

Fall 2026 – Carleton University
PHIL 2330: Happiness, Well-being, and the Good Life
Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:05 a.m.–11:25 a.m. on Zoom

Instructor: Dr. Kyla Bruff

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Office hours: Wednesdays online by appointment

Course Delivery: Online via Zoom, synchronous, with on-campus evaluations.

Please note that all tests for this course and the final exam will be written in-person on Carleton's campus in Ottawa. Please ensure in advance that you are available to come to campus on the test dates indicated below. There will be no online option for taking the tests and exam.

I. Description:

What does it mean to live well? How can we live a good life and be happy? What makes life meaningful? These are questions that concern all of us.

In this course, we will examine eight different perspectives on the good life, which provide different guidance on how to live well. By the end of the course, you will describe and defend your own perspective on the good life. This will be done in the form of your own philosophical “apology.”¹

We will begin the course with the Anishinaabe notion of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, a wholistic, balanced approach to living well in relation to our interdependence, which calls for respect for all forms of life. Beginning with this approach will allow us to adopt a critical lens through which to examine the particular tendencies and biases of the Western approaches to the good life, which we will study throughout the rest of the course, including their relationships to colonization.

Subsequently, we will study Plato's thesis that caring for yourself as an individual involves pursuing the truth collectively with others. Through a study of Socrates' *Apology*, we begin this unit by examining the importance of truth and expressing one's opinion, both in person and online, and the importance of self-reflection in caring for our souls, or living the good life.

We will then examine Aristotle's view that the human being's activity should accord with reason in the pursuit of happiness. We will explore whether moderation, or the idea that virtues must aim at a “mean between extremes,” is conducive to living the good life. Following this, we will examine Aristotle's view of friendship and determine how it applies to our own friendships and thus to living a virtuous, happy life.

Our next approach to the good life will lead us to the Stoic tradition. Stoicism has enjoyed a renewed surge in popularity in recent years, particularly in online spaces, due in no small part to its practical teachings, which help individuals confront circumstances outside of their control. By reading sections from Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, we will investigate whether or not living a good life requires that we scrutinize our own role in our problems and the despair we experience

¹ This final exam idea was inspired by: <https://godandgoodlife.nd.edu/policies-structure/>

in our lives, and set our own, personal standards. We will examine how one's understanding of one's place in the universe (or cosmos) relates to one's struggles and successes.

After studying Socrates through Plato, Aristotle, and Marcus Aurelius, we will consider whether God, religion, and scripture should play a role in our attempts to live well and be happy. We will rely on Saint Augustine's autobiographical text, *Confessions*, to guide us through this inquiry.

In trying to live well, many people find it necessary to discipline themselves to behave in accordance with duties and the principles they legislate, or set up, for themselves. We will explore this approach to the good life by jumping into the eighteenth century, reading sections from Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. In carrying out their moral duty, a good person, on Kant's account, self-legislates rational principles, which in turn guide their action. For Kant, living the good life involves a high level of self-control. Nietzsche, on the other hand, critiques this endorsement of self-constraint, together with the claims that our decisions about how to live well should follow the strict principles of reason or those of religion. For Nietzsche, to live a good life means both to affirm life but also to suffer in solitude on the journey to self-improvement.

Finally, through Martha C. Nussbaum's work, we will evaluate the role of emotions in making judgments about what is important for our well-being. Through emotions, we expose our own vulnerability and neediness with regard to others and the world.

At the end of this course, you will have the opportunity to evaluate which conceptions of the good life and their corresponding demands are most applicable to your own life.

