

Philosophy
PHILOS 4YY3
Topics in Ethics
Fall 2025



HUMANITIES

Instructor Information

Dr. Allauren Forbes

Email: forbeas@mcmaster.ca

Office: UH 307A

Office Hours:

Tuesdays 16:30-17:30, Wednesdays 13:30-15:00, or by appt.

Course Information

Class meetings are 3 hours long 11:30am-2:30pm on Fridays. See Mosaic for room location.

We will meet in person once a week at the location noted on Mosaic.

Our class meetings will include a selection of:

- Writing journal time
- mini-lecture
- Break
- Discussion activity OR Philosophy Live!

Course Dates: 09/02/2025 - 12/04/2025

Units: 3.00

Course Delivery Mode: In Person

Course Description: An advanced study of ethics broadly defined to include those

aspects of human life that provide meaning and value (e.g. aesthetic, moral, religious, social or political experience.) Seminar (three hours); one term Prerequisite(s): One of PHILOS 2YY3 or 2D03 and registration in Level IV of any program in Philosophy or Global Peace & Social Justice Antirequisite(s): PHILOS 4B03 PHILOS 4YY3 may be repeated, if on a different topic, to a total of six units. Departmental permission required

Instructor-Specific Course Information

This course is organized around oral communication skills.

Interpersonal relationships are incredibly complex. In ethics, we often ask: what do we owe others? What are our duties of care? Do these obligations change based on the nature of the relationship involved? This course is organized around four different kinds of relationships which are important to many folks' lives - society writ large, family, friends, and romance. We will ask and attempt to answer several important questions, including, Is it unethical to gossip? Are parents obligated to love their children? Are children public goods, and if so, what does that mean for how we should treat children (and parents)? Is it morally permissible to ghost someone? Should we be friends with bad people? Is marriage unethical, and if so, can we make it better?

Meeting Details

If you need to meet with me for any reason, my office hours are in-person and drop-in, meaning I will be there every week at that time and students are seen in the order in which they arrive. I am available for meetings outside of this time; you must email me to schedule them. I can meet by Zoom if necessary.

Important Links

- [Mosaic](#)
- [Avenue to Learn](#)
- [Student Accessibility Services - Accommodations](#)
- [McMaster University Library](#)
- [eReserves](#)

Course Learning Outcomes

- Reading: read philosophical texts for understanding and context;
- Communicating: communicate your understanding, interpretation, and critical evaluation of philosophical views and texts clearly
- Discussing: discuss philosophical views and texts with your peers in charitable and respectful ways, even when challenging one another
- Constructing: construct clear and persuasive original philosophical arguments
- Reflecting: reflect on your own knowledge, experiences, and how they bear on the course content

Required Materials and Texts

Please sign in with your MacID [here](#) to view your booklist

The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy

ISBN: 9780367659639

Authors: Edited by Adrienne Martin

Publisher: Routledge

Publication Date: 2019

NOTE THAT THIS IS AVAILABLE FOR FREE VIA MCMASTER'S LIBRARY

Class Format

In Person

Course Evaluation

You will be assessed on the basis of the following:

1. Self-reflection assignment - 5%
2. Writing journal - 20%
3. Philosophy Live! - 30%
4. Term paper & oral defence - 35%
5. Self-assessment of participation - 10%

Please note that almost all of these assessments - all but 4 & 5 - occur in class (and 5 pertains to in-class behaviour). Attendance is thus a necessary component of the course.

Course Evaluation Details

Please note that most of the assessments take place in class. This is because the course is organized around oral communication skills - a crucial and highly transferable skill, especially for students who seek admission to law or graduate school next year - and because it is intended to make the course less burdensome in terms of out-of-class hours required in order to flourish academically. This means that the bulk of your work will take place in class time. Should attendance be a challenge for you (because you have SAS accommodations), email me (forbeas@mcmaster.ca) ASAP. Accommodations are possible but will entail substantial written assignments in the formal, argumentative style with oral defences (as in the term paper assessment noted below), given the focus of the course.

Self-Reflection Assignment DUE in class first week / last week (2.5% + 2.5% = 5%)

You will be provided with a series of prompts in class. Answer the prompts on the physical paper provided in class in approximately 250-400 words. This assignment will be repeated, albeit in a slightly different way, on the last day of class.

This will be assessed for effort and on a pass-fail basis.

Writing Journal DUE in class, weeks 2-12 (20%)

In class, you will complete journal entries on the assigned readings. Your main task will be to discuss what you take to be the central argument(s) of the paper(s), how this works, and whether it seems right to you. Each entry is worth 2%. There are 8 opportunities to obtain full marks on this assignment. You only need 7 for the full 20%.

This assignment will be assessed for effort to engage in personally and philosophically meaningful ways with the course texts/themes on a pass-fail basis.

