end of Chapter Three).

Week 3 (May 20th – 25th): **Meta-Ethics Part II – Divine Command Theory and Egoism**

- Divine Command Theory – **W, pgs. 95 – 103** (i.e., from the start of Chapter Four up to the heading 'Natural Law Theories').
- Introduction to Divine Command Theory – **G&H, pgs. 57 – 61**.
- Plato's Euthyphro – **G&H, pgs. 62 – 80**.
- The Story of Abraham – **G&H, pgs. 81 – 82**.
- G&H Introduce Ethical Egoism – **G&H, pgs. 83 – 87**.
- Plato "The Myth of Gyges" – **G&H, pgs. 88 – 96**.
- Rachels's Critique of Egoism – **G&H, pgs. 97 – 106**.
- The Social Contract Theory of Morality – **W, pgs. 121 – 142** (i.e., all of Chapter Five).

Mid-Term Exam – Opens Thursday May 23rd at 9 a.m., closes Monday May 27th at 11:55 p.m. EDT.

Week 4 (May 26th – June 1st): **Utilitarianism**

- Act Utilitarianism – W, pgs. 145 – 165 (i.e., from the start of Chapter Six up the heading ‘Rule Utilitarianism’).
- Mill’s Utilitarianism – G&H, pgs. 114 – 129.
- Rule Utilitarianism – W, pgs. 165 – 172 (i.e., from the heading ‘Rule Utilitarianism’ to the end of Chapter Six).
- Rawls’s Rule Utilitarianism – G&H, pgs. 130 – 156.

ESSAY #1 due by 11:55p.m. EDT Tuesday May 27th

Week 5 (June 2nd – 8th): **Deontology**

- Waluchow on Kant Part I – W, pgs. 173 – 181 (i.e., from the beginning of Chapter Seven up to the heading ‘The Categorical Imperative II: Respect for Persons’).
- Kant on Kant Part I – G&H, pgs. 189 – 198.
- Waluchow on Kant Part II – W, pgs. 182 – 188 (i.e., from the heading ‘The Categorical Imperative II: Respect for Persons’ up to the end of Chapter Seven).
- Kant on Kant Part II – G&H, pgs. 199 – 207.

Week 6 (June 9th – 13th): **Deontological Pluralism and Feminist Ethics**

- Waluchow on Ross – W, pgs. 189 – 200 (i.e., all of Chapter Eight).
- Ross on Ross – G&H, pgs. 259 – 283.
- Waluchow on Feminist Ethics – W, pgs. 223 – 246 (i.e., all of Chapter Ten).
- G&H on Feminist Ethics – G&H, pgs. 381 – 385.
- Lindemann’s Critique of Standard Ethical Theories – G&H, pgs. 386 – 395.
- Noddings’s “Women and Caring” – G&H, pgs. 396 – 404.

ESSAY #2 due by 11:55 p.m. EDT Friday June 13th

Final Exam – To be scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during the June Exam period.

AUDIT

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

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 <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>.

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.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

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. 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.