

Winter 2016 Seminar

PHIL 675: Seminar in Contemporary European Philosophy

Seminar Topic: The Philosophy of Frantz Fanon

Thursdays 3:35 – 6:00 PM (Leacock 927)

Professor Alia Al-Saji

alia.al-saji@mcgill.ca

Office: 932 Leacock

Office hours: 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM (and by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Writing at the cusp of phenomenology, psychiatry, and political philosophy, Frantz Fanon's work attempts to articulate the ambivalent and painful terrain of *racialization*. A precursor to critical philosophy of race as well as decolonized psychiatry, Fanon brings to light the *structuring* work of racism, its *imaginary* dimensions, and its *experiential* and agential effects. The philosophical traction of Fanon's work—and its methodological promise for critical philosophies of race—lies in this multidimensional analysis of racism. At once poignant and provocative, Fanon's work allows us to think racism—and its intertwining with colonialism—in structural, systemic *and* phenomenological, lived and felt ways.

Fanon (1925-1961) was a phenomenologist and psychiatrist, as well as an anti-colonial militant and thinker. His work was written in dialogue with contemporary existential phenomenologists (especially Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty). Fanon develops what I would call a “critical phenomenology”: his phenomenology interweaves descriptions of first-person experience, with deconstructions of the intersubjective racial imaginary that undergirds his social world, and analyses of historical, social and economic structures. This approach refuses to treat racism as merely accidental to settler colonial societies, or as mere individual failing. It challenges the epistemology of ignorance (Charles Mills)—or colonial aphasia (Ann Stoler)—of supposedly “race-neutral” philosophical categories. And it poses the questions: How can racism be structuring of being, while historically contingent? How is racialization, at once, social pathology and “aberration of affect”? And what would it mean to “decolonize” being?

In this seminar, we will read closely Fanon's major phenomenological work, *Black Skin, White Masks*. We will also discuss some of his essays on Algeria and on racism and colonialism. And we will aim to read most of his last work in political philosophy, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

TEXTS: The English translations of Fanon's works will be available in **Paragraphe Bookstore**. Students with reading knowledge of French are encouraged to read Fanon in the original French.

Required Readings:

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; *Peau noire, masques blancs*

_____, *The Wretched of the Earth*; *Les damnés de la terre*

_____, “Algeria Unveiled” from *A Dying Colonialism*; “L’Algérie se dévoile” from *L’an V de la révolution algérienne*

_____, “Racism and Culture” from *Toward the African Revolution*; “Racisme et culture” from *Pour la révolution africaine*

Optional Readings: From time to time, relevant supplementary literature will be posted on MyCourses as needed.

Registration Notes

Seminars are open to graduate students and to undergraduates in U3 or higher. If you are an undergraduate and would like to take this course, please contact the professor for permission. (For undergraduates, there is a form to fill out and a requirement that you have a CGPA of 3.3 or higher, although exceptional cases will be considered.)

For Graduate Students in Philosophy: Since this seminar tackles both phenomenology and political philosophy, it can fulfill the graduate area requirement either in epistemology/metaphysics or in value theory.

Prerequisite for undergraduate students: *One of PHIL 327, 474, 475, or other appropriate courses in philosophy of race, political philosophy, or continental philosophy, as determined by permission of the instructor.*

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

The grade will depend on the following: a major term paper, 50%; one class presentation, 30%; and consistent and engaged participation in the class as well as regular attendance, 20%.

- (1) The **TERM PAPER**, worth **50%** of your grade, should be approximately **17-20 pages** in length. Formatting should be: Times New Roman 12 font, double spaced. *The topic of this paper is to be designed by you, in consultation with the instructors.* It is recommended that you begin work on this paper early, since you should consult secondary sources for the purpose. ***The paper will be due at the end of the semester (date TBA).***

- (2) **PRESENTATION**

30%

The presentation should be aimed at providing a deeper understanding and analysis of that week's reading (or, when the reading is extensive, of what you think is the most significant part of the reading). The presentation should aim (i) to teach the material to the class, and (ii) to raise questions about the reading, including critical questions, which can motivate discussion. **It is recommended that the presentation be organized around a central theme, concept or structure that you develop from the reading** (please avoid linear summaries). You can draw on secondary source material, citing and summarizing appropriately.

Students should meet with the instructor on the Thursday prior to their presentation with an outline of their proposed presentation. If two students are presenting on the same week, you will be expected to coordinate your presentations and to collaborate during class. Each presentation should be max. **25 minutes** in length, not including discussion.

