Philosophy 243 / Feminist & Gender Studies 243

PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS OF IDENTITY

130 Armstrong Hall

Course Description

Philosophy 243 will investigate the meanings, problems, and possibilities of contemporary understandings of identity, particularly as affected by development of movements of identity politics in recent decades. The course will begin with an examination of three very different philosophical approaches toward identity and politics: liberal conceptions of individual rights and religious liberties; existential explorations of nihilism and freedom; and traditionalist understandings of virtue and action. The heart of the course will then trace the emergence of a new kind of identity politics out of racial, feminist, queer, and evangelical movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The term will end by trying to make sense of contemporary discussions of identity and politics, in relation to both the history of Western thought and contemporary cultural and political life. Note that this course is also cross-listed as Feminist and Gender Studies 243. Students may enroll under either of these rubrics.

Course Goals

The primary aim of the course will be to help students understand some basic philosophical approaches to understanding identity – both in personal and political or social senses. The course will explore dilemmas and controversies associated with such approaches to identity. An equally important aim of the course will be help students gain perspective on contemporary political controversies associated with the emergence of various forms of identity politics, particularly forms associated with racial, feminist, and queer political movements of the last 40 years or so, as well as conservative reactions to those movements. Finally, the course will also seek to develop students’ ability to make judgments on controversial issues, using philosophical principles and arguments in combination with social, cultural, and historical interpretations of the changing contexts that shape philosophical horizons.

Philosophy 243 course will seek to develop students’ abilities to read, interpret, and respond to complex texts. Refining and developing interpretations of the texts we read will be emphasized through a number of short writing assignments, combined with discussion and presentations in class. Two longer papers will aim to give students opportunities to develop and defend their judgments about the problems the course will investigate. The second of those papers will enable students to explore in some depth one problem relevant to our topic and common literature.

Course Requirements

Reading. This course will have a heavy yet quite rewarding reading list. Students will be expected to keep up with the reading throughout the block. Plan to spend a fair amount of time reading before attending class and, at times, re-reading after class. In general, texts are to be brought to our meetings so that they may be referred to in our discussions.

Course Meetings and Discussion. Most course meetings will consist largely of discussion, with some lecturing from time to time. Individual students may be assigned to lead discussions or take part in debates on particular topics periodically. Students should expect to attend class meetings consistently and punctually, and discuss the subjects and texts under investigation in a civil manner. Performance in discussions will strongly influence the participation grade.
**Writing and Examinations.** Students will write five 1½-2 page reaction papers and two longer essays (4-5 and 6-8 pages, respectively). The short reaction papers may be presented in an informal style, and they will be graded minimally. The two longer essays are to be typed (i.e., word-processed), double-spaced, and annotated in accordance with the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Unexcused late papers will be downgraded one step per hour tardy. For detailed explanations of the grading policy, see the end of this syllabus.

**Required Texts**


**Additional Readings**


Judith Butler, selections from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990, 1999)  

Other supplemental readings may also be assigned as the block unfolds. All additional and supplemental readings will be available on the course PROWL site:

[https://prowl.coloradocollege.edu/course/view.php?id=3913](https://prowl.coloradocollege.edu/course/view.php?id=3913)
Grading and Attendance Policies

Grades will be assigned on an 100-point scale and weighted in the following manner:

1. First paper draft and workshop  Wed. 4 December  2%
2. First paper (4-5 pages)       Fri, 6 December  25%
4. Second paper draft/writing workshop  Wed. 18 December  2%
5. Second paper (6-8 pages)  Fri., 20 December  40%
6. Five reaction papers (2 pages, each)  Various dates  10%
7. Participation  All block!  20%

TOTAL: 100%

The two-page reaction papers will be graded minimally: check, minus, zero. For detail on this requirement, see p. 6. Extra credit of 1% will be given for 1 ½ page reaction papers in response to the Philosophy Colloquium lecture by Chad Kautzer.