II. Preclusions: None

III. Prerequisite(s): None

IV. Learning Outcomes:

- to understand and be able to reconstruct the arguments in favour of different concepts of happiness, well-being and the good life in the history of philosophy
- to be able to critically analyse, relate and juxtapose different approaches to the good life
- to be able to defend, in consideration of a broad range of philosophical arguments, your own personal approach to how to live a good life

V. Course readings and texts:

You are expected to keep up with the readings in line with the course schedule below. All required readings for this course will be made available to you online via Brightspace. **You are not required to purchase any course texts.**

If you *do* want to purchase a physical copy of any of the books in which our reading selections are found, the corresponding editions can be easily found and purchased online. ***This is not required.***

Unit I: Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin: a wholistic, balanced approach to interdependence and respect for all forms of life

Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, "Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology: A Spirit-centered Way in Anishinaabe Research," *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2010.

Unit II: The good life as seeking the truth with others, while examining and improving oneself

Plato, "The Apology" in *Plato's Apology, Crito and Phaedrus*, trans. Henry Cary, published by Andrews UK Ltd., 2012.

Unit III: The quest to be happy through the exercise of reason and developing friendships

Aristotle, Books I, II, and VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, published by Oxford University Press, 2009.

Unit IV: The power of the mind to adjust one's perspective

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Martin Hammond, published by Penguin Classics, 2006.

Optional reading:

"The Daily Stoic: Meditations by Marcus Aurelius: Book Summary, Key Lessons and Best Quotes"

<https://dailystoic.com/meditations-marcus-aurelius/>

Unit V: God and the Good Life

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, published by Oxford University Press, 2008.

Unit VI: The good life as requiring self-discipline and self-control

Immanuel Kant – *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Allen W. Wood, published by Yale University Press, 2002.

Unit VII: The affirmation of life, the value of solitude and risk-taking, without an appeal to transcendence

Friedrich Nietzsche – *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, published by Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Unit VIII: Emotions as evaluative judgments, which show us what is important and our own vulnerability, in pursuing the good life

Martha C. Nussbaum – "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance" in *Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed. Robert C. Solomon, published by Oxford University Press, 2004, Part VI, Ch. 12.

Optional reading: Interview with Martha Nussbaum in the Daily Stoic

<https://dailystoic.com/martha-nussbaum/>

VI. Calendar description: A philosophical exploration of what makes a good human life. Topics may include the role of happiness, well-being, and flourishing in a good life, the relations between these aspects, and the extent to which they depend on luck and social considerations.

VII. Course calendar and overview:

Date	Themes, Deadlines & Feedback	Required Reading
Sept. 9	Course Introduction	None
Sept. 14	The Anishinaabe concept of “mino-bimaadiziwin” (the Good Life)	Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, “Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology,” pp. 12-18
Sept. 16	Re-conceptualizing mino-bimaadiziwin in order to critically examine Western approaches to knowledge and the good life	Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, “Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology,” pp. 19-24
Sept. 21	Socrates’ defence	Plato, <i>The Apology</i> , sections 1-16, pp. 10-26
Sept. 23	Socrates’ view of the good life and death as a blessing	Plato, <i>The Apology</i> , sections 17-33, pp. 26-45
Sept. 28	Happiness and the golden mean	Aristotle, Books I and II of the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 3-37
Sept. 30	Friendship as essential to the good life	Aristotle, Book VIII of the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 142-162
Oct. 5	Test 1 (in person)	
Oct. 7	To what extent do we create our own problems? Are we in control of what bothers us?	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 5, pp. 35-41
Oct. 12	Thanksgiving – no class	
Oct. 14	Living at one with nature and dealing with obstacles	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 5, pp. 41-45
Oct. 19	One’s place in the universe in relation to one’s struggles	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 9, pp. 83-93
Oct. 21	Sin Test 1 grade released	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 2, pp. 24-34
Oct. 26 & 28	NO CLASSES – MIDTERM BREAK	
Nov. 2	Conversion, the will to serve God, and the good life	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 8, pp. 140-154, book 10 (sections 10.31-10.34), pp. 196-200
Nov. 4	Introduction to Kant and moral duty	Kant, Preface and First Section of the <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 3-21

