

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES
(CGSC 3603 B/PHIL 3503 B)

Carleton University, Winter 2026

Day/Time: Thursdays, 2:35pm-5:25pm

Format: In Person

Prof. Myrto Mylopoulos

Office Hours: By appointment (Zoom or in-person)

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Teaching Assistant: TBA

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Course Website: TBA

Course Description

This course will examine a range of issues pertaining to the philosophy and ethics of artificial intelligence. Questions to be addressed include the following:

- Can artificial general intelligence ever be achieved?
- How likely are we to face a singularity event in the next 50 years?
- What are the risks, both existential and non-existential, involved in building intelligent machines? And how should we handle them?
- Will “merging” with AI someday be possible?
- Could AI ever become conscious or sentient?
- Might some present or future AIs be deserving of moral status?
- Are AIs moral agents? Can they be said to be morally responsible?
- Is genuine friendship with AI possible?

Course Prerequisites: CGSC 2001 or PHIL 2501, and third-year standing in Cognitive Science or Philosophy.

Course Objectives

Our aim in this course will be to support and develop the following:

- A familiarity with foundational philosophical issues in AI as well as current debates, through careful reading of the relevant literature.
- An ability to critically examine, from an informed viewpoint, various ethical implications of advancements in AI.

- An ability to articulate a critical viewpoint on a philosophical issue related to AI clearly and effectively, both verbally and in writing.

Course Materials

All required readings and additional resources will be made available on Brightspace. Students are not required to purchase textbooks or other learning materials for this course.

Course Requirements

Course Component	Percentage of Final Grade
Reading Assignments (Perusall)	15%
In-Class Participation Exercises	10%
Writing Assignment #1	25%
Writing Assignment #2	25%
Group Project	25%

Reading Assignments

Readings will be assigned for every class session except the first and the last two. All readings are required, except for those marked ‘optional’ on Brightspace. (You are encouraged to have a look at the optional readings, as they will help both fill in the background for, and expand upon, the material we’ll be discussing in class.)

To work through the readings, we will be using Perusall, a collaborative e-reading platform where you can discuss the readings together as a group in between our class sessions. The reading assignments you complete on Perusall are worth **15%** of your final grade. They are due the day before class (**Wednesdays**) by **midnight**. **No late assignments will be accepted.**

Reading assignments on Perusall will count towards your final grade from Week 2 through Week 12.

For instructions on how to register for and use Perusall, please see the *Guide to Perusall* posted under Week 1 on Brightspace.

In-Class Participation Exercises

These will take place **in class only** starting in **Week 2** and are worth **10%** of your final grade. The aim of these activity-based exercises is to give you an in-class space to interact with your peers and an opportunity to further process and reflect on the course material.

In order to earn your participation credit for a given class, you must be present in class and engage in the exercise. **There are no make-ups for these exercises.** In the case of illness or emergency preventing you from being in class on a given day, you may be excused from participating—please let me know promptly if this is the case.

Writing Assignments

Details TBA. We will go over instructions and a marking rubric in class closer to the due dates.

Writing Assignment #1 (25%) (1500 - 2000 words)

Due: February 13th by 11:59pm

Writing Assignment #2 (25%) (1500 - 2000 words)

Due: April 8th by 11:59pm

These assignments will be submitted via Brightspace. Late submissions will be penalized 5% per day, including weekends, except in the case of illness, emergency, or bereavement.

Group Project

In groups of three, you will put together a presentation focused on one ethical issue related to AI. You will have the choice between creating a slideshow presentation or a podcast presentation for the class. All presentation materials are due **March 30th** before class. Presentations will take place in class on **March 30th and April 6th**.

You will be provided with a list of topics to choose from as well as a core article for each topic to help guide further research.

There are two main components to the project: (i) Individual component involving independent research, and (ii) Group presentation component.

This project is worth 25% of your final grade. Further details to be discussed in class.

Course Topics and Reading Schedule

May be revised. Check Brightspace for most up-to-date information.

Week 1 (Jan. 8): Introduction

- No assigned readings.