Regular, timely attendance and active participation in discussion are essential parts of the course – worth 20% of your final grade. Unexcused absences and regular tardiness will be noted and will affect grades negatively. Students who miss three or more classes for any reason may be required to withdraw from the course. If you have a good reason to be absent or late, notify me as soon as possible. Be sure to write a note (so that I remember!), as well as to speak to me.

The schedule of assignments appears above. You will be expected to meet all of these deadlines. Exceptions will be made only in extreme and unavoidable circumstances. If you expect to miss an assignment or submit one late, contact me immediately. Either see me in my office, or give me a note or an e-mail message explaining your circumstances. If religious observances or other serious obligations conflict with the course schedule, let me know as soon as possible, and we can work out an alternate schedule for you.

Plan to attend class for the whole period, focusing on coursework throughout. “Attending for the whole period” means, among other things, that you will not leave class to visit the restroom, get a drink of water, chat with friends, call Mom on the cell, and the like. We will take a break about after about an hour and 15 minutes – that is when you may leave class (except in an emergency, of course). If you have a good reason for arriving late or leaving early, please notify me in advance. As a courtesy to all, please silence all telephones and electronic devices while in class, and if you bring a notebook computer or tablet to class, please do not surf the web while we are in session and please do remember to make regular eye contact with us. Note that this entire syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

Honor Code. Students will be expected to abide by the Honor Code. Among other things, the Honor Code specifies that you will be responsible for producing all of your own work and that you will always cite the works or ideas of others used in your work. However, discussing your ideas and your writing with others is not a violation of the Honor Code. In fact, it is a good idea to compare your ideas and writings with those of others and to ask others for criticisms of your work. And using other people’s ideas can also be a good idea – if their ideas are good and you credit the authors for developing the ideas. The two formal papers should include a statement affirming that the Honor Code has been upheld.

Audio and Video Recordings. With the exception of disability accommodations, no audio or visual recordings of class discussions or of class events may be made without the specific consent of those being recorded. All recordings made, including those produced as part of an authorized disability accommodation, may be used only for academic ends associated with this course. Both unauthorized recording and the publication or broadcast of recordings (including authorized ones), without the express consent to their publication or broadcast by those recorded, will be considered violations of the Honor Code.

Disability Accommodations. If you believe you are eligible for learning accommodations as the result of a qualified disability, please contact me privately. If you believe you may have a disability that impacts learning, and you have not identified yourself to the College’s Disabilities Services Office, please do so immediately. You will find their office in the Colket Student Learning Center at Tutt Library, Room 152. You may also contact the College’s Disability Services Coordinator, Jan Edwards, at jedwards@coloradocollege.edu or 719-227-8285. I will make appropriate learning accommodations in accordance with the Disabilities Service Office’s instructions.

Office Hours/Communication. I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30-3 p.m. I am also generally be in my office (124 Armstrong) in the afternoon. The easiest way to meet with me would be to make an appointment after class, or via telephone (x6564) or e-mail (dennismc@coloradocollege.edu).
SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS, TOPICS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note: All assignments are to be completed before class.
Class will meet from 9:20 a.m. to about 11:45 a.m., with a 15-minute break around 10:30, except where noted.
* Indicates electronic reserve reading. Roman numerals identify reaction paper groups.

I. Three Conceptions of Identity and Politics

Monday, 25 November
Introduction – Identity, Philosophy, and Politics
Reading: Begin reading Locke and Sartre as soon as possible!

Tuesday, 26 November
**Class meets 9:20 – noon, AND from 1:30 – 3 p.m.**
Locke: Social Being, Consciousness, and the Right of Liberty
Morning session:

Afternoon session:

Group I
FIRST PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED

Wednesday, 27 November
Reading Day
No class meeting – read Nausea.

Thanksgiving Break – Be Ready on Monday to Discuss Nausea!

Monday, 2 December
Existentialism, the Problem of the Self, and Modern Freedoms
  b. Sartre, Nausea, pp. 94-178.

Group III

Group IV

Tuesday, 3 December
Selfhood: Experiences, Choices, Virtuous Roles?

