

PHIL 2101 A: *History of Ethics* (Winter 2021, Prof. G. Davis, Dept of Philosophy)

Email: Gordon.Davis@carleton.ca (\* Always email me from your 'carleton.ca' address.)

Meetings at 6:05 PM on Mondays, with some exceptions. See the following explanation:

This course will be partly synchronous. *On average*, we will meet once every two weeks in real-time (via Zoom links sent out the morning of each class date); but see schedule below for exact dates. In weeks before an assignment deadline, meetings may occupy a few consecutive weeks. This is because one main purpose of meetings is Q & A regarding assignment expectations, with some related content matters covered as well. Attendance is required in the following sense: you won't be guaranteed a prompt email reply to queries about assignments if you were not present for a class in which the same query was covered. (Records of attendance will be kept for this reason; but attendance is – *exceptionally in 2021* – not part of the mark.)

**REQUIRED READINGS** (at [www.library.carleton.ca](http://www.library.carleton.ca), either via catalogue or “Databases”; **please note that this year, exceptionally, Book 1 of Aristotle's *Nico. Ethics* will be our first reading**, for reasons TBA.)

1. **(First see 3 below)** Plato, *Protagoras*, excerpts TBA: Click 'Databases' at our library website, click “Past Masters” (under P), find *Plato* in the list, then click *Volume 1* at left, and then click 'Dialogues'. Click *Protagoras*, which is the fifth dialogue listed on the left-hand side. (Jowett transl.)
2. Plato, *Republic*, excerpts TBA, in Volume 2 of Plato's *Collected Dialogues* in “Past Masters” (follow same steps as above, but click *Volume 2* instead). In both cases, skip the 'Introduction'.
3. **(rdg # 1 in 2021\*)** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Ross & Urmson translation), also at “Past Masters” database, as above (from the list of authors, click Aristotle, then click Volume II on the left, then 'Volume 2' again in the drop-down menu below that, i.e. the item between 'Frontmatter' and 'Endmatter' ... then click *Nicomachean Ethics* in the middle of the left-hand-side list.)

**NOTE:** in essays, other translations can be used, but **only if** proper care is taken when citing them. It is imperative that the relevant translator be indicated, and that both sets of page numbers be indicated, including the standard ones that all editions use (called 'Stephanus' pages for Plato; called 'Bekker' pages for Aristotle). Re. Aristotle: the library has an ebook of the recent Roger Crisp translation of *Nico. Ethics*.

4. Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), excerpts TBA; ebook @ library... + Mark Siderits, “The Buddha” (2011), at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buddha>
5. Ancient Buddhist texts ...including an excerpt from the *Majjhima Nikaya* (“Malunkyovada Sutta”) <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.063.than.html>... and from *Samyutta Nikaya*: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html> (on the four noble truths)
6. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). Go to 'Past Masters' database; click “Hume: Complete Works & Corr.”, and click the sixth item from the top on left-hand side.
7. Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789): <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/bentham/ipml/ipml.toc.html>
8. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), H.J. Paton translation... [Search for translator's title, which is *The Moral Law: Kant's Groundwork*(...), at Carleton's library catalogue; the H.J. Paton translation occupies the second half of this ebook.]
9. J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1861): <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/mill/util/index.html>

\* Depending on which essay topics you choose – especially wrt the **Final** Essay – other readings will also be required (as noted in CuLearn material relating to the various essay topics).

## COURSE DESCRIPTION and COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course follows the evolution of some key ideas in ethical theory, over a span of three thousand years, starting with the moral frameworks of some of the oldest world religions and taking us up to the twentieth century. In order to look closely and critically at the way some major philosophers have developed these ideas, we will focus on reading and discussing these philosophers (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Siddhartha Gautama, Hume, Kant, Bentham and Mill), and will be less concerned about filling in the chronological gaps than about filling in philosophical gaps – by diagnosing the flaws and prejudices in both their thinking and, perhaps, our own thinking.

The course tries to balance two important goals in the study of the history of philosophical ethics. One of these goals relates to our interest in the historical evolution of ideas in general, and imposes a responsibility for seeking fair and historically sensitive interpretations of historical texts as well as a responsibility for appreciating the broader historical context of the works, their authors, and the moral, political and cultural phenomena they describe. Our other goal is philosophically more fundamental (and perhaps more important to those whose further studies will be focused more on contemporary than on historical concerns): by studying the major ethical works of the past, we hope to make progress with contemporary moral problems and with the refinement of our own ethical views. We shall therefore devote as much time to critical discussions that focus simultaneously on the claims of contemporary ethical theories and the claims and arguments in our primary texts (as to historical discussions). Conversely, though, we must be ready – as ethicists rather than pure historians – to subject these works to critical assessment and to be selective in incorporating their ideas and arguments, based on our own understanding of the relevant phenomena and our own sense of sound argument.

