

Ethics and Society  
PHIL-UA 3  
Fall 2023

### **Instructor**

Caroline Bowman

[caroline.bowman@nyu.edu](mailto:caroline.bowman@nyu.edu)

5 Washington Place, Office 204

Office hours: Wednesday, 2:30–4pm (in person), and by appointment

### **Teaching Assistants**

Sophie Côte

[sc5620@nyu.edu](mailto:sc5620@nyu.edu)

Office hours: by appointment at [calendly.com/sophiecote](https://calendly.com/sophiecote)

Lauren Somers

[ls5678@nyu.edu](mailto:ls5678@nyu.edu)

Office hours: by appointment at <https://calendly.com/laurensomersofficehours/office-hours-intro-to-ethics>

### **Course meeting times/locations**

Lectures: Tues. and Thurs, 3:30pm–4:45pm (Silver Center, Room 408)

Section 002: Fri. 8am–9:15am (Bobst LL141, with Lauren Somers)

Section 003: Fri. 9.30am–10:45am (Silver Ctr Room 620, with Lauren Somers)

Section 004: Fri. 11am–12:15pm (Paulson Center Room 320, with Sophie Côte)

Section 005, Fri. 12:30pm–1:45pm (Silver Ctr Room 514, with Sophie Côte)

### **Course goals**

This course introduces students to the methods of philosophy through the study of selected moral, social, and political topics. In particular, we will be focusing on the use of philosophy as a tool to critically examine the social world, focusing on three main topics: work, marriage and the family, and prisons and policing. By focusing on these domains of the social world, we'll consider what philosophy has to contribute to developing analyses of domination and oppression along the intersecting lines of class, gender, and race. In so doing, we'll also consider select proposals and visions for transforming (even abolishing!) work, the family, and prisons and the police. The point of this course is not for you to walk away agreeing with any particular views presented in the readings, but rather for us to collectively examine and assess the presented arguments. The course will also provide you with the opportunity to bring philosophical reflection to bear on your own individual experiences and positions in the world.

The course will emphasize the development of critical thinking, writing, and reading skills. Reading assignments will typically consist of relatively short but challenging texts that require close attention and multiple readings. Course readings will combine readings by contemporary professional philosophers with select readings from the history of philosophy, readings from other disciplines, and readings produced in contexts of political and social struggle.

Course goals: In this course, you will:

1. Develop a grasp of philosophical analyses of work, marriage and the family, and prisons and policing, along with related proposals for transforming these institutions
2. Develop skills reading, interpreting, and writing about complex philosophical texts
3. Develop skills engaging with peers in a way that allows you to advance your understanding of the ideas and arguments and your own critical assessment of them

## **How we'll work toward course goals**

Reading: Reading philosophical texts is a rewarding, but challenging, endeavor. The readings assigned for this class are generally short but difficult. You will need to read them at least twice (and sometimes more) to achieve an understanding of the claims and arguments the readings make. You are expected to have completed each reading assignment before the lecture during which it will be discussed.

Lecture: Lectures have three main purposes. First, they provide background to the readings, and place them in a larger philosophical context. Second, lectures demonstrate how to go about identifying, analyzing, and assessing the central claims and arguments in the readings. Third, they give you a chance to raise questions, and discuss your thoughts on the issues we are considering with other students. Since lectures will present key material not covered by the reading, you should attend each lecture, and if you cannot attend a lecture, make sure you take a close look at the lecture slides, which I will upload to the Brightspace page for the class soon after the lecture. This all being said, I will not take attendance for lecture—I'll let you be the judge of how to best use your own time. However, I expect for most students it would be difficult to get an A in the course without regularly attending lecture.

Recitations: Learning philosophy requires doing philosophy, and recitation sections provide a key opportunity to practice doing philosophy through discussion. You are expected to regularly attend recitation sections and to be an active participant in those discussions. Contributing to discussion does not require having a perfect grasp of the material; rather, these discussions should be an opportunity to seek clarification, solidify your understanding of the material, and begin refining your critical responses to the ideas we are discussing. Attendance in recitations is mandatory. Your TA will determine how to assess your participation in recitation, which will determine your participation grade for the course.

