

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-16
Philosophy 2700F: Introduction to Ethics and Value Theory
Previously Philosophy 201F/G

Fall Term 2015
Tuesdays 6 pm -9 pm
Location: Talbot College 343

Instructor: Michael Milde
Office and office hours: TBA
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DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to a number of fundamental issues in the field of Ethics. Somewhat perversely, we will start by examining a couple of concepts that are traditionally construed as challenges to morality: egoism and ethical relativism. Egoism opposes morality to the interests of particular individuals. Why, it asks, should moral commands take precedence over individual self-interest? Why should I give up some advantage so that someone else might get a benefit? Relativism makes the claim that there are no universally and ahistorically true moral principles: the rightness or wrongness of an action is said to be relative to, or depend on, the values held by a particular group or community. At its most extreme, relativism takes the form of subjectivism and makes the claim that morals and values are relative to each individual. Both egoism and relativism can give rise to moral skepticism: the view that there really are no moral values, or at least none that we can positively identify.

We will then go on to investigate a number of normative moral theories which attempt to provide guidance as to which actions are right and which are wrong, and which also make more or less direct attempts to answer the challenges posed by relativism, skepticism and egoism. These theories include deontology (as presented by Immanuel Kant), utilitarianism (as presented by John Stuart Mill) and virtue ethics (as presented by Aristotle). In the first place, we will try to establish just what makes these theories attractive. Then we will consider various criticisms that have been made, and see what modifications to the theories might be required in order to accommodate or respond to them.

Throughout, this course will focus on the nature of moral argument, criticism and analysis.

TEXT

Pojman *Moral Philosophy (4th Edition)* Hackett Publishing (required)

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

The format of the class will combine lectures and guided small group discussions. Students will be expected to achieve the following course objectives by critically analyzing historical and contemporary readings (all found in the required text).

1. Learn and understand the fundamental elements of the main ethical theories: utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics.

2. Learn and understand the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the main ethical theories.
3. Learn and understand the arguments that support and challenge the main ethical theories.
4. Reflect on the challenge egoism and relativism pose to standard conceptions of morality.
5. Develop critical reading and writing skills by preparing a critical analysis and a term paper.
6. Be able to critically assess ethical arguments; be able to construct cogent ethical arguments.

REQUIREMENTS

2 in-class tests worth 10% of the grade each
Critical analysis, 4-5 pages, worth 20%
Paper, 7-8 pages, worth 30%
Final exam worth 30% (to be scheduled by Registrar)

AUDIT

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

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/proceduresappeals.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.

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.