

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

PHIL 2103: The Philosophy of Human Rights

Course Syllabus Winter Term 2018

Professor
Ken Ferguson

kenneth.ferguson
@carleton.ca
(613)520-2110
3A54 Paterson

Office Hours:
TBD

Class Time

Mon/Wednesday
10:05-11:25

Location:
TBA

COURSE SUMMARY

Most of us today believe that we humans have rights and that we possess these rights quite independently of any laws made by governments or international bodies such as the United Nations. (After all, we invoke these rights as the reason for *making* laws which promote and protect them and for criticizing laws which fail to respect them.) Belief in such human rights, moreover, plays a central role, both domestically and internationally, in justifying and evaluating social and political policies, programs and initiatives.

Despite the prominence of human rights, however, they remain puzzling, problematic and controversial in many respects. One problem concerns their justification. How do we really know that human rights exist, particularly in view of the fact that they cannot be identified with any legal rights guaranteed by actual laws? Where do these rights come from? What is their source? There are several competing answers to these questions, and it is not easy to determine which of them is correct. A second problem concerns the scope of human rights. Precisely what things do we have a right to? Civil and political rights, e.g. the right not to be imprisoned unjustly, are fairly uncontroversial. But do we also have a right to free health care, to an education, or to a decent job? And how is it to be determined whether we have a right to these and other things? A third major controversy about human rights concerns their universality. There appear to be cultures around the world that do not acknowledge the existence of many of the rights we take for granted. Are human rights, then, merely a Western cultural phenomenon, and is the attempt to impose them on other cultures merely another form of Western imperialism?

Our objective in this course is to investigate and explore these and other philosophical issues that arise in connection with human rights. In addition to this, however, we will also do our best to provide a detailed, rigorous, systematic and convincing defense of the conception of human rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other prominent human rights documents.

REQUIRED TEXT

A course pack, with the title *Readings in the Philosophy of Human Rights*, has been prepared by the Instructor. This course pack can only be purchased at **Haven Books**, located at 43 Seneca St.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Although attendance will not be taken, regular attendance is important if students wish to do well. It is understood that students are responsible for any material missed due to absence.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Midterm: There will be a midterm exam which will be worth 30% of the final grade. The format of the midterm will be as follows: one week before the midterm a list of study questions will be given to students. On the midterm students will then be asked to answer a selection from this list.

Term Paper: Students will be required to write a term paper worth 30% of the final grade. The paper will be 5-8 pages in length. It will not be a research paper but will consist of a critical discussion of some topic or issue central to the course. A list of topics, along with instructions and guidelines for writing the paper, will be available early in the term.

Final Examination: There will be a final exam scheduled during the examination period, which will be worth 40% of the final grade. The format will be the same as for the midterm.

CLASS FORMAT

The emphasis in the course will be on reasoning, analysis and critical evaluation. Readings will be assigned for each class, and students will be expected to have read them. The role of the Instructor will be to guide students through the readings, to ensure that discussions remain focused on relevant and important issues, and to illustrate the processes of interpretation, analysis and criticism by repeated example in class.

SHORT LIST OF TOPICS/ISSUES

(For a more detailed list of topics and readings, see the course syllabus posted on CuLearn.)

- 1) What are human rights and why are they important?
- 2) Do human rights exist independently of law?
- 3) Are human rights universal?
- 4) What is the justification or source of human rights?
- 5) Are human rights absolute?
- 6) Do human rights neglect human duties?
- 7) Is the concept of a human right distinctively Western?
- 8) Is there a human right to democracy?
- 9) Is there a human right to privacy?
- 10) Are there human rights to economic and social goods?
- 11) Is there a right to economic development?
- 12) Has the human rights movement discriminated against women?
- 13) Should there be a categorical ban on the use of torture?
- 14) Should the definition of genocide be revised?
- 15) Does the issue of climate change raise human rights issues?

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2017-18)

Assignments:

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box)
- must include the following:
 - student name
 - student number
 - course number and section
 - instructor's name
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

If you miss a final examination (formally scheduled or take-home) because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral. You must apply within 3 working days after the scheduled date of your formally scheduled exam or within 3 working days after the due date of a take-home exam. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information:

<http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv2/#2.5>

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. <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy 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 Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

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 Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

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 scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC

website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*) at <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Important Dates:

Sept. 6	Classes start.
Sept. 19	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.
Oct. 9	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 23-27	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 24	Last day for summative or final examinations in Fall term courses before the official examination period.
Dec. 8	Last day of Fall term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. 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. 10-22	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. 22	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 8	Classes begin.
Jan. 19	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.
Feb. 19	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 19-23	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 27	Last day for summative or final examinations in Winter term or two-term courses before the official examination period.
Mar. 30	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 11	Last day of two-term and Winter term classes. Classes follow a Friday schedule. 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. 14-26	Final examinations for Winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 26	All take home examinations are due on this day.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall www.carleton.ca/philosophy 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory www.carleton.ca/registrar 520-3500
Academic Advising Centre:	302 Tory www.carleton.ca/academicadvising 520-7850
Writing Services:	4 th Floor, Library http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/ 520-3822
MacOdrum Library	http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735