Group V
Group VI

Wednesday, 4 December
Writing Workshops
Location TBA
Meet in small groups to read and discuss paper drafts.
FIRST PAPER DRAFTS DUE BY 9 AM – Submit Online
BRING 4 PRINTOUTS TO CLASS TO SHARE

II. New Identifications and New Forms of Political Action: Four Waves

Thursday, 5 December
Recognizing Race, Resisting Colonization
  a. Fanon, Wretched of the Earth, pp. 1-62.
  b. Fanon, Wretched of the Earth, pp. 145-180.

Group I
Group II

Friday, 6 December
Losing Identity: Problem or Good?
  a. Fanon, Wretched of the Earth, pp. 181-239.

REVISED FIRST PAPER DUE BY 5 PM – Submit Online
SECOND PAPER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED
Monday, 9 December  
**Naming Oppression, Disrupting Liberalism**

Tuesday, 10 December  
**From Impartial Justice to Feminist Difference Politics**

**SECOND PAPER PROPOSALS DUE 5 PM – Submit Online**

Wednesday, 11 December  
**Queering Identity/Difference, Occupying Trans Borderlands**
- b. *C. Jacob Hale, “Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/FTM Borderlands,”* pp. 311-48. Group IV

- **Afternoon:** Group appointments to discuss paper topics, 1:30-4

Thursday, 12 December  
**Religious Reactions: Righting Identity, Claiming Authority**

- **Afternoon:** Philosophy Colloquium Lecture: Chad Kautzer, “When Rights Go Wrong: Hegel, Honneth, and Contemporary Social Pathologies,” Gaylord Hall, 3:30 p.m. (1% extra credit for a 1½ page reaction paper is available to all students.)

**III. Making Sense of Identity after Identity Politics**

Friday, 13 December  
**From Identity and Difference to New Figures**

Monday, 16 December  
**Selves: Recognition beyond Categorization?**

**IV. Making Sense of Politics and New Identifications**

Tuesday, 17 December  
**A Work in Progress? Philosophical Reflection on Recognition**

Wednesday, 18 December  
**Writing Workshops**
*Meet in small groups to read and discuss paper drafts.*

**SECOND PAPER DRAFTS DUE AT 9 AM**
Thursday, 19 December

Writing Day

No class meeting – individual appointments available.

SECOND PAPER DUE AT NOON

Friday, 20 December

Democracy and Identification: What’s Missing?

a. *Laden, “Legitimacy and Deep Diversity” and selection from Groups I-III


c. Review Locke, Sartre, and MacIntyre.

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Two-Page Summary and Reaction Statements

Throughout the two blocks, students will write five short, informal summary-and-reaction statement. Students will be assigned to one of six groups, listed above in the schedule, and expected to write papers on the readings assigned to their group. Each student’s piece should be divided into two parts:

a) **Summary:** stating what strikes you as the most significant or interesting point (or two points) made in the assigned text (½–1 page); and

b) **Reaction:** explaining what that aspect of the reading leads you to think about (1–1½ pages).

These statements should be the equivalent of 1½-2 word-processed, double-spaced pages – so about 375-525 words long. The format is informal: your statement should list your name, the date, the assignment (the authors, titles, and chapters/pages discussed), and your own title at the top. You should divide the statement into two parts (“Summary” and “Reaction”), one summarizing the reading’s most important point or points and the other giving your reaction to the reading. You need neither quote nor cite the text, though you can, if you think it important to do so. The statements should be written in clear, Standard English prose. The style may be informal.

As you write, don’t try to summarize all the points made in the reading. Focus on one or two points that seem highly significant to you. This point or these points ought to have led you to think about something that seems important, significant, or meaningful. This point or these points need not be central to the reading, although in most cases I expect they will be. You may well write about some minor aside that an author makes, if that aside has led you to begin thinking. Just be sure to explain clearly and accurately what the author says when you claim the authors argue something. Also, explain your reaction, your interest, your thought process. When I say, “explain,” I don’t mean saying that something is “interesting” or it has “made you think.” Instead, identify what in particular strikes you as interesting, or what specific problems or ideas the reading raised for you, and then give the reader some sense of why any of these ideas seem important or significant to you. What has led you to react in the way you have?

