
PHIL 382R

Special Topics in Philosophy: Racial Justice in the 21st Century

Course Description

This course will systematically and analytically address racially-tinged contemporary political controversies, asking the basic question, “what does racial justice require of us today?” It will begin with literature on the development of race as an ontological and political category, the nature of oppression and systemic racism, and some past approaches to thinking about racial justice. Following this theoretical introduction, students will work on projects of their choosing focused on some issue in contemporary racial justice. Possible topics include: police brutality in communities of color, American immigration policy, Islamophobia and the “war on terror,” the exploitation of Dominicans in Major League Baseball, Native American tribal rights, race in contemporary Asia, “Yellow Peril” rhetoric in anti-China economic policy, the role of white persons in anti-racist movements, hate crime legislation, and racial justice in the gun control debate. Throughout, students will engage in an interdisciplinary approach to racial justice, and will complete projects that reach across disciplines.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Question their own and others’ opinions about and responses to the problem of racial injustice.
- Apply the methods of the discipline of Philosophy to the contemporary world.
- Identify and evaluate arguments using philosophically appropriate concepts and techniques and formulate logical arguments on the same basis.
- Think independently to identify problems of racial injustice in the contemporary world (even where these are not obvious).
- Break a complex ethical or political problem down into its key components (identifying where, i.e., empirical or moral evidence is needed), in order to adequately structure an investigation of that problem.
- Work independently, drawing on the resources of more than one discipline, to formulate their own questions about what racial justice requires in a given situation, and to provide their own well-reasoned and –researched responses to those questions.
- Communicate philosophical positions both verbally and in writing.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Discussion Facilitations	5%
Argument Papers on Race Theory	20%
Class Participation	5%
Milestone Project:	
- Project Proposal	5%
- Revised Proposal with Annotated Bibliography	10%
- Presentation on Work in Progress	10%
- Working Draft of Final Project	10%
- Summative Class Presentations	10%
- Final Paper/Project	25%

Spring 2017

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Office: Humanities 204

Office Hours: by appointment (sign up on Canvas or send an email for an alternate time)

Important Dates

February 6

Argument Paper 1 must be complete

February 8

Two Argument Papers must be complete

February 13

Three Argument Papers must be complete

February 15

Project Proposals due by midnight

February 27

Revised Project Proposals due by midnight

March 13 – April 5

Works in Progress
Presentations/Discussions

April 10 – April 19

Summative presentations
(Working Drafts Due)

April 24

Honors Symposium

April 30

Final Papers due by midnight

Assignment Descriptions

Argument Papers on Race Theory

Students must complete THREE one-to-two-page argument papers during the first half of the semester, each of which must be on a text by a different author. ONE of the papers submitted may be revised for re-grading, provided that it is re-submitted within a week of receiving an initial grade and comments. The goal of this assignment is to develop your ability to express and engage with philosophical ideas in a concise, written form; as such, no secondary source use is permitted. In each paper, you will develop ONE argument in response to an argument found in the assigned reading. Your papers will be scored on the basis of clarity, argumentative effectiveness, and the extent to which they demonstrate accurate understanding and clear analysis of the text at hand. I practice author-anonymous grading for these papers; please do not include your name on these submissions.

Discussion Facilitation

In groups of 3, students will be responsible for leading our class discussion **two times** during the semester, having met outside of class to prepare. With your group, you will formulate philosophical questions that lead the class to analyze and evaluate key philosophical ideas in the assigned reading, film, or excursion on the schedule for that day. Each of the philosophical questions you raise must be related to **central concerns** in the assigned text. The goal of this assignment is to figure out the most interesting philosophical questions that we can discuss in light of the text/experience, and to sustain a focused conversation with these questions for the length of the class. Further instructions are available on Canvas and will be distributed in class.

Participation

Because this honors seminar is largely collaborative and student-directed in its content, your active participation is both assumed and crucial for the success of the seminar. Each day we meet, you should come to class having completed the reading or film for that day, with your materials, and prepared to actively engage in the discussion with your classmates. You should not miss more than two class meetings for any reason; *each absence beyond two will result in a 10-point deduction to your participation grade.*

Project Proposal

Your project in this class should deal with a contemporary issue that raises questions of racial justice, whether or not these are obvious (for example, disparities in clean water policies across the United States may raise questions about racial justice, despite the fact that they are not explicitly racialized). Your goal in the 1-2 page proposal is to articulate, as clearly as possible 1) what contemporary issue you will focus on, including any brief background necessary to understand it, 2) what questions related to racial justice are raised by it, including the relevant moral/political agent(s) it concerns (for example, whether it is a question about the obligations of the state or individual persons), and 3) how, in a preliminary way, you believe any of our course readings on race theory will be of use in answering this question. Following submission, students will meet individually with me to discuss revisions.

Revised Proposal with Annotated Bibliography

Your revised proposal will include a more detailed, focused discussion of the question/problem that you will investigate, a work plan for your research that divides the problem into its component parts (i.e., gathering of empirical evidence via social scientific or historical studies, review of the most influential theoretical approaches to this or a closely-related problem, formulation of your own argument that synthesizes these and makes an original contribution to the debate about racial justice), and an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources you plan to use, which you have found via independent library research. The revised proposal and annotated bibliography should be 3-4 pages.

Presentations on Work in Progress

These presentations will comprise our meetings for the second half of the semester. Your goal in this presentation is both 1) to lead your class in a discussion of the problem you are considering, centered around a key text that you post/link to on the course blog at least two days in advance of the class and 2) to get feedback from the class on the status of your project. Two students will be scheduled for discussion per day. During your half of the class meeting, you should aim to spend about 1/3 of your time on a formal presentation of your problem, your work thus far, and the relevance of the text you have selected and distributed to it, and about 2/3 of your time leading a discussion. I will expect you to have a draft thesis/praxis statement (that is, you should be able to articulate how you believe we ought to respond to the problem you are addressing), and to orient your presentation around a defense of that statement.

