

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy 1040F – Ethics, Law and Politics

Fall 2017

Mon/Wed – 11:30 -12:30

Location: MC 110

Instructor: Prof. Michael Milde

Office: AHB 3R34

Office Hours: TBA

E. mmilde@uwo.ca

Course Description

In our everyday experiences, we are confronted by situations in which we have to decide what is right, and what is wrong. Broadly, we can think of these as ethical “moments”, where we have to make a certain kind of judgment: normative or moral judgment. We ask: what is morally permissible in these circumstances? What is morally obligatory? What is forbidden? The answers that we give are important – they will guide our actions, or we may use them to evaluate the actions of others. Either way, they will determine what counts as a right action, or who is a good person.

Politics and law sometimes generate very similar experiences – we ask ourselves whether an action is legal or illegal, which tax or environmental policy is the best for the country, has the government violated our rights, and so on. There are many instances where ethics, law and politics intersect. Recently, Canada made medical assistance in dying (MAID) legally permissible. Previously, any doctor or medical practitioner who participated in medically assisted suicide would have been liable to prosecution and punishment under various provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada. The debates surrounding this controversial topic were (and continue to be) complex. Is MAID ever justifiable? Is it something that people have a right to receive? If it is going to be done, how is to be implemented? What are the limits? Who will pay? And what happens when people fundamentally disagree on some or all of these issues?

In this course, we will consider a number of topics with a view to understanding the ways in which ethics, law and politics intersect, and the ways in which they can sometimes pull in different directions. We will start by having a look at the Canadian Constitution, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in particular. The Constitution sets the framework in which

law and politics are played out – it also embodies and enshrines various values that sound very much like ethical commitments. We will then consider various topics including medical assistance in dying, freedom of speech, public apologies, prostitution, food waste and the problem of lying.

Along the way, we will explore how complexity, pluralism and bias serve to make these topics so controversial and so difficult to resolve, once and for all. And, through in-class discussion, written work, and tutorial assignments we will learn how to engage in clear philosophical analysis, develop and defend multiple perspectives, and provide convincing arguments to support our conclusions.

Texts

Readings will include selections from a variety of scholarly, legal and internet resources. All of these will be available through the course website on OWL.

Objectives

Ethics, law and politics are fundamental elements of all societies, including our own. The aim of this course is to allow you to explore the similarities, differences and interconnections that exist between them. By examining a number of contemporary topics, you will see how these elements represent different perspectives that can be used to address controversial and complicated issues. You will learn to identify and evaluate the arguments offered to support various points of view. You will also learn to construct your own arguments, developing sound conclusions supported by fully adequate reasons and evidence. Along the way, you will become acquainted with the complexity that is the hallmark of social interactions, and the ways in which bias, diversity and pluralism serve to make social consensus difficult to achieve.

Requirements

Three 1000-word essays worth 15% each (total 45%)

- Designed to develop your skills in critical analysis, and clear expository writing. You will receive detailed instructions prior to each assignment
- Due Dates: October 4, November 8 and December 6

Tutorial assignments and tutorial attendance (total 20%)

- There will be a one-hour tutorial session each week.
- Assignments will vary from week to week, but will generally involve a short, written response to a specified question.

- Tutorials will include in-class discussion of the written responses, together with small group workshops.

Final exam (35%)

- Will cover all of the lectures, readings and tutorial content.
- Will be scheduled by the Registrar in the final examination period (TBA)

Email

Philosophical questions and questions about course content are best asked and discussed in person, during office hours. Email should be reserved for technical questions, or for administrative matters (including requests to meet outside of office hours). To ensure that your email gets priority attention, please include "PHIL1040F" in the subject line. I will do my best to respond promptly – if you do not get a response within 48 hours, please re-send your message.

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** 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/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.

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 at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

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, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

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 <http://www.turnitin.com>.

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.