This assignment is meant to focus both on the reading and on your thoughts insofar as they relate to the reading. For the second portion of the paper, you may explain why the authors’ claims seem to you wrong-headed, or really cogent; why they excite or repel you; why they have made you think of something in a new way, or why they seem to point to a dead end. You may explain why the piece seems really bad or really good to you. This assignment lets you think aloud, as it were. However, the first part of the paper should accurately summarize what the author says.

The assignment also, I hope, will further two other aims. First, it will give you a chance to work on mastering the reading, as well as to demonstrate to me that you have done the reading. If there are parts of the reading that you don’t understand, then write about the problems you have in seeing the author’s points. I’ll try to address those problems, either directly, by commenting on your paper, or indirectly, in class.
Second, your comments may provide materials for our class discussion, as well as prepare you for writing the longer papers and exams.

These papers will be graded minimally: check, check/minus, minus, zero. I may add no or only a few comments.

- Check: a) the paper clearly and coherently develops an idea; b) it also accurately and fully summarizes what the reading says; and c) it convincingly and clearly shows why this point or line of thought is significant to you.
- Check/minus: the paper demonstrates some effort, but it is incomplete or unbalanced.
- Minus: the paper is just thrown together, it lacks careful thought, or it is wildly inaccurate about the reading.

Checks will earn full credit (1%), check/minuses partial credit (0.75%) and minuses (0.5%) minimal credit. A check is the equivalent of an “A+” already for 1% of your final grade.

No late papers will be accepted. Finally, all papers will be posted to the course PROWL site by 7:30 a.m. will be and available to the entire class, for use in our discussions and preparing papers.

Note: Students will be assigned to one of six groups, corresponding to numbers listed on reading schedule. These groups and readings are summarized below:

Group I
- 26 Nov. – Locke, *Human Understanding*
- 5 Dec. – Fanon, pp. 1-62
- 10 Dec. – Young, pp. 96-163
- 13 Dec. – Hekman, pp. 68-80, 98-112

Group II
- 26 Nov. – Locke, *Toleration*
- 5 Dec. – Fanon, pp. 145-180
- 10 Dec. – Young, pp. 163-191
- 14 Dec. – Zerrilli, “Feminists Know Not”

Group III
- 6 Dec. – Fanon, pp. 181-239
- 11 Dec. – Butler or Jagose reading (your choice)
- 16 Dec. – Bloodsworth-Lugo, pp. 1-43

Group IV
- 2 Dec. – Sartre, *Nausea*, pp. 94-178
- 6 Dec. – Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”
- 11 Dec. – Hale, “Consuming the Living”
- 16 Dec. – Bloodsworth-Lugo, pp. 45-99
- 19 Dec. – Norval, “Democratic Identification”

Group V
- 3 Dec. – Sartre, “Existentialism”
- 9 Dec. – Young, *Justice*, pp. 3-38
- 12 Dec. – George reading, pp. 27-41, 106-14
- 19 Dec. – Norval, “Democratic Identification”

Group VI
- 3 Dec. – MacIntyre, “Virtues”
- 9 Dec. – Young, *Justice*, pp. 39-95
- 12 Dec. – Gutman, pp. 151-91
- 17 Dec. – Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, pp. 51-73, or Appiah, pp. 149-63 (your choice)
- 19 Dec. – Norval, “Democratic Identification”
Inquiry into the meaning and lived experience of identity cuts across many fields, including sociology and anthropology (often focusing on the construction of collectivities in particular times and places); psychology (typically examining the development of “the self”); and political science (analyzing the success or failure of national or subcultural group formations). In philosophy, investigations of identity tend to fall into three main categories: accounts of personal identity; inquiry into the logic of identity; and examination of social or political identity.

