

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

PHIL 2103: The Philosophy of Human Rights

Course Syllabus Summer Term 2014

Professor
Ken Ferguson

kenneth.ferguson
@carleton.ca
(613)520-2110
3A51 Paterson

Office Hours:
TBD

Class Time

Mon/Wed
10:30 – 1:30

Location:
TBA

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

Tests: There will be two in-class tests. One will be held about the middle of the course, the second will be held at the end of the course. The test on which students do best will be worth 40% of the overall grade, the other will be worth 30%. The format for these tests will be as follows: a week or two before the date of the test students will be given a list of questions; the instructor will then select several of these for students to answer.

Discussion Essay: Students will write an essay of approximately 5-7 pages in length (1200-1500 words), which will be worth 30% of the overall grade. This will be a discussion paper, not a research paper, which will involve analyzing and evaluating some issue central to the course. A list of topics for students to choose from will be posted on CuLearn early in the course.

Optional Participation Grade: Students will be given the option of having 20% of their grade determined by participation in class discussions. For those who choose this option, each exam will be worth 30% and the term paper 20%.

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 source/ground of human rights?
- 5 Does the human right against torture mean there should be a categorical ban on its use?
- 6 Is there a human right to democracy?
- 7 Are there human rights to economic and social goods, and, if so, what is their justification?
- 8 Is there a right to economic development?
- 9 Has the human rights movement discriminated against women, and, if so, how should this problem be rectified?
- 10 Is the concept of a human right distinctively Western or is it also present in non-Western cultures?
- 11 Does the issue of climate change raise human rights issues?

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Summer 2014)

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 in the lower right corner of the cover sheet:
 - student name
 - student number
 - course number and section
 - instructor's name
- The Philosophy Department does not accept assignments by FAX. You may send them by courier, if necessary.
- 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, you must apply within 5 working days after the scheduled date of your exam. To apply for deferral of a final assignment, you must apply within 5 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://www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html#14.3>)

Academic Accommodation 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 for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me 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). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

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

Important Dates:

May 5	Classes start.
May 12	Last day for registration and course changes for early summer courses.
May 16	Last day for registration and course changes for full summer courses.
May 19	Statutory holiday, university closed.
May 23	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from early and full summer courses.
June 17	Last day for early summer 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 courses that end on this day.
June 17	Last day for academic withdrawal from early summer courses.
June 20-26	Final examinations.
July 1	Statutory holiday, university closed.
July 3	Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume.
July 10	Last day for registration and course changes for late summer courses.
July 23	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from late summer courses.
Aug. 4	Statutory holiday, university closed
Aug. 15	Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for late and full summer 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 courses that end on this day.
Aug. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from late summer and full summer courses.
Aug. 18-23	Final examinations.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall www.carleton.ca/philosophy 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory www.carleton.ca/registrar 520-3500
Student Academic Success Centre:	302 Tory www.carleton.ca/sasc 520-7850
Paul Menton Centre:	500 University Centre www.carleton.ca/pmc 520-6608
Writing Tutorial Service:	4 th Floor, Library http://www.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/ 520-6632
MacOdrum Library	http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735