The skills and concepts we develop in pursuing these two goals can be useful, not only in philosophical thinking in general and in studying ethics in particular, but also in any area involving a critical engagement with the history of ethical or political theory in any tradition. These skills and concepts may thus be carried over to studies of the history of ethical thought that are focused on ‘non-Western’ traditions of philosophy, or on (e.g.) medieval philosophy, or on other specific historical periods that we will not be able to cover here. What is commonly, but somewhat misleadingly, called the ‘Western’ tradition of philosophical ethics will be our focus, primarily because the works in this tradition remain prominent in contemporary discussions of ethical theory. We shall try to identify both the scope for applying the insights in these works to broader cultural contexts and the scope for bias and limitations of perspective within theoretical frameworks that draw mainly on this ‘Western’ tradition.

The major questions that are still central to ethical theory, and that are addressed by the writers we will be examining, include: What is the best kind of life for humans? How should we define, and how can we attain, ‘happiness’ or ‘well-being’? What is the significance of other people’s happiness or well-being to our own? What do we owe to others? Which ‘others’ matter? Is moral goodness or rightness based on character, intentions, observance of rules or rights, or the consequences of one’s actions? Is ‘goodness’ as a character trait as important as the ‘goods’ that are the results of actions or policies? Which results matter most to ‘goodness’? In what ways can actions and intentions be ‘rational’? Can moral principles be rationally justified? Do practical or moral principles reflect truths about our nature as human beings? What is the relationship between ‘facts’ and ‘values’? Are there any universal ethical truths?

There are more specific questions in ethics that relate to issues of common concern in society, such as deciding on life and death (abortion, euthanasia, triage, capital punishment, war), the scope of duties to assist other beings (poverty at home and abroad, international development, animal welfare), social justice and the scope of human rights, issues in individual conduct and personal relations (in relation to honesty, faithfulness, sexual conduct, tolerance of differences), and many more. Although our primary focus will often be on more theoretical questions, we will also consider to what extent there is overlap between our concerns in these areas and those of the authors we will be reading, historical and philosophical factors that might account for differences, and what implications their theories may have for contemporary issues.

# TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS:

(NB: Chat sessions on CuLearn will take place on Mondays when no live Zoom session is scheduled.)

Week 1 (January 11-15) Introduction & overview of essay topics

Readings: Aristotle, Book 1 of *Nicomachean Ethics* (chapters **1-5** by Jan. 15; chs **7-13** by Jan. 18)

(NB: what we call ‘chapters’ within the ‘books’ of *N.Eth.* are more like sections (and quite short).)

Week 2 (January 18, **with live Zoom session, 6:05 PM**) Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, intro & overview

Readings: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (all of Book 1, *prior to* Jan. 18)

Week 3 (January 25, **with live Zoom session, 6:05 PM**) Plato’s Ethics / Aristotle’s departures from Plato

Readings: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 2) + Plato, *Protagoras & Republic* (excerpts TBA)

Week 4 (Feb. 1, **with live Zoom session, “**) Selfhood, virtue and wisdom in Aristotle and in Buddhism

Readings: Aristotle, *Nico. Ethics* (Bks 3 & 6 + chs. 6-8 of Bk 10) ... + Siderits, “The Buddha”

- **NOTE: Essay # 1 due Feb. 5 (via email by midnight); topics posted by Week 2 on CuL.**

Week 5 (Feb. 8) Comparing Aristotelian and Buddhist virtues (*relevant to Essay # 2 & optional essay*)

Readings: excerpts TBA from Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* (see # 4 on p. 1)

& the Buddha’s discourses, eg : <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>

Week 6 (Feb. 15, **with live Zoom session**) Buddhist Ethics ... **NOTE: Optional essay due Feb. 26**

Readings: excerpts TBA from Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* (see # 4 on p. 1)

## **READING WEEK BREAK: \*\*\* no class on Feb. 22**

Week 8 (Mar. 1) Key concepts of consequentialism and utilitarianism (transition to modern ethics)

Readings: excerpts TBA from Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion*; and Hume TBA

Week 9 (Mar. 8, **with live Zoom session**) Hume, Bentham & other early modern theorists of utilitarianism

Readings: Hume, excerpts TBA from *Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (see p. 1) & TBA from Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*

- **NOTE: Essay II due March 12 (email to [Gordon.Davis@carleton.ca](mailto:Gordon.Davis@carleton.ca) by midnight)**

Week 10 (Mar. 15) Key Concepts in Kant’s Ethics

Rdg: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (Chapter I) – see # 8 on p. 1

Week 11 (Mar. 22) Kant's universal moral imperatives / Rights and Duties / Applications

Rdg: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (Chapter II) – see # 8 on p. 1

Week 12 (Mar. 29, **with live Zoom session**) Kantians vs. Utilitarians (cf. contemp. usages of 'Kantian')

Rdg: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (excerpts TBA) – see # 9 at top of p. 2

