



PHIL 2010: Issues in Theoretical Philosophy

0.5 credit. Issues drawn from epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and related fields will be examined through careful study of significant philosophical texts after 1900, along with some ensuing debates. Prerequisite(s): enrolment in Honours or Combined Honours Philosophy programs, or in philosophy, Ethics, and Public Affairs, or permission of the Department.

Fall Term 2025
Tuesdays & Thursdays
10:05–11:25 a.m.

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Office hours:
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:00–1:00 p.m.

Overview & Objectives

In this course we will explore some of the most important theoretical problems in philosophy, including the problem of the external world, our knowledge of other minds, the mind-body relationship, what makes for linguistic meaning, the nature of free will and moral obligation, how we should think about justice, why death is bad thing, and whether talk of the meaning of life makes sense in the modern world.

We will discuss important readings by prominent 20th century and contemporary philosophers in relation to these problems. Although the readings are difficult, they are required, and the structure of the course is designed to help you master their central lines of thought. All of the readings will be made available to you online or in electronic format, so you will not have to purchase any of them.

Because it so aptly and succinctly characterizes all of the theoretical problems we will consider, I also recommend an introductory textbook by the renowned contemporary philosopher, Thomas Nagel. Although the Nagel book is not required for this course, I encourage you to purchase your own copy if you are able, or at least to make use of the copy that I will put reserve at the MacOdrum Library.

There are two main objectives in this course. The first is to give you a very good foundational understanding of the theoretical problems we will explore. The second is to give you the opportunity to develop your own line of thought about some aspect of one of these problems.

Recommended Book & Required Readings

Here is the recommended book by Nagel:

Nagel, T. (1987). *What does it all mean? A very short introduction to philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The required readings that we will consider in relation to the problems we will explore are as follows:

- Anscombe, G.E.M. (1958). Modern moral philosophy. *Philosophy*, 33, 1-19.
- Frankfurt, H. (1969). Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility. *Journal of Philosophy*, 66, 829-39.
- Frege, G. ([1892] 1948). Sense and reference, trans. by M. Black, *The Philosophical Review*, 57, 209-30.
- Kim, J. (2001). Lonely souls: Causality and substance dualism. In K. Corcoran (ed.), *Soul, body, and survival* (pp. 30-43). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Levy, N. (2003). Analytic and Continental philosophy: Explaining the differences. *Metaphilosophy*, 34, 284-304.
- Nagel, T. (1970). Death. *Noûs*, 4, 73-80.
- Pargetter, R. (1984). The scientific inference to other minds, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 62, 158-63.
- Rawls, J. (1958). Justice as fairness. *The Philosophical Review*, 67, 164-94.
- Stroud, B. (1984). The problem of the external world. In Stroud, *The significance of philosophical scepticism* (pp. 1-38). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolf, S. (2010). A conception of meaningfulness in life [and] the fitting fulfillment view defended. In Wolf, *Meaning in life and why it matters* (pp. 7-13 & 25-33). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Evaluation

Thursday Debates: 0%
 Test 1: 30%
 Test 2: 30%
 Term Paper Proposal: 10%
 Term Paper: 30%

For most weeks in the course, I will lead the Tuesday class discussion by talking about the required reading we will be considering that week. The Thursday class will then be devoted to **Thursday**

debates. For these debates, the class will be divided into groups. I will represent the philosopher whose reading we discussed in the Tuesday class, and each of the groups will informally debate me in turn about that reading. Groups will be given some time before each debate to discuss the questions or challenges they would like to raise for me in the debate. The purpose of these debates is to enhance your understanding of what we talked about in the preceding Tuesday classes, and thus to enhance your understanding of the theoretical problems, in an informal (but focused) conversational setting. Although you will not be graded for your performance in these Thursday debates, you are strongly encouraged to participate in all of them, because you are bound to get more out of the course and to do better on its graded elements by participating.

There will be **two Brightspace tests** in this course, each worth 30% of your overall grade. The first test will be on October 9 at 10:05 a.m., and the second on November 20 at 10:05 a.m. Because these are Brightspace tests, you do not need to come to class those two days. But you must take the tests in Brightspace at those times on those days. The tests will consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions, and you will have up to one hour to complete each test. The test questions will concern what we have discussed in the previous Tuesday classes and Thursday debates up to that point.