Reflections: Reflections will provide you the chance to consider pre-existing beliefs you have regarding the main course topics and to reflect on how your beliefs and understandings progress throughout the course. These assignments will be infrequent, short (intended to take no more than 30 minutes), and graded for completion. No extensions on these assignments will be granted.

Papers: There will be two papers assigned in this course (the first 1000 words long, the second 1500 words long). Papers will give you the chance to a) develop the skill of explaining someone else's argument in your words, and b) develop the skill of presenting your own response to an argument (for example, in the form of an objection.) Prompts will be released at least 10 days before the due date of the paper.

Exams: There will be a midterm and final exam (the midterm will be held during a regular class session, and the final will be held during finals period). You will be asked to explain core ideas from the unit in writing, as well as to clearly communicate some of your own ideas about the central debates. If you've kept up with the material, attended lectures and recitations, and made a good faith effort to understand and think through the issues we are reading about and discussing, the exam should be fairly straightforward (and, hopefully, easier than the papers!)

## Evaluation + key dates

### Grade breakdown

Participation and attendance: 10%

Reflections: 5%

Paper 1 (1000 words): 15%

Midterm exam: 20%

Paper 2 (1500 words): 25%

Final exam: 25%

### Deadlines and exam dates

Paper 1: Fri., Oct. 6 at 11:59p.m.

Midterm exam: Thurs., Oct. 26 (in class)

Paper 2: Mon., Dec. 4 at 11:59p.m.

Final exam: Mon., Dec. 18, 4pm-5:50pm (*This is the tentative date that the university has provided me; if it changes, I'll update the syllabus.*)

## Course materials

There are no texts you need to purchase for this course; all readings will be uploaded to Brightspace, unless available on the NYU library website or online—this will be noted on the schedule, and readings that will be posted on Brightspace will be marked “[B].” It's important to consistently check the course website, where I'll post the readings as well as prompts for papers, reflection assignments, and pointers for assigned reading.

## Course policies and accommodations

**Accommodations for students with disabilities:** Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or [mosescsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu)) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

**Office hours and email:** I will hold regular office hours in my office, room 204 on the 2nd floor of the philosophy department, 5 Washington Place, on Wednesdays from 2:30 to 4pm. You don't need to make an appointment for office hours—you can drop in any time in that window. If you can't make the regular office hours, you can email me to make an appointment. Appointments may take place on zoom.

Please always get in touch with me via email [caroline.bowman@nyu.edu] rather than via Brightspace. I will respond to email during weekday business hours (9-6), and will aim to respond to emails within 24 hours.

**Anonymous grading:** In an effort to reduce the effects of implicit and explicit biases, assignments will, when possible, be graded anonymously.

**Extensions and late assignments:** If you are experiencing challenges that will affect your ability to complete work on time, please contact your TA as soon as possible to work out a plan. For late papers (where no extension has been discussed), we will deduct one-third of a letter grade (from an A to an A-, from an A- to a B+, and so on) for each day late.

**Academic honesty:** Plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable, and the penalty for plagiarism is an F in the course. If you are at all uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, you should consult NYU's Statement of Academic Integrity: <http://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/ewp/writing-resources/statement-on-academic-integrity.html>. If you have any further questions, talk to me or to your TA. Given recent discussions of ChatGPT, let me emphasize that use of ChatGPT (or similar software) to help write an assignment is a violation of academic integrity standards, and leads to an F for the course as a whole.

**Laptops & smart devices:** I will allow laptops and smart devices in class for the purpose of accessing the readings; it's good to have these in front of you in class. And I will allow you to take notes on one of these devices if you choose to. However, I discourage you from doing so, and instead encourage you to take notes by hand. Research has shown that laptop use is detrimental to learning for the user and for those sitting nearby, and that taking notes by hand helps many people learn better. Instead, I encourage you to take notes by hand, and refer to your device just for the readings, or print the readings out if you prefer. If someone in class is using their laptop in a manner that is distracting to you, I encourage you to first ask them if they could keep to just the reading and/or their notes, and then to talk to me or one of your TAs if it keeps happening.

