

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

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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

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

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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

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