

**PHIL 3320 (A)**  
**Contemporary Ethical Theory**  
16:05 – 17:25 Tuesdays and Thursdays  
Online Synchronous (via Zoom)

I General information

Instructor: Sacha Ghandeharian  
On-line Office Hours: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Wednesdays (email for appointment, via Zoom)  
Email: [sacha.ghandeharian@carleton.ca](mailto:sacha.ghandeharian@carleton.ca)

All communication is to be via official Carleton e-mail accounts, not personal emails. Please note that students should carefully read the course outline and that important course information will be communicated via the Brightspace Announcement tool. Students should regularly check their Carleton email account for important course information, and it is strongly recommended that students remain subscribed to Brightspace email notifications. Emails with questions that are already answered on the course outline and/or Brightspace will usually not receive a reply. Please allow 2 workdays for reply.

II Course description

Calendar Description: “[0.5 credit] Critical study of modern ethical theories, their views on the nature of morality and the justification of moral claims. Topics may include utilitarianism, libertarianism, communitarianism, egoism, neo-Kantianism, virtue ethics, social contract ethics, feminist ethics, and moral rights.

*Precludes additional credit for PHIL 2102.*

*Prerequisite(s): PHIL 2020 or PHIL 2101 or permission of the department.”*

This course will have two main sections. The first half will involve a reading and discussion of several important and distinct perspectives in contemporary ethics – contractarianism, communitarianism, and discourse ethics. The second half will involve a close reading and discussion of feminist ethics – in particular, the tradition known as ‘care ethics’ – which seeks to bring to light a form of moral reasoning, and corresponding conception of the self, that feminist theorists claim has often been ignored by more dominant voices in the history of ethics – including those discussed in the first half of the course.

III Course format

The format of this course will more resemble the structure of a seminar – with emphasis being placed on class discussion of the readings – rather than a traditional lecture-style. Students will thus be required to take a more active approach to their learning, specifically in the form of making sure that they consistently complete the assigned readings before classes and have prepared to discuss them with the instructor and fellow students using the Zoom web-conferencing platform. Please note that class meetings will not be recorded and that recording by students is prohibited.

To facilitate this approach, and create space for increased engagement, the class will be split into two groups with 'Group A' meeting on Tuesdays and 'Group B' meeting on Thursdays (during course timeslot). Groups will most likely be determined based on alphabetical order (last name), with the first half of the class roster meeting on Tuesdays and the second on Thursdays; the composition of groups will become more concrete during the first week of term but may require adjustments based on changes in enrollment. By registering in the course, students are agreeing that they are available during the timeslots assigned to the course by the university. While the occasional exception can be made for cases of illness or emergency (inform instructor via email), students are asked to remain in their 'Group' and corresponding meeting time. The instructor will also hold office hours on Wednesdays (see above for times) and students are welcome to email for an appointment to discuss aspects of the material.

#### IV Learning outcomes

- Understanding of a selection of important perspectives in contemporary ethical/moral theory
- Development of skills related to the critical reading of texts in contemporary ethical/moral theory
- Development of skills related to analyzing theories and arguments in contemporary ethics and moral theory through class discussion and written assignments

#### V Texts

The readings for this course will be accessible through the Library Reserves Ares system which can be accessed via the course Brightspace and/or Library website. No text(s) need to be purchased.

Please note that for the sake of remaining consistent in class discussions and assignments, students are asked to use the same editions identified in this outline and made available by the library.

#### VI Evaluation at a glance

- 1) Attendance and Participation (ongoing): 30%
  - a. Attendance: 10%
  - b. Participation: 10%
  - c. Discussion questions: 10%
- 2) Three Critical Essays: 70%
  - a. Critical Essay 1 (due Feb 11): 20%
  - b. Critical Essay 2 (due Mar 11): 20%
  - c. Critical Essay 3 (due Apr 12): 30%

**Total = 100%**

Students are asked to be attentive to deadlines and to reach out to the instructor in advance if legitimate reasons (i.e., serious illness or family emergency) will affect their ability to submit course work by the deadlines. Please refer to the below policy on late submissions and be aware of university policy on completion of course work. Make-up and/or extra-credit assignments will not be an option.

Academic Integrity: Students are responsible for being aware of, and abiding by, Carleton University's Academic Integrity Policy; suspected violations of the policy such as, but not limited to, plagiarism,

cannot be settled with the instructor. A full copy of the policy can be found here:  
<https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/Academic-Integrity-Policy-2021.pdf>

## VII Evaluation in detail

### **Attendance and Participation (30% total)**

The attendance and participation portion of the evaluation has three components: attendance, participation, and discussion questions.

