

LATER LIFE LEARNING TORONTO

SERIES WN27-C:367b: From Socrates to Silicon: Five Big Questions for Modern Life

**Fridays at 1:00 pm
February 26 to April 2, 2027**

Virtually via Online Zoom Webinar



Course Overview:

In this lecture series, Dr. Christopher DiCarlo – a philosopher, author, and educator – will examine and discuss a wide variety of topics dealing with some of the most important issues that face us today. These will be examined through the lens of Critical Thinking and range from the study of ethics, love, the advancements of Artificial Intelligence, and how to deal with misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories.

Weekly Outline:

Week 1 - February 26, 2027: Critical Thinking in a Post-Truth World of Alternative Facts

The skill set of Critical Thinking teaches us that there really are better and worse ways to think about things. And it really is possible to have heated discussions, disagree entirely, and still be able to get along. Due to recent U.S. and world political events, one of the Oxford Dictionary's Words of the Year was 'post-truth'. This is an extremely sad commentary on how information is now delivered, interpreted, and acted upon.

Once 'fake news' becomes accepted as factual, it feeds on confirmation bias and becomes entrenched in the minds of people who want to believe it to be true. In order to live in free and just societies, all information is open to criticism and scrutiny without exception. And so it's time to make facts and Critical Thinking relevant again.

The biggest take away from this talk is that if people use Critical Thinking skills fairly, they will be more empowered to have meaningful discussions about important issues, disagree entirely, and still be able to get along. Learning these skills will allow us to value discourse over hatred, dialogue over violence, and most importantly, fairness and understanding in our disagreements on important issues. And in today's Age of Immediacy where information and opinions are just a click away, there seems to be less and less time in which to practice such skills.

So, if we truly value freedom of thought and expression, and the free interplay and exchange of ideas, then we must do so through the continued practice and use of such Critical Thinking skills. In such a manner, we can look to the future with the hope that civil and political discourse will regain its rightful place in the marketplace of ideas and we can once again

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acknowledge and appreciate the importance of truth and facts which will hopefully make conversations great again.

Week 2 - March 5, 2027: Good vs. Evil How Should I Behave?

In this talk we shall examine some of the foundational concepts in the branch of Philosophy called Ethics. We shall consider some thought experiments or 'What would you do?' scenarios which pose some ethical dilemmas and challenge us to carefully consider how we might act. We will also consider the ethical theories of various philosophers throughout history to see how their theories apply to such dilemmas. And finally, we will consider to what extent other animal species practice ethical codes of conduct.

Week 3 - March 12, 2027: What is Love? An Intimate Look at Love through the Ages

In this talk, we will consider the concept of 'love' and how it has been defined, used, and celebrated throughout recorded time. During the festive season of St. Valentine's – when "love is in the air" – it would seem apropos to consider the nature of this most perplexing, yet wondrous of human emotions. The Ancient Greeks defined love in at least six different ways: *Eros*: Sexual Passion, *Philia*: Deep Friendship, *Ludus*: Playful or Teasing Love (Flirtatious), *Agape*: Love for All/Love from and for God, *Pragma*: Enduring Love, and *Philautia*: Self-Love. We will consider in some detail, each of these types of love as well as The Science of Love: Neurochemical Reactions and the Drive to Love: The Neural Mechanism for Mate Selections by anthropologist Helen Fisher. And we will take a brief look at some of the more iconic depictions of love in the arts.

Week 4 - March 19, 2027: Misinformation, Disinformation, and Conspiracy Theories

Why is there so much misinformation and worse, disinformation, circulating on popular media? What has led to the rise of such untrustworthy information? And why do there seem to be so many conspiracy theories? In this lecture, we'll consider the causal factors which have led to our current state of confusion and distrust. In order to find out what goes into the making of a conspiracy theorist, we must consider all of the relevant causal influences that have contributed to their particular states of mind. In so doing, we become better enabled in understanding both the physical and cultural constraints which bias their particular points of view. But what are biases? And how do they contribute to the making of a conspiracy theorist? We will consider the psychological profiles of conspiracy theorists as social psychologists attempt to identify specific 'predictors of belief' that give rise to their conspiracy theories. We will also look at the simultaneous demise of newsprint journalism and the rise of social media as contributing factors behind the proliferation of such information. And finally, we will consider some of the ways in which we might be able to engage with those in our lives who subscribe to such views.