Below, I have collected—in a very unsystematic way—references to works in each of these areas that Tutt Library owns. I have also included a few important works that Tutt does not yet own. Articles and books appearing in the syllabus are not listed below.

In some cases, the works below are extremely important; others appear here just because our library carries them and a brief look at the book or article led me to think that it might be worth some study. I’ve added a comment or two to some entries. Bear in mind, however, that this bibliography is a work-in-progress. Some important works are neglected, and some of the works here are probably not that significant. I offer this list, partly, to give students a sense of what else might be available on the broad topic of identity; and, partly, to give a way into materials that may be useful in developing a second paper topic.

Identity – Logical and Analytic Accounts


More in the way of a historical account that debunks logical analysis.

Personal Identity – Philosophical Accounts


A very useful overview of the literature – a good place to start.


The first section contains a good, short historical introduction to the problem of identity.


Very comprehensive collection of articles on the philosophy of personal identity. The introduction presents an extremely thorough (and long) overview of every major Western thinker’s view of personal identity. The subsequent articles cover mainstream (largely analytic) philosophical accounts of identity published since 1970.
Provocative collection of essays by feminist philosophers calling into question the more mainstream philosophical accounts of identity.

Often regarded as the most influential 20th-century account of personal identity – one that belittles the focus on identity.


Christine M. Korsgaard. “Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit.”

A good collection of the historical literature on personal identity, including influential works by Locke, Butler, and Hume, as well as the 1971 Parfit article.

A journal issue devoted to the topic of personal identity.


Social and Political Identity – Philosophical Accounts


A philosophical inquiry into contemporary identities and identity politics, focusing on gender and race.

A work of political theory questioning whether justice requires recognition.


A short exploration of the problems and possibilities of modern notions of self-fulfillment.


An expansion of the essay in the Taylor Multiculturalism book.

Attempts to move beyond the impasse between modernist demands for ethical consensus and postmodernist efforts to promote heterogeneity, arguing instead for multiple identifications and unity in differences.

**Historical Approaches to the Self and Identity**


Challenges the idea of the “narrative identity thesis,” showing how the historical development of institutions and special arrangements make racial narratives “stick.”

**Social and Political Identity – Sociological and Cultural Accounts**

A sprawling popular book connecting the rise of parochial identifications to the threatening anonymity of the global market order.

Focuses on expressivity and performance, and the ways in which “the new social movements” are not necessarily agents of social change but are instead a more heterogeneous phenomenon.

Examines identity from a traditional sociological and anthropological perspective.

Critiques Anglo-American interest in identity, using classic sociological and political arguments to dispute the significance of cultural identity.

Ethnographic anthropological study of identities in Japan, the U.S., and Hong Kong, questioning whether unique cultural identities exist.

Reflections of prominent anthropologist on the contemporary condition.

Essays on identity from a post-colonial perspective.
A collection of conference papers on modernity and postmodernity that addresses the transformation of identity in a world marked by fluidity and change.

Sprawling inquiry into the rise of new forms of identification in an age in which globalization and massive information flows undermine states and traditional forms of organizing.

Very thorough collection of essays on the problems and promise of identity politics, especially as it involves feminist movements.

Histories of identities in transition in a globalizing world.

One of the most influential accounts of how peoples come to acquire nationalist identifications.

*Keywords: Identity: For a Different Kind of Globalization*. Other Press, 2004. [Not owned by CC]
A collection of philosophical essays about the meaning of identity as seen from the perspectives of scholars from Africa, the United States, the Arab world, China, Europe, and India.


**Psychological Approaches to Personal and Social Identity**

Examines collective identities, especially among disadvantaged, dysfunctional minority groups.

Psychoanalytic inquiry into identity politics, its problems and possibilities, as seen from a Black feminist perspective.

Essays building on a model of “social identity” as developed by social psychologists and covering a wide range of topics and behaviors.

Essays from the Blackwell Handbook on Social Psychology addressing the interplay between the individual self and collective selves.