## Discussion norms

We will be discussing some contentious topics. You and others may feel strongly about these, and also think that those who disagree with you are making moral mistakes. You and others may also have been personally affected by some of the issues we are discussing. To make sure that everyone gets the most out of the discussion, it is important that the discussion is governed by some ground rules. The point of these is to encourage an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable, and that fosters debates everyone learns from. (I borrow these, with some revisions, from this website: <http://crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines>):

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Listen actively and aim at understanding others' views. (Don't just think about what you are going to say while someone else is talking.)
- Criticize ideas, not individuals.
- Commit to learning, not debating. Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak.

- Avoid assumptions about any member of the class or generalizations about social groups. Do not ask individuals to speak for their (perceived) social group.
- Offensive (including racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and ableist) comments will not be tolerated.

To be clear, you should feel free to disagree with what the readings, the professor, the TAs, or your fellow students are saying. But when you disagree with the readings or one of your peers, try to back up your response with reasons, rather than just state your opinion. And when you advance your view, ask yourself why others (perhaps especially those who have personal experience with a phenomenon) may disagree with you. Our aim in philosophical discussion is not to win an argument, but to better understand the issue we are discussing — including why there may be important disagreement about it.

Because the topics we are discussing are important and contentious, your professor and TAs will likely have views on them. But our purpose in the class is not to convince you of our views. It is to explore with you the arguments for and against different views, and to assess their force and plausibility. We will not, for instance, grade you based on whether your views are the right ones (as we see the matter). An essay that thoughtfully defends what I think is a mistaken view will get a better grade than one that asserts, without good argument, the position I myself think is correct.

## Schedule

*Readings may change as the semester progresses — make sure to always check the course page for updates.*

Topic	Wk.	Date	Lecture topic/assignment
Intro	1	Tues., Sept. 5	First day of class; no reading
Work		Thurs., Sept. 7	<i>Work and meaning</i> Andrea Veltman, “What Makes Work Meaningful” [B]
	2	Tues., Sept. 12	<i>Work and meaning</i> David Graeber, “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs” <a href="https://www.atlasofplaces.com/essays/on-the-phenomenon-of-bullshit-jobs/">https://www.atlasofplaces.com/essays/on-the-phenomenon-of-bullshit-jobs/</a> <b>Reflection due by start of class</b>
		Thurs., Sept. 14	<i>Domination at work and universal basic income</i> Juliana Bidadanure, “The Political Theory of Universal Income,” pp. 482-486 and Philip Pettit, “A Republican Right to Basic Income” [B]
	3	Tues., Sept. 19	<i>Domination at work and workplace democracy</i> Alex Gourevitch, “Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work” [B]
		Thurs., Sept. 21	<i>Markets and competition</i> Waheed Hussain, “Pitting People Against Each Other” [B]
	4	Tues., Sept. 26	<i>Recap + writing skills</i> Read before class: <a href="http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html">http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html</a>
		Thurs., Sept. 28	<i>Exploitation</i> Karl Marx, <i>Capital</i> vol. 1, excerpts [B]
	5	Tues., Oct. 3	<i>Exploitation cont'd</i>

