

# CARLETON UNIVERSITY

## PHIL 2103: The Philosophy of Human Rights

### Course Syllabus Winter Term 2017

Professor  
Ken Ferguson

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(613)520-2110  
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Office Hours:  
TBD

### Class Time

Wed/Friday  
10:05-11:25

Location:  
103 SC

## COURSE SUMMARY

Most of us today believe that we humans have rights and that we possess these rights quite independently of any laws made by governments or international bodies such as the United Nations. (After all, we invoke these rights as the reason for *making* laws which promote and protect them and for criticizing laws which fail to respect them.) Belief in such human rights, moreover, plays a central role, both domestically and internationally, in justifying and evaluating social and political policies, programs and initiatives.

Despite the prominence of human rights, however, they remain puzzling, problematic and controversial in many respects. One problem concerns their justification. How do we really know that human rights exist, particularly in view of the fact that they cannot be identified with any legal rights guaranteed by actual laws? Where do these rights come from? What is their source? There are several competing answers to these questions, and it is not easy to determine which of them is correct. A second problem concerns the scope of human rights. Precisely what things do we have a right to? Civil and political rights, e.g. the right not to be imprisoned unjustly, are fairly uncontroversial. But do we also have a right to free health care, to an education, or to a decent job? And how is it to be determined whether we have a right to these and other things? A third major controversy about human rights concerns their universality. There appear to be cultures around the world that do not acknowledge the existence of many of the rights we take for granted. Are human rights, then, merely a Western cultural phenomenon, and is the attempt to impose them on other cultures merely another form of Western imperialism?

Our objective in this course is to investigate and explore these and other philosophical issues that arise in connection with human rights. In addition to this, however, we will also do our best to provide a detailed, rigorous, systematic and convincing defense of the conception of human rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other prominent human rights documents.

## REQUIRED TEXT

A course pack, with the title *Readings in the Philosophy of Human Rights*, has been prepared by the Instructor. This course pack can only be purchased at **Haven Books**, located at 43 Seneca St.

## ATTENDANCE POLICY

Although attendance will not be taken, regular attendance is important if students wish to do well. It is understood that students are responsible for any material missed due to absence.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Midterm:** There will be a midterm exam which will be worth 30% of the final grade. The format of the midterm will be as follows: one week before the midterm a list of study questions will be given to students. On the midterm students will then be asked to answer a selection from this list.

**Term Paper:** Students will be required to write a term paper worth 30% of the final grade. The paper will be 5-8 pages in length. It will not be a research paper but will consist of a critical discussion of some topic or issue central to the course. A list of topics, along with instructions and guidelines for writing the paper, will be available early in the term.

**Final Examination:** There will be a final exam scheduled during the examination period, which will be worth 40% of the final grade. The format will be the same as for the midterm.

## CLASS FORMAT

The emphasis in the course will be on reasoning, analysis and critical evaluation. Readings will be assigned for each class, and students will be expected to have read them. The role of the Instructor will be to guide students through the readings, to ensure that discussions remain focused on relevant and important issues, and to illustrate the processes of interpretation, analysis and criticism by repeated example in class.

## SHORT LIST OF TOPICS/ISSUES

(For a more detailed list of topics and readings, see the course syllabus posted on CuLearn.)

- 1) What are human rights and why are they important?
- 2) Do human rights exist independently of law?
- 3) Are human rights universal?
- 4) What is the justification or source of human rights?
- 5) Are human rights absolute?
- 6) Should there be a categorical ban on the use of torture?
- 7) Is there a human right to democracy?
- 8) Is there a human right to privacy?
- 9) Are there human rights to economic and social goods, and, if so, what is their justification?
- 10) Is there a right to economic development?
- 11) Has the human rights movement discriminated against women, and, if so, how should this problem be rectified?
- 12) Is the concept of a human right distinctively Western?
- 13) Does the issue of climate change raise human rights issues?

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (2016-17)

### **Assignments:**

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box)
- must include the following:
  - student name
  - student number
  - course number and section
  - instructor's name
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

### **Deferrals for Term Work:**

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a final assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral of examination/assignment. For deferred examinations (both formally scheduled and take-homes), you must apply within 3 working days after the scheduled date of the exam. To apply for deferral of a final assignment, you must apply within 3 working days of the last scheduled day of classes. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information.

### **Plagiarism:**

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. (Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations, section 14.3, or <http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv14/>)

### **Academic Accommodation:**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Religious obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The **Paul Menton Centre** for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your **Letter of Accommodation** at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). Requests made within two

weeks will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*) at <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

### **Important Dates:**

Sept. 7	Classes start.
Sept. 20	Last day for registration and course changes in Fall and Fall/Winter courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from Fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 10	Thanksgiving Day – University closed.
Oct. 24-28	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 25	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
Dec. 9	Last day of classes, Fall term. Classes follow a Monday schedule.
Dec. 9	Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for Fall term courses.
Dec. 9	Last day to withdraw from Fall term courses (academic purposes only).
Dec. 10-22	Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 22	Take-home exams are due.
Jan. 5	Winter term classes begin.
Jan. 18	Last day for registration and course changes in Winter term classes.
Jan. 31	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter courses or winter portion of two-term courses.
Feb. 20	Family Day – University closed.
Feb. 20-24	Winter Break, no classes.
Mar. 24	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
Apr. 7	Last day of Fall/Winter and Winter term classes. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for Fall/Winter and Winter term courses.
Apr. 7	Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only).
Apr. 10-25	Final Examinations. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 14	Good Friday – University closed.
Apr. 25	Take-home exams are due.

### **Addresses:**

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a>
Registrar's Office:	520-2110 300 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a>
Student Academic Success Centre:	520-3500 302 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/sasc">www.carleton.ca/sasc</a>
Writing Tutorial Service:	520-7850 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library <a href="http://www1.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/">http://www1.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/</a>
MacOdrum Library	520-6632 <a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a> 520-2735