Working Draft

Your working draft should include a detailed outline of your project (see “Final Project” description for the two options of project types), a revised thesis/praxis statement, a revised bibliography, and at least 3 (for Praxis Papers) or 5 (for Philosophical Essays) pages of prose text that will be revised and worked into the final draft.

Summative Class Presentation

In this final presentation, you will offer a verbal/visual presentation of your final project. It should offer a concise, compelling articulation of the racial justice question your project attempts to answer (including relevant background), and either an argument for your philosophical solution or a clearly-articulated rationale for the praxis/action you undertook in response. Your presentation may either be live or in video format, provided that the latter is well-edited, and enhances rather than distracts from the final product. Presentations should be no longer than 20 minutes.

Final Project

Final Philosophical Essay OR Praxis Project: The final project toward which the above work builds may take one of two forms: either a Praxis Project, which puts a theoretical text or texts to work in a tangible, activist or artistic response to your question about racial justice, or a final philosophical essay that defends a clear position on the proper response to that question.

Praxis Option: In this project, your goal should be to put specific philosophical ideas about racial justice to work. Your project will largely be completed outside of the classroom, but will be motivated and/or significantly influenced in its execution by some text(s) from the course, including your outside research. A few things to keep in mind:

- It should be clear how a specific text had a tangible effect in your planning, approach to, and/or execution of the project or activity. Make sure that you are not simply doing a generally anti-racist activity, then tacking on after-the-fact links to a text.
- The project should result in some tangible product that you can share or document (i.e., a performance or event that can be photographed, fliers or materials to distribute, letters to congressional representatives, etc.).
- Your praxis project will be accompanied by an 8-10 page *Praxis Paper* explaining it:
 - o To engage in praxis means to *practice theory*, or to put theory into practice. In this essay, your goal will be to describe this process for your project. Although you will not have a thesis statement as such, you will describe how and why you have enacted the specific theoretical/philosophical text or idea you choose. Your paper should include the following in a coherent narrative:
 - A description of your project/activity and the relationship between that project/activity and the texts you have chosen in your research.
 - A discussion of your methods—what did you do, and why did you do it?
 - A detailed discussion of how your activity was designed to enact some idea or values from the specific text you have chosen.
 - Engagement with outside sources you have found via the research you have done over the course of the semester.

Philosophical Essay Option: A philosophical essay is a reasoned defense of a thesis. Your essay will offer a defense of a claim about racial justice in response to the particular problem/question you have been working on over the course of the semester. In the course of this defense, your essay should also:

- Show why the question you have asked is a pressing one for the goal of racial justice
- Clarify the most important philosophical claims that your thesis depends upon (are we dealing, i.e., with metaphysical claims about the nature of race, broadly political claims about the proper function of the state?)
- Integrate those philosophical claims with the relevant legal, historical, literary, and/or social scientific evidence
- Position your view in response to the relevant primary/secondary literature, including at least one author from our course.
- Anticipate objections to your view and respond to them such that reasonable persons not inclined to agree could be persuaded

Your final essay should be 15-20 pages, and be formatted according to the Chicago Manual of Style (Author-Date version).

Meeting Date	Reading/Viewing to be done in advance	Assignment due/ Class Activity
1/11	Mills Introduction and Chapter 1	Sign Up for Discussion Facilitation and Project Presentation Dates
1/18	Mills Chapter 2 and 120-133	Discussion facilitation group 1
1/23	Alcoff and Izumi (Canvas)	Discussion facilitation group 2
1/25	Anzaldua, Chapters 1 and 2	Discussion facilitation group 3
1/30	<i>Farmingville</i> (Youtube link on Canvas)	<i>New American Pathways Visitor</i>
2/1	Anzaldua, Chapters 3 and 5	Discussion facilitation group 4
2/6	Sheth, chapter 4 (available on Canvas)	Discussion facilitation group 5
2/8	Alexander, Intro and Chapter 5 (available on Canvas)	
2/11 (Sat.)		<i>Center for Civil and Human Rights</i>
2/13	Guttman (canvas)	Discussion facilitation group 1 [3 argument papers must be complete]
2/15	Lebron, Introduction and selection from Chapter 1	Project Proposals due by Midnight
2/16 – 2/24	<i>Meet with Dr. Tarver to Discuss Your Proposal</i>	<i>Sign Up for an Office Hours Slot on Canvas</i>
2/20	Lebron, Chapter 3	Discussion facilitation group 2
2/22	Lebron, Chapter 5	Discussion facilitation group 3
2/27	Glaude excerpts (Canvas)	Discussion facilitation group 4 Revised Proposals and Annotated Bibliographies Due by Midnight
3/1	Malcolm X (Canvas), <i>Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution</i> (Youtube link on Canvas)	Discussion facilitation group 5
SPRING BREAK		
3/13	TBD	Works in progress discussion
3/15	TBD	Works in progress discussion
3/20	TBD	Works in progress discussion
3/22	TBD	Works in progress discussion
3/27	TBD	Works in progress discussion
3/29	TBD	Works in progress discussion
4/3	TBD	Works in progress discussion
4/5	TBD	Works in progress discussion
4/10	Student paper drafts	Summative Presentations – Working Drafts due
4/12	Student paper drafts	Summative Presentations – Working Drafts due
4/17	Student paper drafts	Summative Presentations – Working Drafts due
4/19	Student paper drafts	Summative Presentations – Working Drafts due
4/24	Prepare for Symposium Presentation	Honors Symposium
4/30 (Sun.)	<i>Final Papers Due by Midnight</i>	<i>Final Papers Due by Midnight</i>