

Philosophy and Race
Philosophy 354
Spring 2013

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Ideas about racial inferiority and superiority have played fundamental roles in the construction of knowledge in many disciplines, including philosophy. Despite its tendency to abstraction and aspiration to achieve the most universal of considerations regarding humanity, the queen of the disciplines itself has also been influenced by ideas of race. Many modern philosophers have played active roles in determining how conceptions of racial hierarchy informed the creation of knowledge in the West. In particular, philosophical conceptions of race have influenced knowledge production in anthropology, biology, medicine, sociology, political science, and history. Such conceptions continue to live a cancerous afterlife in current forms of knowledge, even as they have been widely and decisively discredited.

This course examines how ideas of race have been conceived and understood in Western philosophy, and offers students strategies for re-conceiving human knowledge in ways that avoid influences from racialized conceptions of humanity. Course goals include:

- understanding how the modern conception of race is a social construction, not a natural kind.
- exploring the historical development of modern conceptions of race in Western philosophy and science (i.e., “natural philosophy”), focusing particularly on thinkers such as Kant, Darwin, and others.
- examining the legacy of these thinkers’ influence, both overt and unconscious, in regard to our dominant conceptions of such ideas as the person, human beauty, rationality, knowledge, science, history, human development, empire, and social justice.
- determining the usefulness of critical notions such as the racial contract, white supremacy, white privilege, whiteness, empathy, racial hierarchy, and the epistemology of ignorance as analytical concepts in attempting to understand problems of race.
- understanding the role of popular cinema in our grasp, analysis, and attempts to overcome race.

Required Texts

- Flory, Dan, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir* (Penn State University Press, 2008).
- McCarthy, Thomas, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Mills, Charles W., *The Racial Contract* (Cornell University Press, 1997).
- Pateman, Carole, and Charles W. Mills, *Contract & Domination* (Polity, 2007).
- Sullivan, Shannon, and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (SUNY Press, 2007).
- Yancy, George, *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Temple University Press, 2012).
- handouts and electronic reserve articles.

Required Assignments

- one mini-research essay (5-7 pp., double spaced): 30%
- two short essays (1 page each, single spaced): 5% each
- one mid-term exam: 15%
- one final exam: 15%
- reading quizzes: 20%
- participation and industry in class: 10%

Interpretation of Grades

Letter grades in the course will be awarded according to the criteria described below:

- A** Achievement that is outstanding relative to basic course requirements—for example, written work that conveys a superior understanding of the material and is free of grammatical errors. Has a special quality—for example, an essay that provides particularly insightful analysis, criticism, or reflection.
- B** Achievement that is significantly higher than basic course requirements; e.g., a well-written and well-produced essay. May contain a few minor flaws that could be overcome without difficulty. Shows a solid understanding of the material.
- C** Achievement that fulfills basic course requirements. However, may contain significant flaws—e.g., an essay that fulfills the assignment's basic requirements, but does not do it in a clear or noteworthy way. Shows some understanding of the material, but presents it partially, incompletely, or awkwardly. May fail to address properly one or more major assignment requirements. Awkward handling of source materials may be in evidence. May contain grammatical errors or clumsy writing that interfere with the essay's readability.
- D** Achievement that is worthy of course credit, but is not satisfactory. For example, an essay that forces the reader to do far too much work to understand it, due to numerous and/or serious grammatical errors, incomplete or inadequate presentation of materials, poor reasoning, or poor writing. May also fail to address properly one or more major assignment requirements, without which the essay fails to address the primary aims of the assignment.
- F** Achievement not worthy of course credit.

Other Course Policies and Information

Academic Dishonesty. All work for this course must be written by the person submitting it for evaluation. It must also be written for **this** course. These requirements include anything submitted for credit in the class. **Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, or other forms of academic dishonesty will fail this course** and the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students. (See the *MSU Student Conduct Guidelines* for further information.)

Academic Philosophical Resources. For your research essays for this course (see below), you **must** use academic philosophical resources. Usually, an academic philosophical resource is an essay published in a recognized philosophy journal, a recognizably philosophical anthology, a philosophy book, and/or is listed in *The Philosopher's Index* (see below). Academic philosophical essays and books typically have footnotes or endnotes, explore concepts or theories in extended depth (i.e., for several pages), focus on argument or conceptual analysis, and have the sort of character possessed by the books and essays we will read for this course. Typically, but not always, they are written by professional philosophers. **For the purposes of this course, the academic philosophical resource you use for your research paper must be listed in *The Philosopher's Index*.**

Assigned Readings. Philosophy requires a solid comprehension of texts. My assumption for this class is that you will make every effort to **read the assigned material twice and come to class prepared to discuss it**. The best way to achieve the comprehension needed to discuss philosophy texts intelligently is to **read the material carefully and more than once**: first for a general grasp, then a second or additional times (generally more slowly) for a deeper, more detailed understanding.

