

## Canadian Philosophy

### COURSE OUTLINE

**Overview:** Should the fact that we do our philosophy in Canada make any difference to what we do or how we present our arguments? How does philosophy contribute to public discourse in Canada? This independent study course will explore readings which illustrate ways in which Canadian thought might have distinctive traits and specific regional or national audiences.

Since this is an exploration rather than an established field of inquiry, the outline of topics provided below is a guideline rather than a requirement. It will not be necessary to explore each issue in equal depth. Instead, each student will be expected to draw on his or her personal interests and backgrounds to go beyond the readings to develop deeper insights in at least one area covered in the course.

**Text:** **Course pack** (available Week 3). Additional readings provided in Week 1 and occasionally later in term.

**Assignments:** All assignments can be adapted to suit individual needs and goals.

Assignment #1: reading plus oral report, due in Week 4	20%
Assignment #2, Short paper, due in Week 8	20%
Attending 5 meetings with instructor, 2% each	10%
Providing notes from meetings with reflections/suggestions, 2% each	10%
Assignment #3, 10-page paper due by end of exam period	40%

**Grading and expectations.** A+ 87% and over. A 84-86%. A- 80-83%. B+ 77-79%. B 74-76%. B- 70-73%. C+ 67-69%. C 64-66%. C- 60-64%. P given only in exceptional circumstances.

**Course format:** Since this course is a directed independent study course, the format is flexible to suit each individual's schedule. Ideally, we will be able to meet as a group at least 4 times during the semester. Students will be encouraged to find times to meet with each other for discussion. At a minimum, I will meet with each student once a month (more usually every second week) for individual discussion and feedback.

### Proposed sequence of topics

**Weeks 1-2 (January 5-12):** *Philosophy "of Canada"* – political philosophy and the concept of "Canada"

*Readings:* (a) historical: excerpt from *Faces of Reason*, Leslie Armour et al.

(b) contemporary: excerpt from *Multicultural Nationalism*, Gerald Kernerman.

*Assignment #1:* read one original source cited in either of the two readings. Explain the author's concept of "Canada".

**Weeks 3-4 (January 19-26):** *Philosophy and Canadian social issues* – ethical and political philosophy applied to issues that are particularly salient or are handled differently in Canada: e.g. same-sex relationships, drug legalization, public health care  
*Readings:* To be confirmed – probably an excerpt from *Northern Spirit* about the relation of individual to community, an excerpt from *English-speaking Justice* by George Grant, and an excerpt from W. Kymlicka

*Assignment #1 due by end of Week 4*

**Weeks 5-6 (February 2-9):** *Metaphysics and the Canadian landscape* – metaphysical and ethical concepts applied to the distinctive Canadian landscape and its specific environmental concerns. (e.g. the “North” as concept and reality; the mountains; the Canadian Shield; maritime life)

*Readings:* TBA ; possibly replaced with guest speaker

*Assignment #2:* short paper (3-5 pages) Connect philosophy with Canadian issues: give examples of topics, philosophers, and questions which seem particularly relevant or influential to Canadians. Explain what you see as distinctively “Canadian” elements in the choices you have made.

**Weeks 7-8 (February 16-23):** *Canada in war and peace* – political philosophy and Canadian contributions to current global debate on international relations, including Canada’s self-image as “peacekeeper”.

*Readings:* excerpt from M. Ignatieff, either *The Warrior’s Honour* or *The Lesser Evil* excerpt from T. Govier: *A Delicate Balance: What philosophy can tell us about terrorism*.

*Assignment #2 due by end of Week 8*

**Weeks 9-10 (Mar. 2-9):** *Public discourse in Canada* – epistemology and critical thinking applied to Canadian public discussion of the topics previously mentioned in the course. How much input, and of what type, do Canadians expect to have in public debate?

*Readings:* To be confirmed – probably excerpt from T. Govier, *The Philosophy of Argument*, and key articles by R.A. Johnson, A. Blair, R. Pinto. Possible added excerpt from Marshall McLuhan

*Assignment #3:* (Final paper, approximately 10 pages) For one specific topic, trace the philosophical influences and connections in Canadian discussions on this topic. Is there or is there not anything which distinguishes “Canadian” thinking in this area?

**Weeks 11-12 (Mar. 16-23):** *Is it meaningful to seek “Canadian” philosophy?* – postcolonialism and issues of identity and power.

*Readings:* To be confirmed – Charles Taylor on multiculturalism plus some responses to Taylor; T. Watson on the value of empire, contrasted with readings from Africa and/or Latin America on the importance of recognizing the unifying and divisive influences of colonial power.

**Weeks 13-14 (Mar. 30-Apr.6):** *Where to next?* What new questions emerge from the readings and discussion? *Assignment #3 due by arrangement with instructor*