WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Graduate Course Outline 2020-21

Phil 9129A: Topics in Moral Psychology
TRUST AND SOCIAL BONDS

Fall Term 2020 **Synchronous Day and Time: tentatively Thurs.** **2:30-5:30 (**we will aim to find a time that works for everyone who wants to take the course**)**	**Instructor: Prof. Carolyn McLeod** **Office: Stevenson Hall 2150G** **Office hours: TBD** **Tel: 519-661-2111 x 85877** **Email: cmcleod2@uwo.ca**

DESCRIPTION

Crucial to our well-being and survival are social bonds that allow us to depend on one another. The COVID-19 crisis has made this fact all too clear. But these bonds depend on trust, which in some societies or relationships is in short supply. *How can trust be enhanced where it is lacking or preserved where it exists, particularly during social crises like that of COVID-19?* This course will centre on this question, which is interdisciplinary. We will be focused primarily (though not exclusively) on what philosophy can contribute by way of an answer. We will be asking, in particular, what *feminist* philosophy can contribute, where a feminist approach takes for granted that attitudes like trust and distrust are formed against a social background that oppresses certain groups and privileges others.

A key piece of the puzzle about how to promote or protect trust is to understand what trust is, which is arguably a question for philosophers. It is at least a question that many philosophers have tried to answer. Most of them have understood trust to be a species of reliance and therefore something that differs from mere reliance, which we can have on things like cars and which, unlike trust, can't be betrayed. There is much controversy in philosophy about what kind of reliance trust is, if it is in fact any single kind of reliance. In this course, we'll consider how trust itself might differ depending on the types of social bonds it engenders. We will also explore how trust could be strengthened depending on what trust is like in different social contexts.

We will discuss the following types of social bonds: 1) *bonds of intimacy*, including between family members, and especially between parents and children; 2) *bonds of identity*, which exist within or between members of social groups (e.g. race- or gender-based groups); and 3) *bonds of cooperation*, which occur between social groups or between relative strangers. There will be distinct sections of the course for each of these types of bonds, along with an additional section, 4), about *mediating influences* on the trust that makes social bonds possible. Putative examples include social institutions and technology such as artificial intelligence (AI).

Below are the types of questions we will ask in the different sections of the course:

1) *Bonds of Intimacy:*
   a. What is the trust like that allows for these bonds? Should we understand it in terms of the security-based attachment made possible by healthy intimate relationships, particularly between parents and children? What is the relationship between attachment, as understood by psychologists, and people's capacity for trust or tendency to be trusting? How can prolonged isolation weaken bonds of intimacy or attachment? What could governments do to support these bonds?

2) *Bonds of Identity:*
   a. Often, there are special bonds among members of social groups. What is the trust like that glues these people together? What is the distrust like that excludes some people from these bonds of identity (i.e., people who are deemed to be not black enough, queer enough, etc.)? Assuming these bonds are or can be valuable, how can they be enhanced? How have they been valuable during the COVID-19 crisis or recent Black Lives Matter protests?

3) *Bonds of Cooperation:*
   a. What is the trust like that occurs between people who are cooperating with one another to serve ends that one or both of them possess? Examples are relationships between professionals and clients/patients, government representatives and citizens, and experts and the public. How important is this trust? How is it important for knowledge gathering in particular (i.e., trust in the testimony of others)? How do social stereotypes and broader systems of oppression and privilege interfere with it? What could be done to shore it up?

4) *Mediating Influences:*
   a. What are mediating influences on trust that are common for different types of social bonds? What about social institutions? How important is institutional trust for other kinds of trust? What about technology, especially AI which is now pervasive? How can AI positively or negatively mediate trust between, say, government and citizens, professionals and clients, and parents and children?

Some background reading: McLeod, C. "Trust," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta, substantial revision 2020, originally published 2006, URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trust/.

MATERIALS
All materials will be available on the OWL site for this course, specifically through the Lessons and Resources tools. A full reading schedule will also be available there. Please contact me to see a draft (or partial draft) of that schedule before the course starts.

