

# Philosophy 1550

## Introduction to Ethics and Social Issues

PHIL 1550 B

Instructor: Claire French

Winter 2026: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8:35-9:55

Office Hours: Mondays, 1:30-3:30, in person (Paterson 3A PhD Student Offices) or virtually

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TA: TBD

Brightspace: TBD

### Course Calendar Description

#### **Introduction to Ethics and Social Issues**

An introduction to understanding, assessing, and formulating ethical arguments concerning controversial issues. Particular issues studied may include, world hunger, capital punishment, terrorism, euthanasia, abortion, pornography and hate speech, animal rights, the environment, and topics in theories of race, gender and disability.

Precludes additional credit for FYSM 1212 and PHIL 1500.

Lectures three hours a week.

### Course Description for Winter 2026

The aim of this course is to introduce students to both the theory and the practice of ethics and ethical reasoning. Ethics is a broad field, spanning more than two millennia of written work. In order to narrow the scope of our study of ethics, this course will be framed around a particular ethical question: "How do we live well with others?" In the first half of this course, we will discuss several frameworks through which philosophers historically have attempted to answer this question. Drawing on primary sources, we will examine philosophers whose work is representative of various philosophical traditions including various religious doctrines, virtue ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, and care ethics. In the second half of the course, this question will frame our application of the understanding we gained in the first half of the course to pressing ethical issues in our world today. Issues we will discuss might include climate change, queer and trans rights, feminism, care work, settler-colonialism, and economic injustice.

This course will be delivered **online** at a **scheduled time** but does have **in-person assessments**. Students who cannot take exams in person can find information about taking exams virtually at <https://carleton.ca/ses/examination-services/distance-exams/>.

### Learning Outcomes

There are three primary learning outcomes for this course:

- Students will be able to identify explain the basic arguments and assumptions underlying different ethical frameworks
- Students will be able to use philosophical reasoning to construct sound and coherent ethical arguments
- Students will be able to use ethical frameworks as tool for understanding and explaining what they believe the moral salience of a given issue might be

There are two secondary learning outcomes for this course:

- Students will be able to structure a philosophical essay using sound and coherent arguments
- Students will be able draw on arguments from primary texts in order to synthesize their own arguments about ethical issues

## Note on TAs

If we have TAs, please do not email them with questions about the course material or syllabus. They do not have the answers you are seeking and will just forward your questions to me. So! Cut out the middleman and just email me, please!

## Texts and Course Materials

Students are not required to purchase textbooks or other learning materials for this course. I will endeavour to ensure all materials are provided through the course Brightspace page either via ARES or by posting the relevant readings directly to the course page for the relevant week.

The Texts we will be reading in this course are:

Aristotle. 2001. “Nichomachean Ethics” in The Basic Works of Aristotle, edited by Richard McKeon. New York: Modern Library. Book I, pages 935 - 952

Confucius. 2020. The Analects : Conclusions and Conversations of Confucius, translated by Moss Roberts. Berkeley: University of California Press. Book I, pages 21 to 30

Wallis, Glenn. 2007. “Turning the Wheel of the Teaching” in Basic Teachings of the Buddha: A New Translation and Compilation, with a Guide to Reading the Texts. The Modern Library: New York. Pages 36-39.

Augustine. 1961. Confessions. Translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin. Penguin Books: New York. Book II, Pages 43-53.

Locke, John. 1999. Two Treatises of Government. Hamilton: McMaster University Archive of the History of Economic Thought. Second Treatise, Chapter 2 - 5, Pages 106-126

Kant, Immanuel. 1996. “An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?” In Political Philosophy. Translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pages 17-22

Mill, J.S. Utilitarianism. Project Gutenberg. Chapter 2.

King, Martin Luther Jr. Letter from Birmingham City Jail. Philadelphia, American Friends Service Committee.

