

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2018-19

Philosophy 1305F: Questions of the Day

Fall Term

Class Times: MW 10:30-11:30 + Tutorial

Class Location: SEB 2202

Instructor: Gillian Barker

Office Hours: WIRB 7058, Times TBA

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DESCRIPTION

“Questions of the day” are difficult, high-stakes questions that are currently the focus of intense public debate. They include questions about social justice, the use of science in setting public policy, and the limits of individual freedom, to take a few examples. They are high-stakes questions because how we answer them may have large implications for how we live and what we do, both as individuals and as a society. They are difficult questions because of the way that they combine complex issues of fact and value. Philosophy provides a uniquely powerful set of tools to help us think clearly about these contested questions. In this course, we will aim to understand the philosophical significance and complexity of questions like these, and to develop skill in using the tools that philosophy provides for tackling them. 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.

Here are the questions that we’ll cover:

1. What action on climate change is morally required of us?
2. What is racism, and how should we respond to it?
3. To what extent should governments act (e.g. via tax policy) to diminish economic inequality?
4. What is cultural appropriation and is it always bad?
5. Should the government classify people according to their sex or gender on official identity documents (e.g., passports)? If the answer is “yes,” then which system of classification should it use?
6. How open should the Canadian border be to refugees, new citizens, or temporary workers?

TEXTS

All readings are available for free online, as links or PDFs posted on our OWL site. We will also use a few podcasts or videos that are available for free online.

OBJECTIVES

GOALS: As a result of taking this course, you will learn to:	ACTIVITIES: Some of the things we will do to promote these goals are:	ASSESSMENT: We will know how well you have attained these goals by evaluating:
Distinguish between normative and descriptive claims	Discussing this distinction during the first couple of weeks, and reviewing it as needed	Whether you keep track of this distinction in your work for the class (your assignments, in class discussion, and your exam)
Understand the method of doing philosophy	Discussing method in the first couple of weeks, and returning to it as needed	Whether you display an accurate understanding of method in your work for the class
Appreciate the philosophical complexity of different questions of the day	Doing assignments that examine the complexity of these questions	How you describe their complexity in your work for the class
Understand and assess the arguments philosophers have given that are relevant to these questions	Reconstructing philosophers' arguments together in class	How you reconstruct these arguments on your own in your assignments and in your exam
Construct your own clear and persuasive written arguments that respond to these questions	Writing two essays, and engaging in 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 (tutorial) discussions	Whether our discussion is productive and respectful

REQUIREMENTS

1. Short assignments and quizzes, worth 20%

We will use a variety of short assignments and quizzes to support active learning throughout the course. These will include short written assignments, in-class discussion-based activities, and quizzes.

2. Two essays, approximately 1250 words each, worth 25% each

These are argumentative essays; each 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; students will prepare for each paper by writing an outline for peer review in class.

3. Final exam, worth 30%

Each of the requirements is designed to help us achieve the goals for the course.

AUDIT

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

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

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://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.

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested.

The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at

http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

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

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

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>.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.