Philosophy Live! DUE in class weeks 3, 6, 9, and 12 (30%)

This is an in-class assignment which will bring together the course content for the module and the skills this course is designed around honing (understanding texts, constructing arguments, discussing philosophical theories in rich, charitable, and collaborative ways). There will be four iterations of the assignment, one at the end of each module, but **your lowest score will be dropped**. Thus, assuming you participate in four iterations, each instance of participation will be worth 10% of your grade.

This assignment is akin to a debate, though it features a distinct philosopher-twist. The goal here is to make persuasive arguments, defend them, interrogate/challenge (in a friendly way) the arguments of others, and to make interpretive assessments of persuasion efforts, all in a charitable and collaborative manner.

There are three roles in this assignment. Students must participate in at least two different roles over the course of the semester. The roles are as follows:

1. Speaker teams (one team will argue *for* a proposition, the other team will argue *against* the proposition)
2. Gadfly team (a team whose chief obligation is to provide challenging questions/objections for the Speaker teams)
3. The Chorus (a team whose chief obligation is to be charitable, active listeners and to provide a verdict and defence thereof in terms of which team made a more persuasive case).

See Avenue for the assessment rubrics for each role. It is assessed on the basis of both effort and achievement.

Keep in mind that though this is structured similarly to a debate, it is not meant to be combative. We are in this class - and in this discipline - together. We are trying to think through complicated ethical questions with the help of our classroom community. You will not score higher on the rubric for "winning" (that is, for being found to be more persuasive by The Chorus) - both teams may obtain the same score if they meet the criteria noted on Avenue.

This assignment is intended to be fun and dynamic, practice core skills, and to scaffold the Term Paper and Oral Defence.

This assignment is graded on the basis of effort and achievement.

Term Paper & Oral Defence - DUE 28 Nov 11:59pm (paper, 10%) and 3 or 4 Dec (defence, 25%)

This class is all about oral communication. By the second semester of your fourth year, you will have had a lot of practice in writing argumentative papers (and perhaps you are tired of writing them!). For this assignment, you will write an argumentative paper of approx. 2000-2500 words. However, you will also have to present and defend it in a one-on-one meeting with me in my office on one of three days at the end of term. This defence will measure the depth of your understanding and your ability to engage in philosophy live.

See Avenue for the rubrics for the Term Paper and for the Oral Defence.

This assignment is graded on the basis of achievement.

Self-Assessment of Participation - DUE 3 Dec 2025, 11:59pm, on Avenue (10%)

Were you an active and engaged member of this philosophical community? What does that look like for you? As instructors, there are barriers to what we can know about the nature and quality of a student's participation in a course. We know when you attend, of course, and notice when you speak and what you say, but we don't know how that comes to pass - perhaps you find speaking in class really challenging, or perhaps you were dealing with some complex factors in your personal life which kept you in your head rather than active in class discussions. Perhaps you love talking in class and challenged yourself to make space for others. I will provide a rubric and some questions for you to answer. You will grade yourself and justify that grade. Assuming that this seems compelling (and here I will strive to be an especially charitable interpreter), this is the grade you will receive.

Undergraduate Grading Scale

The grades breakdown for McMaster's 12-Point Grading Scale

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
-------	------------------------	------------------------

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
A+	12	90-100
A	11	85-89
A-	10	80-84
B+	9	77-79
B	8	73-76
B-	7	70-72
C+	6	67-69
C	5	63-66
C-	4	60-62
D+	3	57-59
D	2	53-56
D-	1	50-52
F	0	0-49

Graduate Grading Scale

Graduate Student Grading Scale (Except for MBA and Master of Finance)

Grade	Points	Equivalent Percentage	Pass/Fail
A+	12	90-100	P+
A	11	85-89	P
A-	10	80-84	
B+	9	77-79	
B	8	73-76	
B-	7	70-72	
F	0	69 and under	F

MBA and Master of Finance Grading Scale

Grade	Points	Equivalent Percentage	Pass/Fail
A+	12	90-100	P+
A	11	85-89	P
A-	10	80-84	
B+	9	75-79	
B	8	70-74	

Grade	Points	Equivalent Percentage	Pass/Fail
B-	7	60-69	
F	0	59 and under	F

Course Schedule

MODULE ONE: SOCIETY

Week 1 - 5 Sept: *Leave Britney alone!: The ethics of pop princesses*

- No reading

Week 2 - 12 Sept: *Is it unethical to gossip?*

- Gloria Origgi, "Reputation in Moral Philosophy and Epistemology"
- Cécline Fabre: "The Morality of Gossip: A Kantian Account"

Week 3 - 19 Sept: *The ethics of parasocial relationships*

- Podcast: *Normal Gossip* episode "Podcast Famous" (originally released June 2022)
- **PHILOSOPHY LIVE!**

MODULE TWO: FAMILY

Week 4 - 26 Sept: *The ethics of parenting*

- Serena Olsaretti, "Children as Public Goods?"
- Franco A. Carnevale, "Recognizing Children as Agents: Taylor's Hermeneutical Ontology and the Philosophy of Childhood"

