

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2025-26

PHILOSOP 2065G
Evil, Suffering, and Pessimism:
An Introduction to Modern Philosophy

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course Owl BrightSpace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

PREREQUISITE CHECKING

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll 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. [Student Responsibility for Course Selection](#)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a study of philosophical approaches to evil through the history of modern Western philosophy. We will consider evil as a theological problem (i.e., the problem of evil, optimism, and philosophical attempts at theodicy and objections to these), the origin and significance of suffering, and philosophical responses to the fact of evil and suffering, especially pessimism (the view that this is the “worst of all possible worlds”).

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students successfully completing this course should be able to:

- (1) **explain** the views of some of the principal philosophers of the modern period (1500-1900) in Western philosophy on the course topics;
- (2) **appreciate the significance** of the contributions of a diverse set of philosophers (including many outside of the current philosophical canon) to philosophical treatments of evil, suffering, and pessimism
- (3) **identify, analyse, and evaluate** complex philosophical arguments
- (4) **construct** effective argumentative papers that engage with and appraise a philosophical position

TEXTS

All required texts are available at no cost through the course OWL page.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Study Question Responses	10%	Weekly (via OWL)
Quizzes	30% (15% x 2)	TBD
Argumentative Paper	30%	TBD
Final Exam	30%	TBD

The Quizzes and Final Exam will be in-class assessments and will involve essay-length responses to a question selected by the instructor. Possible questions will be circulated in advance.

The Study Questions are sets of 3 questions intended to assist you in your readings of the assigned texts. The questions will be posted at the beginning of each week as an Assignment in Owl. Students will have until the beginning of our in-person meeting to respond to each (no more than a sentence will be required or expected). NOTE: Since the purposes of the SQRs are to prepare you for the weekly lecture, completing them before class is essential. **Therefore, no late submissions will be accepted and no make-up assignments are possible.**

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 <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.

AUDIT

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

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Study aids and electronic devices of any kind (including calculators, cell phones and smart watches) are not permitted for the quizzes and exam in this course.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Use of AI tools such as ChatGPT is **not** forbidden in this course, but it is restricted to the purposes of brainstorming, information gathering, preliminary research, and improving expression. If you have made use of AI tools for your essay assignment you are required to specify the purposes for which you have used it in your paper itself (in, for instance, an initial footnote). Your final assignments should in any case reflect your own critical thinking and independent work.

ACCOMMODATION

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.” <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodationdisabilities.pdf>. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity. “Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students” <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION

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.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of Faculty in which the student is registered.
2. 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

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Western's Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf.

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".

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

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.

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, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Statement on the use of plagiarism-checking software

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>).

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: https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) 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 (24/7 availability).

GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.