In the final two weeks of classes, every student will also be expected briefly to outline for the rest of the class a **term paper proposal**. The proposal should be accompanied by a written outline of your proposal, about a page (or 300 words) or so in length. You will give this written outline to me on the day you give your paper proposal. Because the point of this proposal is to ensure that you are thinking in advance about your term paper for the course. Your proposal will be worth 10% of your overall grade.

The **term paper** you will then be expected to write for the course should be approximately 1,500 words long. It will follow through on your proposal, and develop your own line of thought about whichever aspect of whichever theoretical problem you find most interesting. The paper will be worth 30% of your overall grade, and will be due by 11:59 p.m. on the final day of the term's examination period, December 20. I will say more about the evaluation criteria for your term paper as we near the end of classes. But note for now that it will be important when writing the paper to avoid plagiarism, as defined in the university's Academic Integrity Policy, which can be found at:

<https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/Academic-Integrity-Policy-2021.pdf>.

Please also note that **you are not permitted to make use of generative artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT, for your tests, term paper proposal, or term paper**. If I acquire evidence that you have made use of generative AI on any of these course assignments, I will treat it as a suspected violation of academic integrity, per Section 1.3 of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences guidelines on Academic Integrity and Academic Offences, which may be found at: <https://carleton.ca/FASS-FPA-teaching-regulations/academic-integrity-and-academic-offences/#sect1.3>.

Schedule

The left column of the following table lists the dates of our class meetings. The centre column indicates the main problems we will be discussing in the lead Tuesday classes and Thursday debates. In the right column are the corresponding required readings (and recommended chapters from the Nagel textbook) for those problems. The centre column also indicates which class times will be devoted to the tests and term paper proposals.

Sept 9	Approaches to Philosophy	Levy (2003) Nagel, Chapter 1
Sept 11	Thursday Debates	
Sept 16	The External World	Stroud (1984) Nagel, Chapter 2
Sept 18	Thursday Debates	
Sept 23	Other Minds	Pargetter (1984) Nagel, Chapter 3
Sept 25	Thursday Debates	
Sept 30	The Mind-Body Relationship	Kim (2001) Nagel, Chapter 4
Oct 2	Thursday Debates	
Oct 7	Linguistic Meaning	Frege ([1892] 1948) Nagel, Chapter 5
Oct 9	Test 1	
Oct 14	Free Will	Frankfurt (1969) Nagel, Chapter 6

Oct 16	Thursday Debates	
Oct 20–24	Winter Break	
Oct 28	Moral Obligation	Anscombe (1958) Nagel, Chapter 7
Oct 30	Thursday Debates	
Nov 4	Principles of Justice	Rawls (1958) Nagel, Chapter 8
Nov 6	Thursday Debates	
Nov 11	The Badness of Death	Nagel (1970) Nagel, Chapter 9
Nov 13	Thursday Debates	
Nov 18	The Meaning of Life	Wolf (2010) Nagel, Chapter 10
Nov 20	Test 2	
Nov 25	Term Paper Proposals	
Nov 27	Term Paper Proposals	
Dec 2	Term Paper Proposals	
Dec 4	Term Paper Proposals	
April 26	Term Paper Due	

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2025-26)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. We no longer allow hard copies placed in the department's essay box.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further 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. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or 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 [EIC](#) website.
- *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 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 test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for [Student Activities](#):* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor 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.

Important Dates:

Sept. 3	Classes start.
Sept. 16	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 13	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 20-24	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 21	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 5	Last day of fall term classes. <i>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</i> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. 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 a fall term course.
Dec. 6-7	No classes or examinations take place.
Dec. 8-20	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 20	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 5	Classes begin.
Jan. 16	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 16	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 16-20	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.
Mar. 25	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 3	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 8	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. <i>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</i> Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 9-10	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 11-23	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 23	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:
www.carleton.ca/philosophy
 520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
 520-7850

Writing Services:
<https://carleton.ca/csas/support/>
 520-3822

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
 520-2735