Rawls, John. 1971. A Theory of Justice : Original Edition. Original edition. Belknap Press. Part 1, Chapter 2, Sections 11-12, Pages 60-75

Baier, Annette. 1995. “The Need for More than Justice,” in Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Pages 18-32

Ahmed, Sara. 2017. Living a Feminist Life. Durham: Duke University Press. Conclusion 2: A Killjoy Manifesto, Pages 251-268

Young, Iris Marion. 2011. Justice and the Politics of Difference. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 2, “Five Faces of Oppression,” Pages 39-65

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” in Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society, vol. 1, no. 1, pages 1-40.

BigEagle, Louise. 2025. “Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation looks to build an economic future with traditional trade routes” on CBC.ca. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/standing-buffalo-dakota-trade-corridor-1.7636589>

Szende, Jennifer. 2022. “Relational value, land, and climate justice.” In Journal of Global Ethics vol. 18, no. 1, 118-133.

Pressman, Natalie. 2024. “The View from Downstream.” On CBC.ca. <https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/transboundary-water-agreement>

Campbell, Sue. 1994. “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression.” Hypatia 9, no. 3, 46–65.

porpentine. 2015. “Hot Allostatic Load.” In The New Inquiry. <https://thenewinquiry.com/hot-allostatic-load/>

Tronto, Joan C. 1993. Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care. New York: Routledge. Chapter 4, pages 101-124

Goldman, Brain, host. 2025. *White Coat, Black Art*. “This Vancouver hospital is transforming addiction treatment.” CBC Podcasts, November 21. Podcast, 26 min., 30 sec. <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live/>

<radio/1-75-white-coat-black-art/clip/16183035-this-vancouver-hospital-transforming-addiction-treatment?onboarding=false>

Fraser, Nancy. 2016. "Contradictions of Capital and Care." In *New Left Review* 100, 99-117.

Doctrow, Cory. 2025. "For-profit healthcare is the problem, not (just) private equity." Published on [medium.com](https://doctorow.medium.com/for-profit-healthcare-is-the-problem-not-just-private-equity-aa4a4940e85f). <https://doctorow.medium.com/for-profit-healthcare-is-the-problem-not-just-private-equity-aa4a4940e85f>

## Evaluation

### **Reflection Assignment, due Friday, January 23rd, submitted through Brightspace — 10%**

In no more than 500 words, reflect on our course's framing question "How do we live well with others?" In the readings and lectures so far, we have encountered several different frameworks which identify different answers to this question. In the mid-term and final exams, you will be asked to think through whether or not you agree with a philosopher or position and then make an argument for or against their answer to the framing question. This exercise aims to prepare you to do that kind of thinking by having you reflect on the reasons why you agree or disagree with philosophical arguments. For this reflection assignment, briefly explain one or two key elements that one of the philosophers we've looked at believe are necessary to live well with others. Then, reflect on whether or not you agree and explaining. Remember! Philosophy is about making arguments. You will be graded on how accurately you recreate the relevant philosopher's argument as well as how you explain your agreement or disagreement. Be sure to give me clear reasons why you do or do not agree with the philosopher.

*Note on late assignments:* Late assignments will not be penalized. However, assignments submitted **after January 30th** may not receive detailed feedback, depending on how much time I have to give it.

Assignments submitted after **reading week (week 7)** will receive no feedback whatsoever. Assignments cannot be submitted after **April 8th** as this is the last day of term.

### **Mid-Term, February 24th, in person (Room TBA) — 25%**

The mid-term will be an in person, hand written exam consisting of two questions which will be provided to students beforehand. There will be a short answer question worth ten marks and a longer answer question worth fifteen marks. Since you are being given the questions ahead of time, I am expecting your essays to be well structured so as to make a specific argument. Before the mid-term, we will have an essay writing workshop in which we will work together to make a sample outline so students will have an idea of what I am expecting.

### **Final Exam, during the scheduled exam period, in person — 40%**

The final exam will also be in-person and hand written. However, this time there will be three questions, two short answer questions worth ten marks each and a longer essay question worth twenty marks. Questions will again be provided ahead of time and students will be expected to prepare to answer the questions with well structured arguments. The final exam will be held during the formal exam period.