- (3) Since this is a discussion-based seminar, **ATTENDANCE** and **PARTICIPATION** are crucial to your role in the seminar. Together they are worth **20%** of your grade.

Expectations with respect to Participation and Attendance

It is your responsibility as a member of this graduate seminar to attend each class, having done the readings and prepared for substantial and nuanced discussion. Please come to each class with at least **2 written questions/ connections / reflections**, designed to generate discussion. **You should expect to contribute one or both questions orally.** (Questions will not be graded, though I will ask that you hand them in at the end of each class.) See guidelines for questions below.

You are expected to **attend** all sessions of the seminar (unless you have a valid medical reason for absence).

And you are also expected to engage seriously with the questions, interventions, and presentations of your fellow students. Oral participation should be thoughtful, respectful of others, and constructively critical, as well as on-going.

Guidelines for Weekly Questions

A question can take up *one specific problem, concept or connection* within that week's reading. The aim is not to give an exhaustive interpretation of the reading; rather it is to interrogate as precisely and attentively as possible one issue in that week's reading that you think is significant. (As a rough guideline, each question can be about 100 words in length.)

Some hints:

- (1) Ask *one* question (this can have related sub-questions, but you should avoid multiple unrelated questions).
- (2) Explain your question *clearly*. Remember that the question aims to motivate discussion, so others should be able to understand it. Try not to assume background that others in the class will not share.
- (3) Make sure this is a *real* question, i.e., that there is something at stake in what you are asking. *Avoid simple textual clarification questions.* Your question should try to locate an important issue in the reading that calls for discussion. (Textual clarification questions can, of course, be asked in the seminar; but they should come in addition to your two discussion questions.)
- (4) Remember that critical questions are more productive when *internally* motivated by the text, and based on a close and generous reading.
- (5) The question need not have only one answer. Indeed, it is better if the question does not have a simple answer but rather calls for multiple interpretations and positions.

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Instructor generated course materials are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

January 14 Organizational matters. Introduction to the course.

Black Skin, White Masks [Peau noire, masques blancs] (5 weeks)

- January 21 *Introduction
 *Chapter 1 “The Black Man and Language” [*Le Noir et le langage*]
 Chapter 2 “The Woman of Color and the White Man” [*La femme de couleur et le Blanc*]
 [Supplementary: T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Anti-black femininity and mixed-race identity: Engaging Fanon to reread Capécia”]
- 28 Chapter 3 “The Man of Color and the White Woman” [*L’homme de couleur et la Blanche*]
 Chapter 4 “The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized” [*Du prétendu complexe de dépendance du colonisé*]
- February 4 *Chapter 5 “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” [*L’expérience vécue du Noir*]
 [Supplementary: Jean-Paul Sartre, “Black Orpheus”]
- 11 Chapter 6 “The Black Man and Psychopathology” [*Le Nègre et la psychopathologie*]
- 18 Class cancelled.
Tuesday, February 23rd, 6 PM: Rescheduled class:
 *Chapter 7 “The Black Man and Recognition” [*Le Nègre et la reconnaissance*]
 *Chapter 8 “By Way of Conclusion” [*En guise de conclusion*]

Essays

- February 25 *“Algeria Unveiled”, pp. 35-67 [*“L’Algérie se dévoile”, pp. 16-50*]. Also, see the last ten pages of the essay “This is the Voice of Algeria [*Ici la voix de l’Algérie*”]
 “Racism and Culture”, pp. 31-44 [“Racisme et culture”, pp. 37-52*].
- March 3 Reading Week.

The Wretched of the Earth [Les damnés de la terre] (5 weeks)

- March 10 We will begin with Chapter 5 “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” [*“Guerre coloniale et troubles mentaux”*]
- 17 Chapter 1 “On Violence” [*“De la violence”*]
- 24 Chapter 2 “Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity” [*“Grandeur et faiblesses de la spontanéité”*]

31 Class cancelled.

Rescheduled Class will be at 6 PM on either Monday, April 4th or Tuesday, April 5th.
Chapter 3 “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness” [*“Mésaventures de la conscience nationale”*]

April 7 Chapter 4 “On National Culture” [*“Sur la culture nationale”*]
And Fanon’s Conclusion.
Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre.

April 14 Catch-up week. This will be inserted in the schedule when more discussion time is needed.

TERM PAPERS will be due at the end of the semester. Date to be announced.

Scheduling Note: Two classes will need to be rescheduled during term. We will discuss rebooking dates on the first day of class. Please confirm with the instructor that you can attend these dates.