<u>**OBJECTIVES**</u>
By the end of the course, you (a student in the course) will be able to,
- Comprehend debates in philosophy concerning trust and other topics related to the course (e.g., testimony, stereotyping, attachment)
- Assess and stimulate discussion about arguments that appear in these debates
- Construct your own clear and persuasive argument on a topic of your choice
- Engage in rigorous, respectful debate about heated topics that concern trust and social bonds

In addition, through your assignments (see below under Requirements), you will develop or hone the following skills:
- Critical analysis and writing (through the reflections on readings, discussion questions, and final paper)
- Confident public speaking (through your presentations)
- Synthesis and consolidation of significant amounts of material (through the final paper)
- Translation of philosophical knowledge for the public (through the blogpost, if you choose to write one)

<u>**REQUIREMENTS**</u>
1. Reflections on readings (20%)
You will be required to submit *four* one-page (and one-page only) "reflection papers" in four different weeks, chosen by them. Each paper should answer the following,

> **What, to your mind, is the *most difficult question*[1] raised in or by the required readings assigned for the class on which the paper is due—*and why is that question difficult?***

"Raised in or by" means that the question either is in the readings or came to your mind while doing the readings (i.e., it is raised *by* them). I will give you tips on writing reflection papers along with sample papers. I'm also happy to look at drafts of reflection papers. They will be due in the Assignments section of our website by **6PM** the day before our weekly meeting. Since they may be used as a basis for discussion at that meeting, you'll need to come ready to discuss them. I will mark these papers out of 5 and return them the following week.

2. Discussion Questions and Participation (10%)
You will be required to post a discussion question to the group (via the Forums section of our website) no later than **6PM** before our weekly meeting, with the exception of meetings for which you write a reflection paper and also the first and last meetings of the course. (So, *six* times in total.) For each question, you'll need to describe, briefly (in 1-2 sentences), how it is tied to the relevant week's readings. You won't need to explain why the question is difficult or

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[1] By "difficult," I mean a question for which there is no easy answer. If, after stating the question, you can provide a snappy answer, then the question is not a good one. It is not difficult.

worth discussing, although in class you may be asked to raise your question and stimulate discussion about it. Unlike with the reflection papers, these questions will not be evaluated, although you will lose 1/10 for participation for each question out of the six that you don't post or for each question that you're not available to raise with the group because you've missed class. You will get at least 6/10 on participation if you post (by 6PM), and are available to discuss, six questions on six different weeks. The rest of your participation grade will be determined by how well you participate in the course, generally speaking. Participating well involves participating respectfully, showing that you've thought carefully about the readings, showing up period, actively listening, and raising points that are relevant to the discussion.

3. Final Paper (in three parts) (70%)

a) Paper Topic (10%)—DUE NOV. 19
You'll need to come to our meeting on Nov. 19 ready to give a brief presentation (5-7 minutes) of your choice of paper topic. The presentation should be like a reflection paper in that it should identify the difficult question that you'll be tackling and provide some explanation of why it's difficult. But it should go further than a reflection paper and indicate how you'd like to answer that question (i.e., what position you'd like to argue for). What is more, the content could be based on a reflection paper that you've submitted previously. You'll be encouraged on Nov. 19 to comment productively and respectfully on other people's short presentations and these contributions will be part of your grade. Lastly, you'll need to submit a written version of your presentation to me by 6PM on **Nov. 18**.

b) Paper Outline (15%)—DUE DEC. 3
You'll present your paper as a work in progress a second time during our last class: on Dec. 3. This presentation will be like a short (10-15 minute) conference presentation. It will identify your thesis, outline your central argument, and explain who you'll draw on for support and who your interlocutors will be. You'll need to be succinct, include either a handout or slides, and be prepared to answer questions from your classmates and also ask questions of them when it's their turn to present. Finally, you'll be expected to hand in a written version of your presentation, along with your handout or slides, by 6PM on **Dec. 2**.

c) The Paper or a Paper and Blogpost (45%)—DUE DEC. 15
The final paper you write *could* be accompanied by a blogpost on the same topic as the paper but written for a general audience rather than an academic one. Or you could simply write an academic paper. For the first option, the paper should be approximately 3500-4000 words (and will be worth 30%), and the blogpost should be no more than 800 words (and will be worth 15%). For the second option, the paper should be 5000-6000 words (and will be worth 45%). Please indicate to me if you hope to submit this work for publication or presentation, and if so, I will gear my comments toward you revising for that purpose.

GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
Please submit *electronic,* not paper, copies of your written work and do so in *pdf* format. Also make sure that it is *double-spaced*. Late work will be accepted only if you have prior approval or

in the event of a documented emergency. The exception is work due on Dec. 13, which may be accepted late, without prior approval or excuse, but only with a penalty of 3% per day. After 5 days, it will not be accepted at all.

If you face circumstances that might impair your ability to succeed in this course or have unique learning needs that should be accommodated, then please contact me early and we can set up a private meeting.

DEPARTMENT OR UNIVERSITY POLICIES OR SERVICES

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

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

SUPPORT SERVICES
Registrar 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.