Nov. 9	The first formulation of the categorical imperative as the principle of duty	Kant, <i>The Second Section of the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 22-38
Nov. 11	The second and third formulations of the categorical imperative as the principle of duty	Kant, <i>The Second Section of the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 44-58
Nov. 16	Questioning the nature of truth and a priori morality	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Part 1: On the prejudices of philosophers, sections 1-11, pp. 5-14
Nov. 18	The free spirit	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Part 2: The free spirit, sections 24-33, pp. 25-34
Nov. 23	Will to power; mastery; affirming life and the value of solitude	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , sections 257-261 & 271-274, pp. 151-158 & 167-168
Nov. 25	Test 2 (in person)	
Nov. 30	The importance of emotions	Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance," pp. 307-313.
Dec. 2	Nussbaum's neo-Stoicism	Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance," pp. 313-319.
Dec. 7	Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance	Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance," pp. 320-329.
Dec. 9	Course conclusion – Is living a happy life the same thing as living a good life?	No reading
Dec. 11 (Friday)	Final class discussion, Test 2 grade released	No reading

VIII. Evaluation

The evaluation for this course is as follows:

- **Test 1** on the concept of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, Plato, and Aristotle (Oct. 5), **30%**
- **Test 2** on Marcus Aurelius, Augustine, Kant and Nietzsche (Nov. 25), **35%**
- **Final Exam: "My Apology"** (scheduled during the exam period), **35%**.

The two tests will be written in person, on campus, scheduled during class time (10:05am-11:25am), and cannot, other than in exceptional, extenuating circumstances, be taken on an alternative date. It is not possible, in any scenario, to take the tests online. The tests are intended to assess your grasp of the main ideas explored in the course, their historical and philosophical context, and their possible, real-world application.

The "My Apology" exam is an in-class essay (final exam) that will be scheduled in-person during the final exam period.

IX. Note on Online Class Delivery and Study Tools

Classes will be held via Zoom through the link available in Brightspace. Please ensure in advance that you have [the equipment and internet connection necessary to take the class](#). Carleton's best practice is that you have [your video camera on during class time](#) (provided you are comfortable doing so). Please keep your microphone on mute unless instructed to unmute it.

The class lectures will not be recorded and will not be provided after class time. This course is synchronous, which means we are embarking on a journey through the ideas of these philosophers live, together, in real time. The course content and tests are structured around this shared progression, so keeping up with our course schedule is an important part of succeeding in the course. The best ways to succeed in the course are to do the readings before the classes, attend all classes, take notes during class, and review those notes after class. I make my PowerPoint slides available just before class starts, so some students choose to take notes by annotating the slides on their own tablet, computer, or other device.

Please note that it is not permitted to record the audio or video of lectures, or to use Zoom's transcription features, Generative AI, or any other AI or transcription software to compile, generate, or retain transcripts or notes from lectures. Live captioning for accessibility purposes is permitted. The intellectual property made available to you through this course, including lecture slides, may not be uploaded to or processed using generative AI software. One of the aims of this course is to help you think critically and reflect on the good life on your own. The mental effort will pay off!

Each of the two tests will include a short essay, and very clear instructions on how to write the essay will be provided in class. You should not use AI to prepare your essays, but rather follow the step-by-step instructions given in class. Students are required to discuss their use of GenAI in any circumstance in relation to the course not described here with the course instructor to ensure it supports the course's learning goals.

I have put an FAQ page on Brightspace that I would encourage you to consult if you have further questions.

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2026-27)

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* after 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 exam date or 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 (<https://carleton.ca/accessibility/accommodations/>). 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 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	Fall term begins.
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.
Oct. 12	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 26-30	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day to request Formal Examination Accommodations for December examinations and two-term midterm examinations.

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. <i>Classes follow a Monday schedule</i> . 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. 6	Winter term begins.
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. 15	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 15-19	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day to request Formal Examination Accommodations for April examinations.
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.
Mar. 26	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 9	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 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
 520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
 520-7850

Writing Services:
<https://carleton.ca/csas/support/>
 520-3822

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