

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-2016

Philosophy 2702F (001): Modes of Normative Reasoning I

Fall Term, 2015

Tu 12:30-1:30 & Th 11:30-1:30

Classroom: TC 202

Office Hours: Tu 11:30-12:30 & Th 1:30-2:30 & by appointment

Instructor: Barry Hoffmaster

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Rationality is the bedrock of philosophy, but what is rationality? Philosophers equate rationality with reasoning. The paradigm of rationality is the deductive reasoning of logic, which produces conclusions that are necessary, certain, and universal, i.e., correct decisions. In moral philosophy and bioethics deduction is the reasoning of the “applied ethics” that subsumes the facts of problems under moral principles to derive right answers about what ought to be done. But moral problems are conflicts between principles, and the general terms in principles are indeterminate, and there are no higher principles for deducing right answers to those crucial problems. In the law applying legal rules encounters the same problems as applying moral principles, and applying precedents from cases uses argument by analogy. The rationality of deduction quickly runs out, and argument by analogy and interpretation do not have the rationality of deduction. Deduction, argument by analogy, and interpretation are examined with examples from morality, law, and bioethics. Where is the rationality?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course has three principal objectives:

- 1) To give students an understanding of the different approaches to decision making that are used in ethics, law, and bioethics and the implications these approaches have for our conceptions of these domains;
- 2) To improve students’ comprehension and critical reading skills; and
- 3) To enhance students’ capacities to develop and defend their own positions on issues and to present them in clear, organized, well argued, and well written essays.

TEXT

A Custom Course Book available from the Book Store

REQUIREMENTS

A draft of an essay on an assigned topic, worth 20% of the mark

A revised, expanded version of the draft essay, worth 40% of the mark

A registrar-scheduled December exam (essay format), worth 40% of the mark

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 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.