Attendance, Participation, and Industry. A portion of your grade (10%) will depend on your **active participation and industry in class**, which I will take to be illustrated by thoughtful discussion, comments, and questions regarding the course's topics and materials. This aspect of your grade **presupposes regular attendance**. Missing numerous class sessions (i.e., six or more) should lead to the expectation that your grade will be negatively affected, and missing **twelve** or more (i.e., 30% or more of the course) for **any** reason should lead to the expectation that you will not do satisfactorily or, in extreme cases, not pass the class. In addition, only rarely or never saying anything in class should lead to the expectation that your grade may be negatively affected.

Copies. Make copies of all your submitted work and keep them until you receive your final grade.

Other Course Policies and Information (continued)

Course Prerequisite. This course **presupposes that you have already had at least one course in philosophy and** thus have a solid general understanding of what philosophy is as a form of disciplinary knowledge. If you have not yet taken any philosophy courses, you are not prepared for this course and should probably drop it.

E-reserve and Online Readings. Some of the course readings will be made available to you through the Renne Library e-Reserve system or are accessible online through various databases. **These readings are required texts** for this course. As such, you will need to **print them out and bring your copies to class** so that we may study and discuss them in detail.

Essay Format. Your written, out-of-class assignments for this course must be word-processed and clearly readable in 10 to 12 point font. Space the lines as instructed, use approximately one-half to one-inch margins, place your name, assignment description, and course and section number in an upper corner of the first page, title your essay, number your pages, use a standard citation format, and staple or paper clip multiple-page essays together. There is no need for cover or backing sheets, plastic binders, folders, etc.

Film Viewings. You will notice on the syllabus some films I will require you see in conjunction with course readings. Screenings of these films will be scheduled for convenient times during the evening on campus; attendance at the class screenings is not required, but **seeing the film is a course requirement**.

Incompletes. Incomplete grades are generally for students who become ill or have other emergencies late in the semester. Students eligible for Incompletes should have consistently completed four-fifths of the assigned work during the semester in a timely fashion. If you feel you merit an Incomplete, talk to be about it ASAP.

Late Papers. Late assignments are generally frowned upon, may receive a lower grade than they would otherwise, or **may not be accepted** for credit. If you have difficulty meeting a deadline, contact me ASAP.

Mature Content. Some of the films we will consider in this course contain mature (i.e., “R”-rated) content. If you are unable to tolerate this kind of material, you should take some other course.

Mini-Research Essays. A mini-research essay is a small-scale academic research essay that further develops the philosophical analysis of some topic we have discussed in class by means of additional, independent research. The purpose of this sort of essay is to help you to take a topic, as we have discussed and analyzed it in class, and independently develop the philosophical discussion of it. This type of assignment requires you to show not only a competence in the topic itself as we have discussed and analyzed it (namely, by **citing and discussing in some detail at least two essays we have covered in this course**), but also to extend its **philosophical analysis** by means of **independent academic research**. In keeping with this purpose, mini-research essays must use in some significant way **at least one academic philosophical resource** (see above) that discusses this topic beyond the ways in which we have discussed it in the course through assigned readings. The best papers, all things being equal, will probably incorporate more than one resource from outside class readings.

Research Resources. A number of research resources for philosophy, containing articles and books that may be used for writing essays in this course, are owned or licensed by the Montana State University – Bozeman Library system. These resources may be identified and in many cases accessed on-line through the MSU Library system’s databases; in other cases you may obtain these materials physically from the books and journals the MSU Library system owns or may borrow through Interlibrary Loan. In particular, your research into topics arising in this course will be greatly facilitated by **The Philosopher’s Index database**, to which the MSU Library system offers access on-line.

Other Course Policies and Information (continued)

Reading Quizzes. Several reading quizzes will be given during the semester to ensure that you are reading the course materials carefully. **Quizzes will be given without warning during the first five minutes of class and may not be made up.** If you have taken all the quizzes, your lowest score may be dropped.

Required Texts. This course is about the **analysis of texts**. The assigned readings exist in books or online resources that you **must have with you on the days we discuss them**. As such, if you come to class without these texts on the relevant days, you will be counted as absent.

Short Essays. One-page, single-spaced writing assignments, such as summary and/or analyses of course readings, will be assigned from time to time. These essays will each be worth 5% of your course grade and will be due at the **beginning** of the class period for which they are assigned.

Schedule of Readings, Topics, and Assignments

9 January	Introduction to the course: syllabus, course requirements, etc.
11 January	The Lived Experience of Being Black: Historical Documents Du Bois, excerpt from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> on “double consciousness” (e-reserve) Fanon, “The Lived Experience of the Black” (e-reserve) [print out and bring to class]
14-16 January	The Lived Experience of Being Black and the Lived Density of Race Yancy, <i>Look, a White!</i> 17-50
18 January	A General Theory Regarding the Importance of Race to Western Philosophy White Supremacy and the Racial Contract: Overview Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> , 1-40
21 January	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – no class
22? January	Screening: <i>Good Hair</i> (Jeff Stilson, 2009) (95 minutes)
23 January	The Norming of Space and Knowledge Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> , 41-53
25 January	The Norming of Personhood Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> , 53-62 See <i>Good Hair</i> by this date Analysis of <i>Good Hair</i> in terms of Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i>, 53-62, due
28 January	The History and Legacy of the Racial Contract; Hierarchies of Whiteness Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> , 62-81
30 January	The Enforcement of the Racial Contract [discussion project – worth 2% of course grade] Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> , 81-89 Bring in a photocopy of one of the photographs and its plate description from James Allen (ed.), <i>Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America</i> (on Reserve or at < www.withoutsanctuary.org >)
1 February	The Epistemology of Ignorance and Racialized Moral Psychology Mills, <i>The Racial Contract</i> , 91-109

