

PHILOSOPHY OF RACE: PHIL 327

Fall 2011 MW 10:05 - 11:25
Leacock 15
Professor Hasana Sharp

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Course Description:

This course will provide an introduction to the philosophy of race by surveying some key debates and analyses, including:

- the metaphysical status of race;
 - what is race? what kind of reality does it possess?
- the relationship between the concept of race and racism;
 - how do we identify discourses as racist? can one have an idea of race that is not racist? does opposition to racism entail opposition to race?
- the intersections of race, gender, and national or ethnic identity;
 - how do these overlap in lived experience? how are they conceptually and genealogically related as concepts?
- racialized experience or subjectivity;
 - how is race lived? can we give an account of the subjective (first person) reality of race?
- mixed-race;
 - given challenges to the metaphysical status of race, can we make any sense of the notion of mixed-race? what political role might mixed-race play? what questions arise from the notion of “passing”?
- responses to racism;
 - what models are available for addressing racism? what should we do? (how) do we continue to think and speak about race?

The philosophy of race is a relatively young field in professional philosophy, but has its roots in 18th and 19th century philosophical anthropology. Any survey is inevitably selective, but students will get a solid foothold in major philosophical debates, especially as they have emerged from an examination of W.E.B. DuBois' early efforts to give an account of the concept of race, the psychological experience of racial oppression, and politically salutary forms of racial identity. Thus, we begin by reading DuBois and diverse responses to his work by contemporary philosophers. We proceed to survey a range of topics from a variety of perspectives. Certain perspectives and interests students bring to the class may not be addressed in the syllabus, but students will be encouraged to explore them in their final papers.

Students should note that while there are no prerequisites for this class, it is an intermediate-level class in philosophy. They should therefore be prepared to read a substantial amount of sometimes quite difficult material, and to learn how to read, write and discuss philosophy (better). The philosophy of race is a particularly exciting place to see the immediate relevance of knotty metaphysical questions. It also represents an especially vital dialogue between the traditions of analytic and continental philosophy. Note, finally, that this course is an introduction to the philosophy of race and not an introduction to the social history of race or racism. We will begin with two assumptions: that we do not live in a world of racial equality; and that this is neither a natural nor a necessary state of affairs.

Texts:

Selected readings will be posted on our course webpage.

Requirements:

Reading: This is officially a lecture course, but I desire and expect your participation. Come to class having read the day's assignment, prepared to pose questions and discuss the material. The quantity of reading in this class is substantial. Please look ahead to anticipate more difficult or lengthy assignments and note that you are responsible for all of the assigned material even if we do not get around to a detailed discussion of it in class.

Students with a borderline grade will benefit from informed participation.

Two short papers: There will be two brief papers (1000 words each) that will analyze a passage, concept, argument, question, or problem drawn from the reading. (30% each)

One short final paper: Your final paper will be on a topic of your choice, but will take up the course material in a meaningful way. You are *strongly* advised to discuss your final topic with the professor during office hours. More detailed instructions will be posted on *MyCourses*. (30% of grade)

NB: written assignments will not be accepted by email. Late assignments will suffer a 1/3 grade deduction per day. Thus an evaluation of A- will become a B+, should it be one day late. There will be no exceptions without valid medical documentation that is promptly submitted to the professor.

Peer review of rough drafts: You will be required to exchange rough drafts *in class* with one of your peers and fill out an evaluation form. The feedback you provide on your peer's paper should be thoughtful and constructive. It will be graded. (5% each)

Grading Criteria: To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than just reiterate what various authors have said in your reading or what was said in class. An "A" indicates that you not only understand and comprehend the material, but that you have thought critically about it, fully fleshing out its subtleties and implications so that you can creatively apply the material at many levels. A "B" reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; however, "B" work doesn't capture the complexity of the issues and tends toward accurate summary rather than independent analysis. A "C" suggests a struggle with the material that manages an average, basic comprehension of it but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A "D" indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An "F" indicates no understanding of the material.

Academic Integrity: 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 <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information). Note that the code stipulates that any assignment suspected of plagiarism should be submitted directly to the associate dean for review.

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

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.