			Karl Marx, <i>Capital</i> vol. 1, excerpts [B]
		Thurs., Oct. 5	<i>Exploitation and the working day</i> Marx, <i>Capital</i> vol. 1, excerpts [B]
		<b>Fri., Oct. 6</b>	<b>Paper 1 due at 11:59pm</b>
Marriage and the family	6	<b>Tues., Oct. 10</b>	<b>Classes meet on Monday schedule; no class or reading</b>
		Thurs., Oct. 12	<i>Feminist critiques of marriage</i> Judy Brady, "I Want a Wife" [B] <b>Reflection due by start of class</b>
	7	Tues., Oct. 17	<i>Feminist critiques of marriage cont'd</i> Susan Okin, "Vulnerability by Marriage" [B]
		Thurs., Oct. 19	<i>Race, nation and the family</i> Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All in the Family"
	8	Tues., Oct. 24	<i>Why privilege marriage?</i> Elizabeth Brake, "Recognizing Care: The Case for Friendship and Polyamory"
		<b>Thurs., Oct. 26</b>	<b>Midterm exam (in class)</b>
	9	Tues., Oct. 31	<i>Marxist feminism and Wages for Housework</i> Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community"
		<b>Thurs., Nov. 2</b>	<b>Class cancelled; no reading</b>
	10	Tues., Nov. 7	<i>Marxist feminism and Wages for Housework cont'd</i> Angela Davis, "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective"
		Thurs., Nov. 9	<i>Marxist feminism and family abolition</i> Sophie Lewis, <i>Abolish the Family</i> chapters 1, 2, and 4 Optional reading: Sophie Lewis, <i>Abolish the Family</i> chapter 3 (this chapter gives a quick and interesting history of family abolitionist thinking)
Prisons and policing	11	Tues., Nov. 14	<i>Consequentialist justifications of punishment</i> Jeremy Bentham, <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> , selections [B] <b>Reflection due by start of class</b>
		Thurs., Nov. 16	<i>Retributivist justifications of punishment</i> James Rachels, "Punishment and Desert" [B]
	12	Tues., Nov. 21	<i>Retributivism and mass incarceration</i> Ekow Yankah, "Punishing Them All: How Criminal Justice Should Account for Mass Incarceration" [B]
		<b>Thurs., Nov. 23</b>	<b>Holiday; no reading or class</b>
	13	Tues., Nov. 28	<i>Prison abolition</i> Davis, <i>Are Prisons Obsolete</i> , Chapters 1, 2 and 6 [available online via the NYU library]
		Thurs., Nov. 30	<i>Prison abolition?</i> Tommie Shelby, <i>The Idea of Prison Abolition</i> , Chapter 3 [available via NYU library]
	14	<b>Mon., Dec. 4</b>	<b>Paper 2 due at 11:59 p.m.</b>
		Tues., Dec. 5	<i>Prison abolition, cont'd</i> Intercepted Podcast, "Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes the Case for Abolition," Part 1 (Part 2 recommended but optional). You may choose to listen to the podcast or read the transcript. <a href="https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/">https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/</a>

		Thurs., Dec. 7	<i>Policing and racial injustice</i> Vanessa Wills, “Bad Guys and Dirty Hands” <a href="http://www.thecritique.com/articles/bad-guys-dirty-hands/?fbclid=IwAR27sH9btA4E9-11dnWUpgmMY7HA1ocR8bAVfyHvbB4ebkO3SmF4zHpkpXQ">http://www.thecritique.com/articles/bad-guys-dirty-hands/?fbclid=IwAR27sH9btA4E9-11dnWUpgmMY7HA1ocR8bAVfyHvbB4ebkO3SmF4zHpkpXQ</a>
	15	Tues., Dec. 12	<i>Community control over the police</i> Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, “Power Over the Police” <a href="https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/power-over-the-police/">https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/power-over-the-police/</a>
End of course		Thurs., Dec. 14	No reading; wrap up and review <b>Reflection due by start of class</b>
	16	<b>Mon., Dec. 18</b>	<b>Final exam, 4pm-5:50pm (location TBD)</b>

## Further resources

**Wellness Exchange:** Life at college can be challenging. You might feel isolated, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, or depressed. While I think what we do in this course matters, I think your physical and mental wellbeing matters much more. NYU’s Counseling and Wellness Services (CWS) are staffed by experienced psychologists and counselors attuned to the needs of college students. Their services are free and confidential. You can call the 24-hour hotline at (212) 443-9999, chat via the Wellness Exchange app anytime, and speak with a certified counselor about any day-to-day challenges or health concerns, including medical issues, stress, depression, sexual assault, anxiety, etc. Website: <https://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/wellness-exchange.html>

**University Learning Center:** The University Learning Center's mission is to assist students in developing the knowledge base, skills, and strategies that will help them to become confident, independent, and active learners. Its various academic support services are intended to help students meet the challenge of NYU's rigorous academic standards. Website: <https://www.nyu.edu/students/academic-services/university-learning-centers.html>

**Writing Center:** The Writing Center is a place where any NYU student can get help with his or her writing. It is a place where one-on-one teaching and learning occur, as students work closely with faculty and experienced peer tutors at every stage of the writing process and on any piece of. Website: <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/ewp/writing-center.html>

**NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative:** The NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative (IDI) offers free and confidential legal services to NYU students and employees, and their immediate family members, on their immigration cases. Contact IDI at [immigrant.defense@law.nyu.edu](mailto:immigrant.defense@law.nyu.edu) or (212) 998-6435.