



## Course Syllabus

### Examining Social Issues in the Light of Reason, Part 1

#### Course Summary:

This class will provide a rational foundation for examining the most controversial social and ethical issues in Western culture – with the goal of clarifying rational positions on several issues so a person can understand the issues clearly and perhaps come to a sound, reasonable basis for holding a position.

#### Course Experience:

Western culture is experiencing significant change and conflict in regard to social issues. Issues like free speech, gun control, identity politics, increasing racial tensions, a new sexual revolution, abortion, capital punishment, and whether capitalism or socialism are better socio-economic systems - are all discussed regularly and are dividing more and more people. Many on either side of an each issue seem to no longer be able to speak to one another in a civil manner. This animosity and conflict should be a concern to all who live in Western nations, and solutions should be sought to reduce the hostility and encourage **thoughtful dialogue**. That will start with a personal commitment to understand one's positions on any of these issues and have **sound reasons for defending one's views**.

Part one of this course will provide a primer or summary of **The Art of Arguing: Reason Matters in Everyday Life!** and **An Intro to Ethics: Evaluating Ethical Frameworks and Popular Ethical Concepts**. It is very important the student have a solid grasp on the content of those two classes, since they lay the foundation for examining the critical social issues of our day.

This course will explain the philosophical framework to more objectively examine the major social issues of our day – namely using reason and logic well, and doing so within an ethical framework of moral objectivism, not cultural relativism – meaning there are moral principles that exist and have universal application to all people. After laying down those foundations – the importance of reason and logic and the superiority of the Moral Objectivist framework - this class will look at the major doctrines of judgmentalism, tolerance and respect, and seek to find the best definitions and working models for these concepts.

The goal of the course will be to encourage reason over emotionalism, and thus to bring clarity to the issues so the learner can understand why they have a position on an issue; whether a certain position has more merit than another (passes the test of logic better or has fewer contradicting ethical tenants); and thus be able to understand and defend their position using well-reasoned arguments.



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In summary, the following issues will be covered in the following order:

- The Important of reason and logic;
- The problems with relativism and examining the popular doctrines of tolerance, respect and judgmentalism;
- Can a Democracy Survive without Truly Free Speech?;
- What is Identify Politics and Does it Give a Pass to Racism?;
- Gun Control: What is a Reasonable Position and Policy?;
- Capital Punishment: Just or Cruel?;

## **Prerequisites & Age & Ability Recommendations:**

It is highly recommended that the student have taken **The Art of Arguing: Reason Matters in Everyday Life!**; and **An Intro to Ethics: Evaluating Ethical Frameworks and Popular Ethical Concepts** prior to this class. This Part 1 course will offer a summary or primer on those two classes built into the first two classes, however, that summary will not be as 'discussion oriented' as the full classes since the student should have taken the prior two courses. This course is appropriate for advanced 8<sup>th</sup> graders to adults.

## **Content Review by Week:**

### **The Importance of Reason and Logic in Examining Issues: (Week 1)**

- Without sound reason and proper logic, it is virtually impossible to have a coherent discussion about any issue or abstract idea. This fact will be explained and illustrated before moving on.
- We will review the distinction between reason and logic; we will understand the difference between formal or deductive logic and informal or inductive logic; we will review examples of the most popular local fallacies used today in the context of this class.

### **Moral Relativism Explained and Major Doctrines of Relativism Examined: (Week 2)**

- Ethical and truth relativism are growing in popularity in all Western cultures. While sounding appealing, it has some very serious short comings. These short comings will be described and discussed and solid conclusions drawn – moral objectivism is superior (provides far fewer contradictions) to cultural or subjective relativism.
- We really ought to be careful before judging an individual and we ought to make sure we self-evaluate before we do so. However, we also need to speak against (judge) harmful behavior or



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destructive viewpoints, and to call doing so 'being judgmental' in some negative sense is irrational and counter-productive. We will see why.

- We really ought to respect other **people** who deserve it (and provide the benefit of the doubt to those we don't know), but should we 'respect' people's **views** when we judge those **views** as immoral, harmful or destructive? We will examine this seeming conundrum and gain clarity on this issue.

### **The Importance of Free Speech: (Week 3)**

- Most citizens of the U.S. take the great privilege of free speech for granted. Unfortunately, the threat to free speech in democratic, pluralistic Western nations is very real. People with particular ethical viewpoints or perceived as having 'traditional values' are being shut down by heckler's veto quite regularly, with their content being labeled 'hate speech'.
- We will dig into the free speech issue and arrive at sound conclusions which seek to both protect free speech, and empathize with the desire to minimize truly hateful speech. We must take the higher road and not succumb to personal insults or using force in order to advocate what we believe is true or right.

### **Examining Identity Politics (IP) and Racisms Role in IP: (Week 4)**

- Large numbers of people in the U.S. and Canada are turning to identity politics as their means to understand political issues or achieve political or social goals. What exactly is identity politics and what are the ramifications of trying to practice it?
- Nearly everyone can agree that racism – treating people unfairly or unkindly due to the color of their skin – is a morally wrong practice. However, identity politics seems to incorporate racism into its core ideology. If so, this would have very negative consequences for a society.

### **Gun Control: What is a Reasonable Position and Policy? (Week 5)**

- Many people feel passionate about gun control. Every time a bad person uses a gun as their tool of choice to hurt or kill many civilian people, many cry out for gun control. On the other hand, many rural people use guns as just another tool in their toolbox and they use guns responsibly. We will look at the issues from both sides from a U.S. perspective, and formulate a reasonable view on gun control.

### **Capital Punishment: Just or Cruel? (Week 6)**

- Capital punishment is another social issue that generates a great deal of passionate emotions on both sides of the issue. The primary arguments from the 'liberal' side of the isle do not appear to be sound when examined in the light of reason. We will examine arguments from both sides and arrive at a reasoned position regarding capital punishment.



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## **What Items or materials are provided with the course?**

- This syllabus.
- A student version of each class's content will be made available prior to the class on the Materials page for the class on the web site, so students don't have to take notes (creating a logic account on the web site is required to access these documents).
- Homework is not required but will be provided upon student's request. If a student requests homework, the answers will also be available in documents on the Materials page for the class on the web site, so students don't have to take notes (creating a logic account on the web site is required to access these documents).