Week 2 (Jan. 15): Super Intelligence and the Singularity

- Bostrom (2003), “When Machines Outsmart Humans”
- Chalmers (2010), “The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis”

Week 3 (Jan. 22): Existential Risk and Value Alignment

- Vold & Harris (2021), “How Does Artificial Intelligence Pose an Existential Risk?”
- Müller & Canon (2022), “Existential Risk from AI and Orthogonality: Can we Have it Both Ways”

Week 4 (Jan. 29): “Merging” with AI

- Turner & Schneider (2020), “Could You Merge with AI? Reflections on the Singularity and Radical Brain Enhancement”
- Heersmink (2017), “Distributed Selves: Personal Identity and Extended Memory Systems”

Week 5 (Feb. 2): LLMs and Understanding

- Bender & Koller (2020), “Climbing Towards NLU: On Meaning Form and Understanding”
- Piantadosi & Hill (2022), “Meaning Without Reference in Large Language Models”

Week 6 (Feb. 5): Artificial Consciousness

- Aru et al. (2023), “The Feasibility of AI Consciousness Through the Lens of Neuroscience”
- Prettyman (2024), “Artificial Consciousness”

Week 7 (Feb. 12): AI & Moral Agency

- Floridi & Sanders (2004), “On the Morality of Artificial Agents”
- Véliz (2021), “Moral Zombies: Why Algorithms Are Not Moral Agents”

Week 8 (Feb. 19): NO CLASS (Winter Break)

Week 9 (Feb. 26): AI & Moral Patienthood

- Schwitzgebel & Garza (2015), “A Defense of the Rights of Artificial Intelligence”
- Danaher (2020), “Welcoming Robots into the Moral Circle”

Week 10 (Mar. 5): AI and Art

- Hertzmann (2018), “Can Computers Create Art?”
- Vlaad (2024), “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Algorithm”

Week 11 (Mar. 12): AI and Friendship

- Danaher (2019), “The Philosophical Case for Robot Friendship”

- Bryson (2018), “Patience is Not a Virtue: The Design of Intelligent Systems and Systems of Ethics”

Week 12 (Mar. 19): TBA

Week 13 (Mar. 26): Group Presentations

Week 14 (Apr. 2): Group Presentations

Additional Information

In accordance with the Carleton University Undergraduate Calendar, the letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

A+ = 90-100	B+ = 77-79	C+ = 67-69	D+ = 57-59
A = 85-89	B = 73-76	C = 63-66	D = 53-56
A - = 80-84	B - = 70-72	C - = 60-62	D - = 50-52
F = Below 50			

Grades entered by Registrar:

WDN = Withdrawn from the course

DEF = Deferred

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.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Carleton University is a community of scholars dedicated to teaching, learning and research. Academic integrity is the set of principles by which a community of scholars governs the pursuit of scholarly activity. The soundness and reliability of scholarly activity rests on a shared commitment to academic integrity based on principles of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, and responsibility.

Academic misconduct, in any form, is ultimately destructive to the values of the University. Conduct by any person that adversely affects academic integrity at Carleton University is a serious matter. The University requires, unequivocally, academic integrity from all of its members, including students. Misconduct in scholarly activity will not be tolerated.

Students should familiarize themselves with Carleton's Academic Integrity Policy, which can be found here: <https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/Academic-IntegrityPolicy-2021.pdf>

For the purposes of this course, the following standards apply:

- A. Students may not submit substantially the same piece of work more than once for academic credit. Here “substantially the same” means that the majority of the content is reproduced. If a student wants to submit an assignment with a minor portion of the content reproduced from another assignment of theirs, they must ask for permission to do so first.

- B. Unless indicated otherwise, students must work individually on their written assignments.

C. Use of AI Tools: The development of analytical and critical thinking skills, through careful reading and writing, is a core objective of this course. As such, unless otherwise indicated, generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) may not be used for any course assignments, *except* to help with the clarity of the writing and its “mechanical” components, i.e., grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Doing so will be considered a form of academic misconduct and penalized in accordance with University policy.

D. 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; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotation marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course.

Statement on Student Mental Health

As a University 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. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus): <https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

Carleton Resources:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389, <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-mecounselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

Requests for Academic Accommodations

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).

For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

- **Academic consideration for medical or other extenuating circumstances:** Students must contact the instructor(s) of their absence or inability to complete the academic deliverable within the predetermined timeframe due to medical or other extenuating circumstances. Students should consult the [Course Outline Information on Academic Accommodations](#) for more information. Detailed information about the procedure for requesting academic consideration can be found [here](#).
- **Pregnancy obligation:** Please write to me 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 accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the Pregnancy Accommodation Form ([click here](#)).
- **Religious obligation:** Please write to me 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 [click here](#).

- **Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The Paul Merton 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).
- **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. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-supportservices>
- **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 will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me 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.
<https://carleton.ca/senate/wpcontent/uploads/Accommodation-for-StudentActivities-1.pdf>

Important Information

- Students must always retain a copy of all work that is submitted.
- 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.
- For us to respond to your emails, we need to see your full name, CU ID, and the email must be written from your valid CARLETON address. Therefore, in order to respond to your inquiries, please send all email from your Carleton CMail account. If you do not have or have yet to activate this account, you may wish to do so by visiting <http://carleton.ca/ccs/students/>
- For a list of dates and deadlines, including holidays and exam dates, please visit: <https://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/>