Schedule of Readings, Topics, and Assignments (continued)

- 4 February The Racial Contract's Effectiveness as Theory
Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 109-133
- 6-8 February Reviews of Mills's *The Racial Contract* and Mills's Response
McCarthy, Review of *The Racial Contract*, *Ethics* 109 (1999), 451-454 (e-reserve)
Gordon, "Contracting White Normativity," *Small Axe* 4 (1998), 166-174 (e-reserve)
Bogues, "Race and Revising Liberalism," *Small Axe* 4 (1998), 175-182 (e-reserve)
[print out and bring to class]
Mills, "Reply to Critics," in Pateman and Mills, *Contract & Domination*, 230-241;
245-50; 260-66
Review for Midterm
- 11 February **Midterm Exam**
- Consequences of Modern Philosophy of Race: Philosophy of History, Empire, Development, and Domination**
- 13 February Kant on Race and Development
McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, 42-68
Recommended: McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, 1-13
- 15 February Social Darwinism and White Supremacy
McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, 69-95
Gordon, excerpt from *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 82-84 (e-reserve) **[print out and bring to class]**
- 18 February **Presidents' Day – no class**
- 20 February Politics, Memory, and Racialized Slavery (discussion project)
McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, 96-127
- 22 February Reparations for Slavery? (discussion project)
Mills, "Contract of Breach: Repairing the Racial Contract,"
Contract & Domination, 106-133
- 25 February Universalist Possibilities for a Philosophy of History?
McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, 131-154;
165 (last paragraph)
- 27 February Liberalism, Imperialism, and Development
McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, 166-191
- 1-4 March Intersecting Contracts: a General Theory
Mills, "Intersecting Contracts," *Contract & Domination*, 165-199
- Analysis of Critical Concepts: Whiteness and the Epistemology of Ignorance**
- 6 March White Ignorance
Mills, "White Ignorance," *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 13-35
- 8 March Types of Ignorance
Alcoff, "Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types,"
Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance, 39-57

Schedule of Readings, Topics, and Assignments (continued)

- 11-15 March **Spring Break – no classes**
- 18 March Managing Ignorance
Spelman, “Managing Ignorance,” in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 119-130
- 20 March Social Ordering and Ignorance
Outlaw, “Social Ordering and the Systematic Production of Ignorance,”
Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance, 197-210
- 22 March The Power of Ignorance
Code, “The Power of Ignorance,” *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 213-228
- 25 March Biology, Ignorance, and Race
Fullerton, “On the Absence of Biology in Philosophical Considerations of Race,”
Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance, 241-253
- 27 March **Whiteness and the Lived Density of Race in Life and in Art**
The Lived Experience of Being Black, The Lived Experience of Being White
Yancy, “Introduction: Flipping the Script,” *Look, a White!* 1-16
Mini-Research Essay on the Critical Analysis of Concepts due
- 29 March **University Day – no classes**
- 1 April Whiteness and University Pedagogy
Yancy, *Look, a White!* 51-81
- 2? April Screening: *White Chicks* (Keenen Ivory Wayans, 2004) (115 minutes)
- 3 April Whiteness and Reinterpreting Shakespeare
Yancy, *Look, a White!* 82-106
- 5 April Looking at Whiteness in Film
Yancy, *Look, a White!* 107-128
- 8 April Looking at Whiteness in Philosophy
Yancy, *Look, a White!* 129-151
- 10 April Looking at Whiteness in the Self
Yancy, *Look, a White!* 152-75
- 11? April Screening: *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989) (120 minutes)
- 12 April Philosophy, Race, and Film
Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir*, xi-xiii; 1-38
- 15 April *Do the Right Thing* as a philosophical film
Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir*, 39-64
See *Do the Right Thing* by this date
- 16? April Screening: *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947) (97 minutes)

Schedule of Readings, Topics, and Assignments (continued)

- 17-19 April *Do the Right Thing*, African-American characters, and *noir* characterization
Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir*, 65-99
See *Out of the Past* by this date
- 18? April Screening: *One False Move* (Carl Franklin, 1992) (106 minutes)
- 22 April *One False Move* as philosophical film
Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir*, 100-123
See *One False Move* by this date
- 23? April Screening: *Summer of Sam* (Spike Lee, 1999) (142 minutes)
- 24 April *Summer of Sam* as philosophical critique of whiteness through film
Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir*, 261-275
See *Summer of Sam* by this date
- 26 April Philosophical critiques of race through film
Flory, *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir*, 309-322
Review for Final Exam
- 30 April **Final Exam** (8-9:50 AM)