NO CLASS - Friday March 26, 2027 - Good Friday

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Week 5 -April 2, 2027: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity

It has become increasingly apparent that AI technologies have advanced quite rapidly in the last several years. In fact, it has happened so rapidly, my colleagues and I have been forced to prioritize our research to focus primarily upon the risks and governance of AI as we move into an uncertain future. Many of us believed that what we are experiencing with AI today was about 30 years away and that we had plenty of time to get to work on plans for regulating, legislating, controlling, containing, or even stopping the potential negative effects of such emerging technologies. Well, that all changed with some of the latest available forms of AI which includes, but is not limited to GPT-4, Bing AI, Claude, Bard, et al.

In this lecture, I'm going to talk about two things. First, we will consider the basics of Artificial Intelligence so that everyone is roughly on the same page in reference to key terms, concepts, and issues. There's a lot going on out there in the AI universe; so it's important for us to become familiar with some of the ideas and processes which have gotten us here so far so that we can engage in meaningful and productive dialogue. And second, we will take a look at some of the promising benefits and potential harms that such new technologies will bring to humanity. When we consider just a few of the possible ways in which AI technology will improve our lives, we are optimistically encouraged to see how these will unfold. From medical miracles, to advancements in education, and increases in efficiency and automation, to wondrous new scientific discoveries, the future of AI technologies holds almost limitless potential. But at the same time, it's important to realize that there are ways in which AI could present risks and generate harm – either intentionally or unintentionally. And these two possible ways could occur either through misalignment with human values or through misuse by individuals, corporations, or even countries. When we use critical thinking and ethical reasoning to consider the potential benefits and harms of AI, we are much more empowered to discuss how we want these new forms of technologies to affect our lives as we move into the uncertain future.

Lecturer Bio:

Dr. Christopher DiCarlo is a philosopher, educator, and author. He is the Principal and Founder of *Critical Thinking Solutions*, a consulting business for individuals, corporations, and not-for-profits in both the private and public sectors. He currently holds the position of Senior Advisor at *Convergence Analysis* – an international organization focusing on AI Risk and Governance.

Dr. DiCarlo is also the Ethics Chair for the Canadian Mental Health Association (Waterloo/Wellington) and is also a lifetime member of Humanist Canada and an Expert Advisor for the Centre for Inquiry Canada. He often teaches at The Life Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University and is a past Visiting Research Scholar at Harvard University in the Department of Anthropology and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Dr. DiCarlo has won several awards including TV Ontario's *Big Ideas* Best Lecturer in Ontario Award and Canada's Humanist of the Year.

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Dr. DiCarlo has been invited to speak at numerous national and international conferences and written many peer-reviewed scholarly papers ranging from bioethics to cognitive evolution. He is the author of several books and his best-seller: *How to Become a Really Good Pain in the Ass: A Critical Thinker's Guide to Asking the Right Questions*, was released by Prometheus Books as a 2nd Edition to mark its 10th-year anniversary. His book: *So You Think You Can Think: Tools for Intelligent Conversations and Getting Along* was published by Rowman and Littlefield and was released in June of 2020. And his current book from Prometheus Books, was released early in 2025, and is called: *Building a God: The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and the Race to Control It*.

Dr. DiCarlo also hosts a niche podcast called: *All Things Considered* in which he engages in free and open discussion about current, important issues with world thought leaders, politicians, and entertainers through the lens of Critical Thinking and Ethical Reasoning..