

The University of Western Ontario  
Department of Philosophy  
Undergraduate Course Outline 2023–24  
Philosophy 3720F  
Normative Ethics

Term: Autumn 2023

## Course Description

This course is devoted to exploring four 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?

## 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.

## 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 7): **Organization and Introduction**

Reading:

- No Reading

Week Two (Sept 11): **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 18): **Trolley Problems**

Reading:

- Thomson, 'The Trolley Problem'
- Thomson, 'Turning the Trolley'

Week Four (Sept 25): **Moral Aggregation**

Reading:

- Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?'

Week Five (Oct 2): **Moral Aggregation**

Reading:

- Scanlon, 'Aggregation'

Week Six (Oct 9): **Moral Aggregation**

Reading:

- 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'

**NOTE: First Essay Assignment is due on Friday, 13 October 2023.**

Week Seven (Oct 16): **Population Ethics**

Reading:

- Parfit, 'Overpopulation and the Quality of Life'

Week Eight (Oct 23): **Population Ethics**

Reading:

- Shiffrin, 'Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm'

Week Nine (Oct 30): **Autumn Reading Week: No Classes**

Week Ten (Nov 6): **Population Ethics**

Reading:

- Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*, chapters 1–3.

**NOTE: Second Essay Assignment is due on Friday, 10 November 2023.**

Week Eleven (Nov 13): **Well-Being**

Reading:

- Parfit, 'What Makes Someone's Life Go Best'

Week Twelve (Nov 20): **Well-Being**

Reading:

- Sumner, 'Welfare and Happiness'

Week Thirteen (Nov 27): **Well-Being**

Reading:

- Kagan, 'An Introduction to Ill-being'

Week Fourteen (Dec 4): **Review**

Reading:

- No Reading

**NOTE: Third Essay Assignment is due on Friday, 8 December 2023.**

## Requirements

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

1. Essay

Due date: Friday, 13 October 2023

Length: No more than 1000 words

Value: 30 percent of final grade

2. Essay

Due date: Friday, 10 November 2023

Length: No more than 1000 words

Value: 30 percent of final grade

3. Essay

Due date: Friday, 8 December 2023

Length: No more than 1000 words

Value: 30 percent of final grade

4. Attendance and participation in class

Value: 10 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 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.

3. Submission of essays

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.

#### 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. 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. 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.

#### 7. 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.

#### 8. 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](#).

## 9. 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.

## 10. 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 communicate to me. When you write an email please make sure to include your name and student number in the email message.

## 11. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Feel free to use electronic devices in class, but please use them for academic purposes only.

## 12. 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.

## 13. Support Services

Gender-based and sexual violence  
Registrarial Services  
Services provided by the USC  
Student Development Centre  
Student Support Services

Students in emotional/ mental distress should refer to [MentalHealth@Western](mailto:MentalHealth@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.