#### *Attendance (10%)*

Students are required to attend all assigned class meetings (according to their 'Group') and to attend them for their full duration. Students who do attend each session, for the full duration, can expect to receive full marks for 'attendance.' Absences and/or consistently joining late and/or leaving early will result in losing marks for attendance. If there is a legitimate reason for being absent for a particular class (i.e., serious illness or family emergency) please contact the instructor in advance or as soon as possible. Students are asked to access Zoom meetings via the Zoom application, with their Zoom account, and using first and last name. Zoom meeting links will be posted onto Brightspace the day before meetings.

#### *Participation (10%)*

Students are expected to actively participate in the discussion in class meetings. This part of the evaluation is based on both the quantity and quality of the participation. Students should participate consistently over the course of the term (quantity) and said participation should demonstrate specific engagement with the assigned readings through thoughtful reflection and/or questions (quality). Students are asked to ensure that they have a working microphone and should not rely on the Zoom chat function as it will not be consistently monitored during meetings. While turning on the camera can be beneficial in terms of fostering a more personal class environment, it is not mandatory to do so.

#### *Discussion questions (10%)*

Students will be required to post (via Brightspace) one discussion question related to the assigned reading(s) for each class (starting Week 2) by noon on the day of that class. The discussion question portion of the evaluation will also be based on quantity and quality in the sense that consistently posting a question (on time) is a basic requirement (quantity); however, the questions should also demonstrate specific engagement with the reading(s) and should be thoughtful and well-written (quality). Discussion questions can be either 'interpretive' (e.g., "what does X mean when they use concept Y in their discussion of Z?") or more 'critical' ("do you find it problematic that X insists that everyone reason in Y fashion for action Z to be considered morally justifiable?"). Students should avoid asking questions that are unclear, overly general, or disconnected from the readings, as this will be of lesser quality and will suggest either a lack of doing the reading(s) or doing so inattentively. In all cases, questions should be proofread and if reference to a specific passage is being made, include citation. Despite the possibility that not all of the questions will be addressed in class meetings, this exercise is still valuable as it: a) can be a demonstration that students have done the readings in advance; b) can aid in identifying which parts of the material require further clarification; c) develops skills related to the critical reading of philosophical texts; and d) can be a potential starting point for class participation and/or a critical essay.

### **Three Critical Essays (70% total)**

Students will be required to submit a total of three critical essays throughout the course of the term according to the stated deadlines. The first essay should be on contractarianism and/or communitarianism; the second essay should be on discourse ethics; the third essay should be on feminist (care) ethics; the first two essays should be 1000-1200 words and are worth 20% of the final grade each; the third essay should be 1500-1700 words and is worth 30% of the final grade.

Essays should demonstrate engagement with the key ideas, arguments and/or themes presented in the reading(s) for the relevant theory/thinker(s). They should demonstrate both an understanding of the relevant ethical theory, but also an ability to make an argument about that theory (or a key part of that theory) through specific engagement with the relevant course readings. In this way, essays need to do more than just summarize the reading(s); they must include a thesis statement in the introduction which then guides the explanation and analysis of the relevant course material. Students are welcome to make an office hours appointment to discuss their general approach to an essay in advance.

Overall, the critical essays will be evaluated based on the below general criteria:

- a. Overall level of understanding of the relevant ethical theory as presented in reading(s).
- b. Ability to identify core arguments/ideas and accurately/concisely explain them.
- c. Ability to provide a clear analysis of core arguments/ideas as guided by an effective thesis.
- d. Quality of writing including organization, formatting, and proper referencing of the texts.

Students are asked to use the Chicago Manual of Style (Author-Date) system for referencing.

*\*Please note that essays should be original to this course and not previously submitted for academic credit. Students may re-use an idea or continue a line of thought from their previous work, but the end-product should be a new piece of writing that reflects the topic(s), readings, and classes for this course.*

### ***Policy on Late Submissions***

Course requirements must be submitted according to the deadlines and instructions stated in this outline. In terms of essays, the instructor will accept late essays, but only if they are submitted within 5 calendar days of the deadline; a late penalty of 3% per day will be applied. Extensions and/or exceptions to this late policy will be at the discretion of the instructor and will only be considered for legitimate reasons (for example, serious illness or family emergency) and where the student has contacted the instructor in advance of the deadline. In exceptional cases of emergency where it is not possible nor reasonable for students to contact the instructor in advance of the deadline, they must do so as soon as possible, and in all cases, no later than within 3 working days of the deadline. Appropriate supporting documentation may be requested. Attendance and Participation components cannot be completed/submitted late.

