PHIL 345/ALST 345 Topics in African-American Philosophy

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Synopsis

This course is designed to serve as an introduction to issues in African-American Philosophy. In particular this course explores the political and ideological goals of leading intellectuals from the nineteenth century to the present. From DuBois and Delaney to the black power movement of the 60’s, analysis of African-American experiences has produced divergent strategies intended to better the condition of black communities in America. The course will investigate nationalist strategies and their roots in notions of black identity as they have been developed through the writings of intellectuals, artists, and political figures. We will also address challenges as to whether or not non-integrationist strategies can be used to achieve social equality. Authors include: Elizabeth Anderson, Anthony Appiah, Countée Cullen, Martin Delany, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Alain Locke, Claude McKay, Tommie Shelby, Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, and Bobby Seale.

Important Dates

Requirements

One course in philosophy or ALST/POSC 212 The Politics of Race and Ethnicity is required.

Goals

The first goal is to put you in a position where you can meaningfully contribute to several discussions concerning topics in African-American philosophy. This course will also get you up to speed on contemporary discussions in African-American philosophy such as black nationalism, integrationism, civil rights, civil disobedience, and issues dealing with compensatory and distributive justice. After taking this course (and under the assumption that you have been keeping up with the reading for the appropriate classes, writing essays, and coming to office hours when clarification is needed) you should be equipped to read and understand professional articles on issues concerning African-American philosophy. The second goal is to improve your abilities to argue and write about issues concerning African-American philosophy.

Grading

Evaluation

Participation – 25%
Two 6-7 page papers – 30% (weighted evenly)
Midterm – 15%
Final Exam – 30%
Grading will be on a 4.0 scale.

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*Philosophy Junior Option:* For Juniors in philosophy who are planning on writing a senior thesis and are exploring topics to write on, the following alternative method of evaluation is available. A completed draft of the 15 page paper must be presented to me two weeks before the due date (the last day of classes). Keep in mind that expectations for a 15 page paper will be high and the paper should make a substantial philosophical contribution to a debate (e.g. A detailed attack of a position with suggestions for an alternative approach to a problem or alternatively, a less detailed attack of a position, with a well developed solution to a problem). A completed draft of the 15 page paper must be presented to me two weeks before the due date (the last day of classes). There should be a total of at least 3 consultations (two before the first draft and one after the first draft). A choice to pursue this option must be made within the first two weeks of class.

Participation – 25%
One 15 page paper 45%
Final Exam 30%

**Participation**

Participation will be determined by attendance, preparedness (having read the assigned readings before class and coming to class with questions), and discussion. Part of learning philosophy is to learn how to engage in argumentation (and not just exchange opinions) with others, so being informed on the matters we are discussing and practicing verbal argumentation is essential to learning philosophy.

If you miss a class you should always contact a classmate to see what you missed and what the next assignment is. You should not plan on missing more than 3 classes (excused or otherwise). The occasional homework assignment (no more than 5) will also figure into participation.

**6-7 Page Papers**

These two papers will give you a chance to further practice argumentation both by covering arguments for essays you have read and, more importantly, by giving you a chance to develop your own arguments (in my opinion, this is the most rewarding part of philosophy). Papers should aim to clearly explain the material you are writing about as well as providing a thesis that is supported by original argumentation. By ‘Original’ I don’t mean to suggest that no one has ever made that argument, just that you come up with the argument independently of what you have read by other philosophers. Original argumentation will be evaluated in terms of its existence (is there any?) and plausibility (how well does it stand up to criticism?). I encourage you to take risks within reason. Don’t think you can come up with a new theory of nationalism in 6-7 pages, but do try to critique arguments, and propose solutions to smaller problems. (I take grading papers to be something like scoring diving: both the difficulty of the project and the quality of the execution are taken into account). You are both welcome and encouraged to come to me to talk
about your paper. While I do not read drafts, I am happy to help you test out arguments, structure your ideas, your papers, and introductions.

- The papers are due September 24th and December 3rd by 5pm in my office or my mailbox in 113 Hascall.

Exams

There will be an in class midterm on October 8th and a cumulative Final Exam which focuses on the second half of the course. The final is scheduled for TBA.

Readings:


Other readings will be made available online.

**Part I: Nationalism – Introduction (3 classes)**


**Part II: Roots of Black Nationalism (2 classes)**


**Part III: Du Bois and Cultural Nationalism (6 classes)**


Further Study: *When Harlem was In Vogue* by David Levering Lewis.


**Part VI: Garveyism – Political Nationalism During the Harlem Renaissance (2–3 classes)**


**Part V: Black Power (6 classes)**

Malcolm X

April 23rd, 1961 NOI Panel Discussion (57 min)

April 12th 1964 Ballot or Bullet (53 min)

June 28th 1964 Program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity
URL=<http://www.malcolm-x.org/docs/gen_oaau.htm>.


**Part VI Integration** (6 classes)