Week 13 (April 5, **with live Zoom session**) Kantians, Utilitarians & Overview of final essay topics

Rdg: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (excerpts, continued) + excerpts from Kant's later ethics

Week 14 (April TBA) Overview & Review

**April 15 : Final Essay due by midnight (via email)**

... **April 27 : Optional take-home essay due by midnight via CuLearn email**

EVALUATION (w/ weight of assignments as percentage of total mark):

Short essay (I)	30 % (on Book 1 of Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> ; pick 1 of 2 topics, tba)
<u>Optional</u> essay	... can replace half of mark on essay # 1; topics on CuLearn (re Aristotle)
Short essay (II)	30 % (on ancient consequentialism & modern utilitarianism; pick " " tba)
Final essay	40 % (of which half the mark can be replaced by optional take-home mark)

\*Final essay topics already visible on CuLearn, under 'Essay 2' heading (to be renamed 'Final Essay')

Essay instructions will specify minimum and maximum length (on CuLearn). Essays that are significantly beyond the word limit will not be marked and will have to be resubmitted within a specified period of time. **It's your responsibility to check CuLearn email, each day following your submission, for replies – from me or a TA – about this or about the formatting you've used, in case it needs correcting.**

The main components of evaluation concern the following: clarity of thesis statement (and other 'signposting'), logical and effective use of argument, due consideration of objections (with effective replies), balanced essay structure, effective use of relevant readings (with full and consistent citations), sensitive interpretation of primary texts, effective writing style (including basics such as grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as clarity in wording and phrasing), and originality in thesis and/or arguments.

More will be said in class about these expectations and their role in how we evaluate the essays. A point to be emphasized here, though, concerns 'originality'. There are two different senses in which essays should be 'original'. In one sense, 'originality' involves coming up with ideas and arguments that are novel (or outside the norm for this level); this can be quite difficult, and those earning the highest marks generally do well on this score, while good essays may show only a modest degree of originality in this sense. In another sense, an essay is 'original' when it is entirely a student's own work, and any ideas in it that derive from the work of others are duly credited in citations of these sources. In this sense, 'originality' is not a component of the mark, but is simply an absolute minimum requirement. If any part of an essay – apart from explicit quotations – is not original *in this sense*, the student has committed the serious offence of *plagiarism* (...)

## UNIVERSITY POLICY ON PLAGIARISM:

According to the Undergraduate Calendar's definition (in section 14 of "University Regulations"), it constitutes *plagiarism* "to use and pass off as one's own idea or product work of another without expressly giving credit to another." It is the responsibility of each student to understand this definition, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding/abetting plagiarism by other students. Penalties for plagiarism are decided by the Dean's office, and can range from an automatic zero on the assignment to suspension or expulsion from the university.

## OTHER POLICIES:

Submission of essays: Essays should be attached & sent to **Gordon.Davis@carleton.ca**. Your essay must arrive before midnight on the due date, to be on time. **You are also responsible for sending a reformatted document within 24 hours in case I contact you about a problem with your file or format (which means: \*\*\* you're required to check for any email from me within 48 hours of submission, in case there is any such problem, or else a late penalty may apply).**

Presentation / formatting of essays: Save your document, (a) with a doc. title indicating your name and your topic, (b) in a format compatible with Word, which includes most formats *except* 'odt'. Begin p. 1 with a title, *but not a title page*; and include your name on p. 1. **Indicate the topic # in both the subject line of your email, and in the title of your document.** Re. methods of citation: we accept MLA, APA or Chicago style, provided you stick to one of these; however, I add some requirements of my own, which you must observe regardless of which style you use. These will be mentioned in class and on CuLearn.

Consultations re. essays: Neither the teaching assistant nor I will be able to read pre-submission drafts of essays. In the case of the only long essay required (the final essay), we may be able to look at summary outlines of less than a page (point-form) – but only if we are approached well in advance of a due date. For more help with structuring your draft(s), you can contact the university's 'Writing Tutorial Service'.

Extensions: Extensions will be granted only upon presentation of a medical certificate, or other documented emergency or crisis. *It is essential that I have documents that have been signed by a professional whose contact info. is well indicated.* Requests based on conflicts with other coursework will not be granted.

Late essays: **Late submissions will lose 5 % per day.** *Also, essays submitted late will get lowest (last) priority in the order of marking. Prompt return of results cannot be guaranteed in general; but this is particularly true for essays that are received late.* (See below for other dept./univ. policies...)

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2020-21)

### **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. 9	Classes start.
Sept. 23	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. 12	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 26-30	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 27	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. 11	Last day of fall term classes. <b><i>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</i></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. 12-23	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. 11	Classes begin.
Jan. 25	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. 15	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 15-19	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 31	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. 2	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 14	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. 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. <b><i>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</i></b>
Apr. 15	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 16-27	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 27	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