## VIII Course schedule

*Please note that the instructor may make reasonable modifications to the below schedule of topics and readings. In such instances, students will be notified in advance.*

### **Week 1 (January 11/13): Introduction**

Discussion of course outline, introductions, and highlighting of some core themes.

### **Week 2 (January 18/20): The Contractarian Approach to Morality**

Cudd, Ann and Seena Eftekhari. 2021. "Contractarianism." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta.  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/contractarianism/>

Gauthier, David. 1986. *Morals by Agreement*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Chapter 1: "Overview of a Theory").

*Discussion question requirement begins this week.*

### **Week 3 (January 25/27): The 'Justice Perspective' in Contemporary (Contractarian) Ethics**

Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Chapter I: "Justice as Fairness").

### **Week 4 (February 1/3): The Communitarian Critique**

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1988. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. (Chapter 1).

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1991. "Précis of Whose Justice? Which Rationality." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1): 149-152.

Taylor, Charles. 1985. *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 7: "Atomism").

Optional: Bell, Daniel. 2020. "Communitarianism." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta.  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/communitarianism/>

### **Week 5 (February 8/10): Discourse Ethics**

*2 of 3 readings will be 'required' and other will be 'optional'; this will be decided closer to meeting day.*

Habermas, Jurgen and Ciaran Cronin. 1996. "On the Cognitive Content of Morality." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96: 335-358.

Ingram, David. 2010. *Habermas: Introduction and Analysis*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. (Pages 115 – 127).

Rehg, William. 2014. "Discourse Ethics." In *Jurgen Habermas: Key Concepts*, edited by Barbara Fultner, 115-139. New York: Routledge.

*Critical Essay 1 due on Friday February 11<sup>th</sup> by 11:59PM ET via Brightspace*

### **Week 6 (February 15/17): Constructive Criticisms of Discourse Ethics**

Seyla, Benhabib. 1992. *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. New York: Routledge. ("Introduction: Communicative Ethics and the Claims of Gender, Community and Postmodernism").

Young, Iris. 1997. "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought." *Constellations* 3 (3): 340-363.

### **WINTER BREAK (February 21-25): No classes**

### **Week 7 (March 1/3): Introducing Feminist (Care) Ethics**

Held, Virginia. 1990. "Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1 (Fall): 321-344.

Held, Virginia. 2006. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. New York: Oxford University Press. E-book. (Chapter 1: "The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory").

### **Week 8 (March 8/10): Moral Reasoning and Care I**

Gilligan, Carol. 1993. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. ("Letter to Readers, 1993," "Introduction," Chapter 1: "Woman's Place in Man's Life Cycle").

*Critical Essay 2 due Friday March 11<sup>th</sup> by 11:59PM ET via Brightspace*

### **Week 9 (March 15/17): Moral Reasoning and Care II**

Gilligan, Carol. 1993. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Chapter 2: "Images of Relationship").

### **Week 10 (March 22/24): Moral Reasoning and Care III**

Gilligan, Carol. 1993. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Chapter 3: "Concepts of Self and Morality").

### **Week 11 (March 29/31): Feminist Ethics and the Relational Self**

Benhabib, Seyla. 1986. "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory." *Praxis International* 5 (4): 402-424.

Oliver, Kelly. 2002. "Subjectivity as Responsivity: The Ethical Implications of Dependency." In *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, edited by Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder, 322–333. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

### **Week 12 (April 5/7): Rethinking Ethics after the Postmodern Turn**

Foucault, Michel. 1984. "What is Enlightenment?" In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 32-50. New York: Pantheon Books.

*Note: if we are running behind schedule, this week will be used to continue previous topics; if on schedule, we will discuss the above topic/reading and an additional reading may be added.*

*Critical Essay 3 due Tuesday April 12<sup>th</sup> by 11:59PM ET via Brightspace*

*April 12<sup>th</sup> is the last day of Winter term classes.*

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2021-22)

### **Assignments:**

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

### **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 [EDC](#) 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. 8	Classes start.
Sept. 22	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. 11	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 25-29	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 26	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. 10	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. 11-23	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. 23	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 10	Classes begin.
Jan. 24	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. 21	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 22-25	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 29	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. 12	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. <b>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</b> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter 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 two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 13	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 14-28	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 15	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 28	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:  
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>  
520-3822

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