

Winter 2026 – Carleton University
PHIL 2330: Happiness, Well-being, and the Good Life
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:05 pm - 2:25 pm

Instructor: Dr. Kyla Bruff

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Office hours: Thursdays, 11AM-12:45PM in 3A56, Paterson Hall, or online by appointment

Course Delivery: In-person

I. Description:

What does it mean to live well? How can we live a good life and be happy? What makes life meaningful? These are questions that concern all of us.

In this course, we will examine eight different perspectives on the good life, which direct us on how to live well. By the end of the course, you will describe and defend your own perspective on the good life. This will be done in the form of your own philosophical “apology.”¹

We will begin the course with the Anishinaabe notion of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, a wholistic, balanced approach to living well in relation to our interdependence, which calls for respect for all forms of life. Beginning this approach will allow us to adopt a critical lens towards the biases of the Western approaches to the good life, which we will study throughout the rest of the course, and their relationships to colonization.

Subsequently, we will study Plato’s thesis that caring for yourself as an individual involves pursuing the truth collectively with others. Through a study of Socrates’ *Apology*, we will start the course by examining the importance of doing justice to others and education in caring for our souls, or living the good life.

We will then examine Aristotle’s view that the human being’s activity should accord with reason in the pursuit of happiness. We will explore whether moderation, or the idea that virtues must aim at a “mean between extremes,” is conducive to living the good life. Following this, we will examine Aristotle’s view of friendship and determine how it applies to our own friendships and thus to living a virtuous, happy life.

Our next approach to the good life will lead us to the Stoic tradition. Stoicism has enjoyed a renewed surge in popularity in recent years, particularly in online spaces, due in part to its practical teachings, which help individuals confront circumstances outside of their control. By reading sections from Marcus Aurelius’ meditations, we will investigate whether or not living a good life requires that we scrutinize our own role in our problems and the despair we experience in our lives, and then to set our own, personal standards. We will examine how one’s understanding of one’s place in the universe (or cosmos) relates to one’s struggles and successes.

¹ This final exam idea was inspired by: <https://godandgoodlife.nd.edu/policies-structure/>

After Plato, Aristotle and Aurelius, we will consider whether God, religion, and scripture should play a role in our attempts to live well and be happy. We will rely on Saint Augustine's autobiographical text, *Confessions*, to guide us through this inquiry.

In trying to live well, many people find it necessary to discipline themselves to behave in accordance with duties and the principles they legislate, or set up, for themselves. We will explore this approach to the good life by jumping into the eighteenth century, reading sections from Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. In carrying out their moral duty, a good person, on Kant's account, self-legislates rational principles, which in turn guide their action. For Kant, living the good life involves a high level of self-control. Nietzsche, on the other hand, critiques this endorsement of self-constraint, together with the claims that our decisions on how to live well should follow the strict principles of reason or those of religion. For Nietzsche, to live a good life means both to affirm life but also to suffer in solitude on the journey to self-improvement.

Finally, through Martha C. Nussbaum's work, we will evaluate the role of emotions in making judgments about what is important for our well-being. Through emotions, we expose our own vulnerability and neediness with regards to others and the world.

At the end of this course, you will have the opportunity to evaluate which conceptions of the good life along with their corresponding demands are most applicable to your own life.

II. Preclusions: None

III. Prerequisite(s): None

IV. Learning Outcomes:

- to understand and be able to reconstruct the arguments in favour of different concepts of happiness, well-being and the good life in the history of philosophy
- to be able to critically analyse, relate and juxtapose different approaches to the good life
- to be able to defend, in consideration of a broad range of philosophical arguments, your own personal approach to how to live a good life

V. Course readings and texts:

All required readings for this course will be made available to you online via Ares. **You are not required to purchase any course texts.**

If you *do* want to purchase a physical copy of any of the books in which our reading selections are found, the corresponding editions can be easily found and purchased online. ***This is not required.***

Unit I: Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin: a wholistic, balanced approach to interdependence and respect for all forms of life

Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, "Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology: A Spirit-centered Way in Anishinaabe Research," *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2010.

Unit II: The good life as seeking the truth with others, while examining and improving oneself

Plato, “The Apology” in *Plato’s Apology, Crito and Phaedrus*, trans. Henry Cary, published by Andrews UK Ltd., 2012.

Unit III: The quest to be happy through the exercise of reason and developing friendships

Aristotle, Books II and VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, published by Oxford University Press, 2009.

Unit IV: The power of the mind to adjust one’s perspective

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Martin Hammond, published by Penguin Classics, 2006.

Optional reading:

“The Daily Stoic: Meditations by Marcus Aurelius: Book Summary, Key Lessons and Best Quotes”

<https://dailystoic.com/meditations-marcus-aurelius/>

Unit V: God and the Good Life

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, published by Oxford University Press, 2008.

