Philosophy 1305G: Questions of the Day

Winter Term 2017
Class times: M 1:30-2:30, W 1:30-2:30
Classroom: TBA
Tutorials: TBA

Instructor: Prof. Carolyn McLeod
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is philosophy and how can it contribute to “questions of the day,” that is, questions that are currently being debated in the public forum, such as whether people have a right to a physician-assisted death or whether the Canadian government is responding appropriately to the Syrian refugee crisis? In this course, we will aim to understand the philosophical significance and complexity of questions like these. We will also discuss what philosophers have said that is relevant to answering them, and consider how to answer them in a reasonable or balanced fashion.

The questions we will cover in the winter of 2017 include all or most of the following:

1. Is there a moral duty to contribute generously to famine relief?
2. Are adoptive and foster parents the only people who should be vetted (or screened) before being allowed to become parents or should there be vetting of a greater subset of parents, or indeed of all parents?
3. What limits should there be on freedom of conscience or religion?
4. Is it possible for people to change their race, just as some people change their gender or sex?
5. How should the controversy over sports team names, such as the Washington Redskins or the Cleveland Indians, be resolved?
6. Should we trust in science?
7. Should the Canadian border be more or less open to refugees, any new citizens, or temporary workers?

COURSE MATERIALS: All readings will be available for free online with links in our reading schedule and on the course OWL site, or as PDFs or Word documents posted on OWL. We will also be listening to podcasts or videos that will be available for free online, to listen to on any computer or smartphone.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
1. **Homework and in-class assignments, worth 30%**

   These assignments will normally have a written component that you complete at home, but some will also have an oral component and thus involve discussion in class.

2. **Two essays, approximately 1250 words each, with each worth 20%**

   These are argumentative essays that will give you the opportunity to defend your own position on one of the topics for this course. There will be a rubric for grading these papers that we will discuss in class. For at least one of the papers, students will be required to write a detailed outline beforehand and have it reviewed by a peer in class.

3. **Final exam, worth 30%**

   Students will be given detailed instructions ahead of time about how to do the homework and in class assignments as well as the essays. They will also be told ahead of time what the structure will be for the final exam. Each of these requirements will be designed to help us achieve the goals for the course.

**COURSE GOALS:**

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<tr>
<th>GOALS: As a result of taking this course, you will learn to:</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES: Some of the things we will do to promote these goals are:</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT: We will know how well you have attained these goals by evaluating:</th>
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<td>Distinguish ethical claims from other types of claims, particularly descriptive ones</td>
<td>Discussing these concepts during the first couple of weeks, and reviewing them as needed</td>
<td>Whether you keep track of these distinctions in your work for the class (your assignments, in class discussion, and your exam)</td>
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<td>Understand the method of doing philosophy</td>
<td>Discussing method in the first couple of weeks, and returning to it as needed</td>
<td>Whether you display an accurate understanding of method in your work for the class</td>
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<td>Appreciate the philosophical complexity of different questions of the day</td>
<td>Doing homework and in class assignments that examine the complexity of these questions</td>
<td>How you describe their complexity in your class work</td>
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<td>Understand and assess the arguments philosophers have given that are relevant to these questions</td>
<td>Reconstructing philosophers’ arguments together in class</td>
<td>How you reconstruct these arguments on your own in your assignments and in your exam</td>
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Construct your own clear and persuasive written arguments that respond to these questions

Writing two essays, and engaging in an essay peer review

Whether your essays meet the standards set in our grading rubric

Engage in rigorous, respectful debate about heated questions of the day

Having large and small group classroom discussions

Whether our discussion is productive and respectful

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

The schedule for Phil 1305 will be revised over the summer so that it covers the questions of the day that we will discuss in this new version of the course. If you would like to see an old course schedule or how the new one is coming along, please feel free to email Prof. McLeod at cmcleod2@uwo.ca.

**AUDIT**

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at [http://www.uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html](http://www.uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html). It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western [http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/](http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Students are directed to view the **Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness** ([https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm](https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm)).

**Policy on Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf).

**Statement on Use of Plagiarism Software**
All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com).

Additional Links

- Registrar Services (http://www.registrar.uwo.ca)
- Student Support Services (http://westernusc.ca/services/)