### **Participation — 25%**

Participation in class and on the class forums will be counted towards participation. So will attending office hours, emailing me questions about the material, attending TA office hours to ask about midterm marks, and anything else that demonstrates authentic engagement with the philosophical questions, frameworks, and ideas we discuss. I will also post discussion questions on the class Brightspace forum after each lecture for students to engage with. Discussing these questions and responding to other students will also earn you participation marks. To keep things simple, there will be **50** total participation marks available and each instance of participation listed above will be worth **1** mark. Each participation mark is worth **0.5** of the final grade.

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.

## Schedule

First Half: A Brief History of Ethics

**Week 1** — Introduction to the class

January 6 — Introduction to Introduction to Ethics

January 8 — Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics, Book I

**Week 2** — An Incomplete Look at Non-Western Ethics

January 13 — Confucius's Analects Book I

January 15 — "Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta" / "Turning The Wheel of the Teaching"

**Week 3** — Western Accounts of Human Nature

January 20 — Saint Augustine's Confessions, Book II

January 22 — John Locke's Second Treatise on Government, Chapter 2: State of Nature through 5: Property

**Reflection Assignment due January 23rd!**

**Week 4** — Codifying A Liberal Idealism

January 27 — Immanuel Kant's "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?"

January 29 — J.S. Mill's Utilitarianism, Chapter 2

**Week 5** — Justice

February 3 — Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter From Birmingham Jail"

February 5 — John Rawls's A Theory of Justice, Part 1, Chapter 2, Sections 11-12

**Week 6** — Critiquing Liberal Ethics

February 10 — Annette Baier's "The Need for More Than Justice"

February 12 — Sara Ahmed's "A Killjoy Manifesto" AND Essay Writing Workshop

**Week 7** — Reading Week!

February 17 — No Class

February 19 — No Class

Second Half: Contemporary Ethical Issues

**Week 8** — Mid-term and Introduction to the Second Half of the Course

February 24 — Mid-term Exam

February 26 — Applying Ethical Frameworks to Ethical Issues: Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppression"

**Week 9** — Decolonization

March 3 — Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor"

March 5 — Indigenous Sovereignty: "Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation looks to build an economic future with traditional trade routes"

**Week 10** — Environmental Ethics

March 10 — Jennifer Szende's "Relational value, land, and climate justice"

March 12 — Relationships to land and climate justice in theory: "The View from Downstream"

**Week 11** — Queerness, Feminism, and Emotion

March 17 — Sue Campbell’s “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression”

March 19 — Listening as Ethical Praxis: “Hot Allostatic Load”

**Week 12** — Bioethics and the Politics of Embodiment

March 24 — Joan Tronto’s Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care, Chapter 4

March 26 — Care in Context: White Coat, Black Art

**Week 13** — Capital, Crisis, and Social Reproduction

March 31 — Nancy Fraser’s “Contradictions of Capital and Care”

April 2 — Capital in Context: “For-profit healthcare is the problem, not (just) private equity”

**Week 14** — Wrap Up!

April 7 — Conclusion(s)

## “AI” Policy

All work submitted for grading or participation on discussion forums must be original. Work generated by a Large Language Model (LLM) is not permitted for submission for grading or for consideration for participation grades in the case of online discussion forums. This course is designed to help students learn how to think critically and structure arguments. This requires actually engaging with the course material and writing out *your own thoughts*. Plus, having a glorified predictive text engine do all the work for you sucks the fun out of learning about complex ideas and issues! I would also recommend against using LLMs to summarize any of the course readings. An LLM is guessing at what it thinks is important because it is designed to simply identify the statistically likely response to any given text input. As a result, they are frequently wrong and, even when they are not, they are subject to the same biases that any inexpert interpreter might be. If you are struggling with a reading, attend the lecture! My job as an instructor is to help you understand the arguments being made in these readings. If the lecture still doesn’t clear things up, come to my office hours or send me an email!

## **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](http://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](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 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. <b>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</b> 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. <b>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</b> 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](http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy)

520-2110

Registrar's Office:

[www.carleton.ca/registrar](http://www.carleton.ca/registrar)

520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:

[www.carleton.ca/academicadvising](http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising)

520-7850

Writing Services:

<https://carleton.ca/csas/support/>

520-3822

MacOdrum Library

<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>

520-2735