Unit VI: The good life as requiring self-discipline and self-control

Immanuel Kant – *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Allen W. Wood, published by Yale University Press, 2002.

Unit VII: The affirmation of life, the value of solitude and risk-taking, without an appeal to transcendence

Friedrich Nietzsche – *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, published by Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Unit VIII: Emotions as evaluative judgments, which show us what is important and our own vulnerability, in pursuing the good life

Martha C. Nussbaum – “Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance” in *Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed. Robert C. Solomon, published by Oxford University Press, 2004, Part VI, Ch. 12.

Optional reading: Interview with Martha Nussbaum in the Daily Stoic

<https://dailystoic.com/martha-nussbaum/>

VI. Calendar description: A philosophical exploration of what makes a good human life. Topics may include the role of happiness, well-being, and flourishing in a good life, the relations between these aspects, and the extent to which they depend on luck and social considerations.

VII. Course calendar and overview:

Date	Themes, Deadlines & Feedback	Required Reading
Jan. 6	Course Introduction	None
Jan. 8	The Anashinaabe concept of “mino-bimaadiziwin” (the Good Life)	Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, “Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology,” pp. 12-18
Jan. 13	Re-conceptualizing mino-bimaadiziwin in order to critically examine Western approaches to knowledge and the good life	Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, “Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology,” pp. 19-24
Jan. 15	Socrates’ defence	Plato, <i>The Apology</i> , sections 1-16, pp. 10-26
Jan. 20	Socrates’ view of the good life and death as a blessing	Plato, <i>The Apology</i> , sections 16-22, pp. 27-45
Jan. 22	Happiness and the golden mean	Aristotle, Books I and II of the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 3-37
Jan. 27	Friendship as essential to the good life	Aristotle, Book VIII of the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 142-162
Jan. 29	Test 1	
Feb. 3	To what extent do we create our own problems? Are we in control of what bothers us?	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 5, pp. 35-41
Feb. 5	Living at one with nature and dealing with obstacles	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 5, pp. 41-45
Feb. 10	One’s place in the universe in relation to one’s struggles	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 9, pp. 83-93
Feb. 12	Sin Test 1 returned	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 2, pp. 24-34
Feb. 17 & 19	NO CLASSES – MIDTERM BREAK	
Feb. 24	Conversion and the will to serve God	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 8, pp. 140-154
Feb. 26	God and the good life	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 10 (sections 10.31-10.34), pp. 196-200
Mar. 3	Introduction to Kant and moral duty	Kant, Preface and First Section of the <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 3-21
Mar. 5	The first formulation of the categorical imperative as the principle of duty	Kant, The Second Section of the <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 22-38

Mar. 10	The second and third formulations of the categorical imperative as the principle of duty	Kant, <i>The Second Section of the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 44-58
Mar. 12	Questioning the nature of truth and a priori morality	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Part 1: On the prejudices of philosophers, sections 1-11, pp. 5-14
Mar. 17	The free spirit	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Part 2: The free spirit, sections 24-33, pp. 25-34
Mar. 19	No class; instructor is away	No class; instructor is away
Mar. 24	Will to power; mastery; affirming life and the value of solitude	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , sections 257-261 & 271-274, pp. 151-158 & 167-168
Mar. 26	Test 2	
Mar. 31	The importance of emotions	Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance," pp. 307-313.
Apr. 2	Nussbaum's neo-Stoicism	Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance," pp. 313-329.
Apr. 6	Course conclusion Test 2 Returned	

VIII. Evaluation

The evaluation for this course is as follows:

- **Test 1** on the concept of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, Plato, and Aristotle (Jan. 29), **30%**
- **Test 2** on Marcus Aurelius, Augustine, Kant and Nietzsche (Mar. 26), **35%**
- **Final Exam: "My Apology"** (scheduled during the exam period), **35%**.

The two tests will be written in person, during class time and cannot, other than in exceptional, extenuating circumstances, be taken on an alternative date. The tests are intended to assess your grasp of the main ideas explored in the course, their context, and their possible, real-world application.

The "My Apology" exam is an in-class essay that will be scheduled in-person during the final exam period.

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 to be 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:

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as '*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*' This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source.

Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own;
- failing to acknowledge sources with proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor.

The Associate Dean of the Faculty follows a rigorous [process for academic integrity allegations](#), including reviewing documents and interviewing the student, when an instructor suspects a violation has been committed. Penalties for violations may include a final grade of "F" for the course.

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the full 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](#))

Statement on AI:

As our understanding of the uses of AI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, students are required to discuss their use of AI in any circumstance not described in the course outline with the instructor to ensure it supports the learning goals for the course.

Mental Health:

As a student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>.

Academic Accommodation:

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website (students.carleton.ca/course-outline). Examples of special arrangements include:

- *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