Week 5 - 3 Oct: *Are parents obligated to love their children?*

- Sara Protasi, "'Mama, Do You Love Me?' A Defense of Unloving Parents"
- Joseph A. Stramondo, "Loving and (Or?) Choosing Our Children: Disability, Unconditional Parental Love, and Prenatal Selection"

Week 6 - 10 Oct: *Parental Rights*

- Liam Shields, "Won't Somebody Please Think of The Parents?"
- Melissa Moschella, *To Whom Do Children Belong? Parental Rights, Civic Education, and Children's Autonomy* (excerpt)
- **PHILOSOPHY LIVE!**

MODULE THREE: FRIENDSHIPS

Week 7 - 24 Oct: *Are some friends better than others?*

- Alexis Elder, "Excellent Online Friendships: An Aristotelian Defense of Social Media"
- Helen Ryland, "It's Friendship, Jim, but Not as We Know It: A Degrees-of-Friendship View of Human-Robot Friendships"

Week 8 - 31 Oct: *Friendship and perfection*

- Mavis Biss, "Friendship, Trust, and Moral Self-Perfection"
- Jen Nguyen, "A True Friend Stabs You in the Front: Astell's Admonisher Conception of a Friend"

Week 9 - 7 Nov: *The ethics of friends*

- Jessica Isserow, "On Having Bad Persons as Friends"
- Jason Brennan, "Friendship and Blackballing for Bad Beliefs"
- **PHILOSOPHY LIVE!**

MODULE FOUR: ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Week 10 - 14 Nov: *The ethics of sexual/romantic desire*

- Tom O'Shea, "Sexual Desire and Structural Injustice"
- Robin Zheng, "Why Yellow Fever Isn't Flattering"
- Raja Halwani, "Casual Sex, Promiscuity, and Objectification"

Week 11 - 21 Nov: *The ethics of online dating*

- Joonas Räsänen, "The Grim View of Online Dating - Rethinking Tinder"
- Nicole Dular, "Boy Bye: A Feminist Defense of Ghosting"

- Bouke de Vries, "State-Run Dating Apps: Are they morally desirable?" (optional)

Week 12 - 28 Nov: *The ethics of (non)monogamy*

- Justin Leonard Clardy, "Monogamies, Non-Monogamies, and the Moral Impermissibility of Intimacy Confining Constraints"
- Kyle York, "Why Monogamy is Morally Permissible"
- Carrie Jenkins, "Is Monogamy Part of 'Who We Are'? Romantic Norms, Defensiveness, and Collective Identity" (optional)
- **PHILOSOPHY LIVE!**

Late Assignments

Most assignments are in-class and so lateness isn't possible. The term paper has a 48hr grace period - no late penalties during that period. After this point, however, if you do not have an extension in writing/MSAF, your paper will be subject to a 5% late penalty per 24 hrs. There is no upper limit on this policy.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

If you are sick, do not come to class. There is no need to provide details or documentation on this matter. Most of this class requires in-class work, so obviously missing class due to illness will mean missing assignments.

- If you miss one Philosophy Live!, no worries and no accommodation necessary: only your top three scores count towards your final grade.
- If you miss one writing journal, no worries and no accommodation necessary: you only need 7 for full marks.
- If you need an extension on your term paper or to reschedule your oral defence for reason of illness, no worries. Just ask.
- If you miss more than one Philosophy Live! or writing journal...
 - ...due to SAS-related needs, accommodations will require substantive work in lieu. Email me to discuss.

- ...due to illness, you will need to provide documentation via Academic Advising (do not send medical information to me directly); we will discuss next steps then.
- ...due to some other unspecified reason, an accommodation may or may not be possible. Email me to discuss.

Please note that while this may seem like an overly strict policy, there are pedagogical reasons behind it. Attendance is a necessary but insufficient condition for learning, especially in a course which, like this one, is designed around creating an epistemic community so as to (further) develop one's oral communication skills and apply your philosophical exegesis / argumentation skills in concrete ways which you can then discuss in, for example, a law school application form. Moreover, with the advent of generative AI, the distinctively human capacity to think on your feet, to generate something new and dynamic which capitalizes on emotional as well as intellectual persuasion, will be increasingly valuable. This course is meant to assist in this process.

Turnitin.com

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Generative AI: Use Prohibited

Students are not permitted to use generative AI in this course. In alignment with [McMaster academic integrity policy](#), it "shall be an offence knowingly to ... submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source". This includes work

created by generative AI tools. Also state in the policy is the following, “Contract Cheating is the act of “outsourcing of student work to third parties” (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016, p. 639) with or without payment.” Using Generative AI tools is a form of contract cheating. Charges of academic dishonesty will be brought forward to the Office of Academic Integrity.

APPROVED ADVISORY STATEMENTS

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-proceduresguidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-proceduresguidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online

learning platform (e.g. Avenue to Learn, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn, LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and

working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the [Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](#).

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous, or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s

Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, Avenue to Learn and/or McMaster email.