Veromi Arsiradam, Keynote
*Philosophy of Social Justice*

Veromi Arsiradam is a philosophy PhD student at Western. Her doctoral research focuses on the ethics and politics of adoption and, specifically, she examines whether there is a duty to adopt children rather than procreating. She created Western’s MAP chapter in 2015 as a way to support the demographic diversification of Western philosophy departments, and to encourage philosophy done from minority-group perspectives or about non-traditional topics.

Veromi’s keynote presentation at the conference raised criticisms of the Western philosophical tradition and focused on philosophy’s role in addressing issues of social justice. She touched on some of her own experiences within the discipline, noting that philosophy’s tools of analytical thinking empower her to question and challenge various aspects of our world. Having identified this particular strength of philosophical investigation, Veromi discussed an issue of social justice that is gaining increasing philosophical attention: the rights and liberation of non-human animals. She highlighted the work of philosophers who challenge anthropocentric conceptions of personhood and rights, and who advocate for social justice movements to consider the interests of both human and non-human beings.

Jasmine Wang, 2nd year honours student in computer science, major in SASAH
*Oppression and Liberation with Modern Technology*

Jasmine argued that network technology is a force of structural oppression because of the nature and reach of such technology. She considered it to be oppressive because network technology precisely tracks our online interactions and makes predictions based on datasets that do not adequately represent the interests of certain populations. In turn, this further skews those already biased datasets and thus, homogenizes representations of human interests. She proposes that only with a comprehensive understanding of network technology as an oppressive force, can we begin to accurately represent the interests of all people.

Austin VanderBurgt, 4th year honours student, major in philosophy
*Notions of Human Nature and Their Affect on Understandings of Government Legitimacy*

Austin contended that the ways in which ancient Greeks and early modern philosophers view human nature affects their respective views on what is considered a legitimate government. He noted that the ancient Greek philosophers’ view of human nature as functional is distinct from how early modern philosophers’ view human nature – as intimately connected with distribution equality. In his presentation, Austin questioned the conceptions and roles of women as being oppressive within the Greek and early modern philosophers he analyzed.

Adanna Odunze, 2nd year medical science student
*Form of Death: Structural Racism*

The main claim in Adanna’s essay is that racial health inequity is perpetuated by the existence of racial oppression in healthcare, and in society at large. She examined notions of implicit biases of healthcare providers and stereotype threat experienced by minority patients. Then, Adanna argued that the disparity found in healthcare may be reduced by increasing diversity in healthcare and providing healthcare professionals with cultural-sensitivity education. Importantly, Adanna put forward the idea that considering intersectionality will greatly help improve the healthcare system.
Matthew Rieck, 4th year honours student, double major in political science and philosophy
*An Examination of the Impossibility of Freedom: The Application of the Other to the Marginalized Self*

Matthew Rieck’s paper was delivered with a cogency that demanded the voices of the marginalized to be heard. Matthew used Mariana Ortega’s notion of multiplicitous and marginalized selves along with Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of the Other and freedom to argue that Freedom is ultimately impossible for marginalized persons. His paper established that the binary definition of freedom insinuates the impossibility of the marginalized attaining said freedom due to the restrictions society wills on them. He highlights the notion that society has molded a world which subjects those to marginalization from birth. Matthew exposes the truth about freedom in such a way that one can no longer claim ignorance to the forcefully implemented marginalization and lack of freedom into which the marginalized are indefinitely born.

Faizaan Jaffer, 3rd year student, philosophy major, minor in political science
*Racialized Children: The Exception to the Infantile State*

Faizaan Jaffer discussed Simone De Beauvoir’s conception of the infantile state and childhood, and transitions from it to adolescence and adulthood. Using phenomenological analysis of his own personal experiences, Faizaan critiqued Beauvoir’s understanding of the infantile state and childhood, noting that her conception does not capture the experiences of children subjected to racialized oppression. Faizaan used the work of George Yancy to elucidate his arguments. Faizaan’s paper was a powerful reminder that the work of some philosophers focuses too narrowly on the experiences of privileged people. His paper offered a rich and articulate evaluation of Beauvoir’s understanding of childhood.

Nicole Nowoselski, 3rd year student, political science major, minor in philosophy
*The Unbecoming of the Self? An Existential Analysis of Identity and Dementia*

Nicole Nowoselski critiqued the common narrative applied to dementia in her paper; the narrative which holds that dementia patients altogether lose their personhood as a result of their illness. Nicole applied Simone De Beauvoir’s concept of identity and personhood against the stigma surrounding dementia to establish that dementia does not mean a loss of self but rather, that the stigma itself does more harm to the agency of a person than the disease itself. Her paper brought an urgency to understand the importance of seeing dementia patients with the same level of personhood as those without this illness. Her use of personal experience with her grandmother, coupled with the relation of the change in identity in those with dementia with the change in identity that all experience in life brought realism to the severity of this stigma. Nicole left us with the realization that the negative effects of this stigma are a “we” issue, not an individual one.

The representatives for Western’s MAP Chapter (Nicole Fice [nfice@uwo.ca] and Helen Fielding [hfieldin@uwo.ca]) would like to thank Western’s philosophy department, it’s climate committee, the Arts and Humanities Student Council, and the Marc Sanders Foundation for supporting this event. We would also like to thank the volunteers that helped make this event a success: Julia Lei, Hannah Eastman, James Belford, Cecilia Li, Sarah Murdoch, and Elisa Kilbourne. Finally, we would like to thank the speakers and everyone who attended the Philosophy Undergraduate Conference.