

Special Topics: Introduction to African American Philosophy

Philosophy 103, Spring 2016

Section 00X: TR StartTime – EndTime Classroom

Section 00Y: TR StartTime – EndTime Classroom

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Course Description

What is distinctive about African American experience? How does that distinctiveness bear on the theory and practice of philosophy and philosophical thinking? In this course, we will read a range of African American thinkers in order to develop an appreciation of the unique philosophical voice in the black intellectual tradition. This 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. Authors include: Martin Delaney, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Alain Locke, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Charles Mills, among others. Self-determination, racial oppression, freedom, liberation, violence, self-esteem, ethnic or racial identity—these are some of the themes or problems that will be explored in this course.

Our course is a survey, which means we will cover a wide range of texts and time periods, beginning in the end of the nineteenth century and concluding in the late twentieth, early twenty-first century. We will attempt to catch sight of the distinctive character of philosophizing in the African American tradition. For reasons that we will see as we go along, autobiography, polemic, social diagnosis, political urgency, and related styles are not only aspects, but absolutely crucial, central features of the tradition. This means that we are required, as readers, to attend to multiple voices in the text in order to appreciate the full character of philosophizing in this tradition and the important reasons for certain registers and modes of inquiry.

Learning Outcomes

The aim of the course is for students to gain insight into, and practice with, thinking about ethical and other philosophical aspects of the African American condition, while developing their general philosophical abilities. More specifically, students who successfully complete this course will learn to:

- think critically and systematically about questions of right and wrong action
- present sound arguments for moral claims, or other philosophical claims, both orally and in writing
- read and analyze philosophical texts carefully
- identify values, the role that they play in our lives and moral theories, and their possible sources
- demonstrate understanding of the importance of values, ethics, and social responsibility for the self and for contemporary society
- reflect of how values shape personal and community ethics and decision making
- gain a general sense of some of the main philosophical issues and positions pertaining to historical and contemporary struggles by African Americans

Required Texts

- (1) *Reflections: An Anthology of African American Philosophy*; editors Montmarquet, James A. and Hardy, William H. (2000).
- (2) *The Racial Contract*; Mills, Charles W. (1997).
- (3) Additional Texts will be made available through Blackboard.

Communication

You do *not* need an appointment to come to my regular office hours. Please *always* feel free to come to my regular hours unannounced or to set an appointment to meet outside of regular office hours. Please

understand that I have a busy schedule and it may be some days before I'm able to meet you outside of regular office hours. Please plan accordingly.

Occasionally I will send out course related emails. It is your responsibility to make sure you have access to and regularly check your official university email account.

Course Requirements

The course will be taught in a way that requires a great deal of student participation in class. Reading the assigned works and participating in class are essential to getting a good grade. Readings should be finished by the date indicated on the schedule. Keep in mind that it is better to read carefully once than to read carelessly twice (It is even better to read carefully twice, or more if necessary!). Each reading will include study questions (*Reflections* will provide its own, while I will provide questions for the other readings). You should come to class having written down preliminary answers to these questions.

In order to facilitate discussion, I will be grading your participation over the course of the semester, both for frequency and quality of contribution. Physical presence in the classroom is not enough, though I will be taking attendance. You are responsible to know the university's attendance policy. Note that missing more than 10% of the scheduled class days will result in significant reduction in your participation grade.

There will be frequent reading quizzes. The quiz questions will be taken from the study questions. Students will have to come to class on time having completed the study questions in order to perform well on these quizzes. The quizzes will be pass/fail, and your grade for this portion of the course will be a function of how many you pass out of the total number of quizzes (minus any I drop).

You will need to complete and submit two abstracts. These abstracts will be a few sentences in length, will provide a thesis, demonstrate reasons for holding your thesis, and engage a relevant objection to your view. The feedback I provide on your abstracts will help guide the papers you will write afterwards. I will provide a template for your abstracts as we get closer to their due date.

The papers themselves will be critical philosophical essays. The first two will be between approximately 1000 and 1500 words, double spaced, with a title, word count, and page numbers. Prompts will be provided beforehand. Papers will be graded primarily upon the strength of the arguments within, but proper grammar, correct spelling, and clear structure are also required for a good grade.

The final paper will be slightly different than the other two: I will not require an abstract to be submitted. It will be slightly longer, with a limit of 1500 – 2000 words. Finally it will require you to do some independent philosophical research beyond what we read in class. More information about all three papers will be provided well before they are due.

Course grades

A = 90-100; B+ = 87-89; B = 80-86; C+ = 77-79; C = 70-76; D+ = 67-69; D = 60-66; F = 59 or below

Your grades will be determined in the following way:

Reading Quizzes:	25%
Abstract #1:	5%
Paper #1:	10%
Abstract #2:	10%
Paper #2:	15%
Final Paper:	25%
Attendance/Participation:	10%

Class Policies

Plagiarism and cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Academic disciplinary procedures will be instituted against anyone caught cheating in this course. See the Student Handbook & Policy Guide at <http://www.sa.sc.edu/carolinacommunity> for a statement of the Academic Responsibility Honor Code and an outline of the Academic Disciplinary Procedures (Go to the A to Z listing of policies and then click on

the Academic Responsibility link). You are responsible for knowing what counts as plagiarism and acting consciously to avoid it.

If you need any special accommodations because of disability, please contact me as soon as possible and provide me with any documentation you may have from the Office of Student Disability Services.

We will strive to make the classroom an open environment where ideas can be exchanged freely. However, we will respect one another in the course of our discussions.

Schedule

Week #	Dates	Topic	Day 1	Day 2	Notes	
1	1/12 - 1/14	Introduction	Intro	Yancy Introduction	Yancy reading available on Blackboard	
2	1/19 - 1/21	Nationalism, Speratism, and Assimilation	Delany 73, Douglass 81	Garvey 92, Karenga 97	1/19 Last day to drop without a 'W'	
3	1/26 - 1/28	Nationalism, Speratism, and Assimilation	Asante 105, West 109	Smitherman 125, Baxter 130		
4	2/2 - 2/4	Race and Racism	DuBois 9, Asante 13	Zack 45, Gordon 54		
5	2/9 - 2/11	Feminism, Womanism, and Gender Relations	Truth 137, Collins 138, hooks 152	Harris 157, Mills 167	Abstract #1 due 2/9	
6	2/16 - 2/18	Feminism, Womanism, and Gender Relations/Violence, Liberation, and Social Justice	White 183, Baraka 192	King 198, Malcolm X 203	Paper #1 due 2/18	
7	2/23 - 2/25	Violence, Liberation, and Social Justice	McGary 210, Thomas 217	Boxill 226, Steele 235		
8	3/1 - 3/3	Ethics and Value Theory	Locke 245	Moody-Adams 255, Thomas 266	3/3 Last day to drop without a 'WF'	
9	3/8 - 3/10	Spring Break - No Class				
10	3/15 - 3/17	Ethics and Value Theory	West 281, Cannon 286	Washington 294, DuBois 296		
11	3/22 - 3/24	Race and Contract Theory	Mills 1-19	Mills 19-40	Abstract #2 due 3/22	
12	3/29 - 3/31	Race and Contract Theory	Mills 41-62	Mills 62-90	Paper #2 due 3/31	
13	4/5 - 4/7	Race and Contract Theory	Mills 91-109	Mills 109-133		
14	4/12 - 4/14	Philosophy and Legal Theory	Williams 306, Austin 314	Bell 325, Lawrence and Gunther 341		
15	4/19 - 4/21	Aesthetics	Baldwin 349, Neal 353	Davis 360, Ellison 367	Final Paper due 4/26	