The University of Western Ontario
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2026–27
Philosophy 2700G
Introduction to Ethics and Value Theory

Instructor Information

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course Owl Brightspace.

Prerequisite Checking

No Prerequisites

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to some of the most important philosophical approaches to ethics and value theory. The following questions will guide our exploration: What is good? What is bad? Which actions are right or permissible? Which actions are wrong or impermissible? Our journey will take us though both historical and contemporary discussions of these and related questions. Our focus will be on arguments in favour of (or against) certain answers to or theses about our main questions.

Objectives

This course has five main objectives.

- To acquaint students with the main historical and contemporary issues in normative ethics.
- To acquaint students with ethical reasoning and argument and with how philosophers rely on them to support answers to or theses about the main questions guiding our discussions.

- To demonstrate the important manner in which the study of normative ethical frameworks facilitates and improves the understanding and resolution of complex practical moral problems.
- To equip students with some of the skills required for conducting philosophical research in normative ethics, including the ability to identify a thesis and to clarify, analyse, structure, and evaluate an argument in support of it.
- To help students develop the ability to express complex philosophical ideas and arguments clearly and economically in writing.

Course Components

This course has the following components.

- Weekly video presentations and handouts
- Weekly readings
- Weekly reading responses (grading on pass/fail basis)
- Closed-book midterm examination (in person)
- Closed-book final examination (in person, scheduled during final examination period by the OOR)

Texts

All course readings are found online – free! – through the OWL Brightspace for this course.

OWL Brightspace

This is an online course. Apart from the midterm and final exams, all required course components are asynchronous and online. There are no tutorials or synchronous lectures. Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the only method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. All course material will be posted to OWL Brightspace.

If students need assistance with the course OWL Brightspace site, they can seek support on the OWL Brightspace Help page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Class Success

To make this class a success, you must view all course videos, read all course handouts, keep up on assignments, do the readings each week, and attend office hours if you are struggling with any of the course components.

Course Schedule

Week One (Jan 4–8): **Organisation and Introduction**

Reading:

- No reading

Week Two (Jan 11–15): **Value Theory**

Reading:

- Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 452–454
- Bentham, 'Classical Hedonism'

Week Three (Jan 18–22): **Value Theory**

Reading:

- Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapters I and II (up to the end of paragraph 10)

Week Four (Jan 25–29): **Value Theory**

Reading:

- Nozick, 'The Experience Machine'
- Bradford, 'The Value of Achievements'

Week Five (Feb 1–5): **Ethical Theory**

Reading:

- Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapters I, IV and II (paragraphs 11–25)

Week Six (Feb 8–12): **Ethical Theory**

Reading:

- Williams, 'Consequentialism and Integrity'

NOTE: First closed-book midterm examination, 12 February 2027.

Week Seven (Feb 15–19): **Reading Week: No Classes**

Week Eight (Feb 22–26): **Ethical Theory**

Reading:

- Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface and chapter I

Week Nine (March 1–5): **Ethical Theory**

Reading:

- Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, chapter II

Week Ten (March 8–12): **Ethical Theory**

Reading:

- Ross, 'What Makes Right Acts Right?'

Week Eleven (March 15–19): **Ethical Theory**

Reading:

- Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 229–241

Week Twelve (March 22–26): **Ethical Theory**

Reading:

- Calhoun, 'Justice, Care, Gender Bias'

Week Thirteen (March 29–April 2): **Sex**

Reading:

- Srinivasan, 'The Right to Sex'
- Dempsey and Herring, 'Why Sexual Penetration Requires Justification'

Week Fourteen (April 5–9): **Veganism**

Reading:

- Hooley and Nobis, 'A Moral Argument for Veganism'
- Gunkel, 'Pleasures of the Flesh'

Method of Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on 10 weekly reading responses worth 20 percent, one closed-book midterm exam worth 40 percent, and on a closed-book final exam worth 40 percent of the final grade.

1. Optional Weekly Online Quizzes

   Due date: A quiz will be posted every Friday beginning 15 January 2027
   Format: Very short quizzes with a small number of questions (true/false; multiple choice; short answer), designed to help you measure your comprehension of course material
   Value: 0 percent of final grade

2. Weekly Reading Responses

   Due Date: Every Monday beginning 18 January 2027
   Length: No more than 200 words each
   Value: 20 percent, graded on pass/fail basis; you must complete no fewer than eight to get full marks

   Note: This is a flexible assignment. You have 12 opportunities to submit a reading response. You need only to submit eight to get full marks. As such, requests for academic consideration for these responses will be denied.

3. Midterm Exam

   Due date: Friday, 12 February 2027
   Length: Two Hours
   Value: 40 percent of final grade

   Note: This is a designated assessment. If you are requesting consideration for a designated assessment, you must include supporting documentation. If you do not include supporting documentation, your request will be denied, and the privilege of undocumented absences is forfeited. It may not be recalled and reapplied.

4. Final Examination

   Due Date: To be determined by the Office of the Registrar
   Length: Three Hours
   Value: 40 percent of final grade

Regulations

1. 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.

2. Audit

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

3. Statement On The Use Of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

   In this course, the use of generative AI (including automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, text-generating AI assistants such as ChatGPT, Claude, and similar) is prohibited.

   This course uses MATCHA to prevent the misuse of generative AI. MATCHA is an integrity-promoting application that students download to their computers, enabling them to efficiently complete assignments. MATCHA is available for our course free of charge. By taking this course, you are agreeing to using MATCHA on your own laptop computer to research and write reading responses and take exams.

   To learn more about MATCHA, visit its website here. Make sure to read the Student Guide, which should be considered part of this outline.

   You will be required to use MATCHA software for all the work you conduct for your reading responses, including reading/research, note-taking, and editing. (MATCHA has built-in tools for doing all these things).

   The midterm examination is scheduled for 12 February 2027 and the final exam will be scheduled by the Registrar's Office. It will take place during the official exam period.

   The midterm exam and the final exam are in person and synchronous, meaning that they must be taken at the scheduled time.

The midterm and final exams may be taken either using paper and a writing instrument or taken on students' own laptops computers using MATCHA. You can decide on the format.

The instructor reserves the right to issue exams on paper and pencil in the event that MATCHA becomes unsuitable for either of our exams.

4. 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

5. Academic Consideration

   Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity.

   Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a substantial but temporary impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

   (a) Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of Faculty in which the student is registered.

   (b) Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
       a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
       b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
       c. Supporting documentation as relevant

   Requests without supporting documentation are limited to one per term per course.

   Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner. Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term always require formal supporting documentation.

Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs

6. Academic Advising

   Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here.

7. Religious Accommodation

   Western's Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here. In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than one week prior to the writing of the test.

8. 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.

9. 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, here.

10. E-mail policy

    The instructor is not able to respond to philosophical concerns or questions over email. These are to be dealt with in office hours only. Use email only if you wish to make an appointment with the instructor or have some business or administrative issue that can be dealt with briefly. When you write an email to the instructor, please make sure to include your name and student number in the email message.

11. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

    No aids are permitted for any of the tests or the exam. Electronic devices of any kind (including cell phones and smart watches) are not permitted, unless they are necessary for the use of MATCHA.

12. Prerequisites

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol 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.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

13. Statement On Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

    Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, here. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact `support@uwo.ca`.

14. Support Services

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

    Students in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@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.