

The University of Toronto ~ Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

## ***Common Humanity***

CCR199 – Fall 2017



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Office Hours: Mondays 2:30-3:30 Thursdays 12:30-1:30 Or by appointment
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Class meets on **Thursdays 10:10-11:50**

Since antiquity, philosophers and writers have struggled to understand what humans have in common. This is a matter of fundamental importance to society, since it determines how laws are formulated, how other cultures are treated, and it ultimately grounds the idea of human rights. We will begin with an overview of the idea of common humanity in the Western tradition. Then we will examine the Enlightenment, a period in which most of the modern positions on common humanity were formulated. Following that, we will ask what the idea of common humanity means for societies whose past is marked by racial injustice and exploitation. In this connection we will pursue an understanding of common humanity in indigenous thought in Canada. What can Canadians schooled in the

western tradition learn from this? Finally, we will take as a case study South Africa in the decades after the end of apartheid. The question here will be: how does the idea of common humanity relate to the persistence of racial inequality? And can the ideal of common humanity survive the leveling effects of the global economy?

### **Coursework and Marking Scheme**

Students participating in this course will be required to attend class regularly and participate actively in classroom discussions. You should read the prescribed texts before the relevant class meetings, and complete assigned work on time. You will also be required to complete one analytical paper, one article summary, one visualization paper, and one term paper.

Attendance and active participation	15%
One analytical paper on a literary text due 12 February	15%
One article summary due 26 February	15%
One position paper due 12 March	15%
Course assignment due 26 March	40%

*Attendance and participation:* In the classroom, you are expected to be able to comment on the content of the week's reading and any additional prescribed reading. You need to be able to engage with the general themes of the course as a whole, as well as the more detailed themes of the week. You are also expected to comment on the ideas of your fellow students. The aim is to improve your critical analysis and your ability to interact constructively with others in discussing literary and theoretical texts.

*Position paper:* This is a subjective piece of writing in which you explain the idea of common humanity from your point of view. You don't need to consult any other references, but I would like you to develop the concept – explain what it means to you, why it is (or isn't) important, and try to identify problems associated with it. Try to think of situations (either real or hypothetical) in which common humanity plays a role. Write two pages, Times New Roman 12, double spaced. **Submit on 21 September.**

*Analytical paper on one of the literary texts:* As you read the prescribed literary texts, make a list of anything that strikes you as strange, contradictory, unresolved. This could have to do with the actions of one of the characters; the way the narrator describes a sequence of events; in the case of a play, the way the characters speak or move on the stage; something important that is not mentioned; contradictory assertions, etc. etc. This paper will explain one central aspect of one of the texts that you find unresolved. You will begin by citing the passages in the text where you find evidence of the problem. Then you will explain what exactly the problem is, i.e. what is unresolved, contradictory, omitted, etc.? You will end by suggesting why you think this particular problem arises in this particular text. Write two pages, Times New Roman 12, double spaced. **Submit on 5 October.**

*Summary of article:* This is a summary of an article or chapter in a book about one of the texts or one of the issues we address in the course. Using JSTOR, Google Scholar, or the U of T Library research interface, locate a scholarly paper dealing with one of the prescribed texts, on a topic of your choice. Summarize the author's argument. State what you consider to be their main points. Take a personal position on their

argument, stating which of their ideas you liked best, and why. Also, list what you didn't understand about their argument. Try to be explicit about what exactly you found confusing or contradictory. Write two pages, Times New Roman 12, double spaced.

**Submit on 2 November.**

*Course Assignment:* Your course assignment involves isolating an important problem in one or two of the prescribed texts. You will explain the problem, and cite from the text to show how it is developed by the author. Analyze the problem (explain exactly what its components are), and show how the author approaches it (does he discuss it directly, does he skirt around it or hide it?). If you are comparing two texts, show the differences and similarities in the two texts. You will also discuss one scholarly article relevant to your paper. If you want, this can be an expansion of the analytical paper and the article summary. Write 8 pages, double-spaced Times New Roman 12.

**Submit on 30 November.**

**Texts:**

Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, trans. Edward Kemp (London : Nick Hern 2003)

Jane Taylor, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998)