

Winter 2021 Seminar

PHIL 675: Seminar in Contemporary European Philosophy

Seminar Topic: Fanon's Political Phenomenology

Tuesday 14:35 – 17:25

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Office hours: TBA. By phone/skype.

McGill University is located on unceded Indigenous land. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather.

Tiohtià:ke/Montréal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations and continues to be home to a diverse population of Indigenous and racialized peoples.

Making this acknowledgement does not exculpate us institutionally; rather, it intensifies the need to actively support Indigenous peoples in their struggles for decolonization.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

At the intersection of phenomenology, psychiatry, and political philosophy, Frantz Fanon's work attempts to articulate the ambivalent and painful terrain of *racialization* and *colonization*. Fanon's philosophy is central to critical philosophy of race, to anticolonial and decolonial theories, as well as to decolonized psychiatry. Fanon brings to light the *structuring* work of colonialism and racism, their *imaginary* dimensions, and their *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 and colonialism.

At once poignant and provocative, Fanon's work allows us to think racism—and its intertwining with colonialism—in structural, systemic, political *and* phenomenological, lived and felt ways. Fanon's work confronts us with questions: How is racialization, at once, social pathology and “aberration of affect”? How can anti-black racism be structuring of being, while historical? Given the irreparable breach of slavery and the *longue durée* of colonialism, their continuing and burning wounds, what would it mean to “decolonize being”?

In recent years, much has been made of the promise of “critical phenomenology” as a reconfiguration that corrects for classical phenomenology's bracketting of the social, political, and historical. My argument is that in Fanon we find not so much an appropriation of previous philosophies (Hegel, Sartre, Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty), but an invention of a new way of doing phenomenology and political philosophy out of his own “psychopathological” lived experience and practice, both affective and epistemological, as racialized subject, colonial medical practitioner, and anticolonial militant. It is this multiplicitous perspective that allows Fanon to chart the oppositional structures and occlusions of racism and colonialism. His work unfurls a *critical*, *political*, and *decolonizing* phenomenological method.

Our aim in this seminar is to read closely Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth (Les damnés de la terre)*. We will need to take up some of *Black Skin, White Masks*, in order to set the frame for Fanon's political phenomenology. And we also aim to read selected essays from *Toward the African Revolution, A Dying Colonialism*, and his psychiatric and political writings.

AREA: *This is a seminar in critical philosophy of race. For the graduate philosophy program, it can count for either *phenomenology* (metaphysics/epistemology) or *philosophy of race* (value theory). For the undergraduate program, it can count for continental philosophy or value theory.*

READINGS

1/ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004). ISBN: 9780802141323. [*Les damnés de la terre* (Éditions la découverte, 2002). ISBN: 2707138533.]

2/ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Markmann (Grove Press, 1967). ISBN: 9780802150845. [*Peau noire, masques blancs* (Éditions du Seuil, 1952). ISBN: 97827578-41686.]

Note that there are two translations of this book. I strongly prefer the Charles Markmann translation. This is out-of-print, but can still be found online. I will also make the required chapters available in PDF. Paragraphe Bookstore only has the newer translation by R. Philcox.

3/ *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Grove Press, 1967). [*Pour la révolution africaine: Écrits politiques* (Éditions la découverte, 2006). ISBN: 9782707149039.]

4/ *A Dying Colonialism* (Grove Press, 1965). [*“L’Algérie se dévoile” in L’an V de la révolution algérienne* (Éditions la découverte, 2001).]

The English translations of Fanon’s texts are available at [Paragraphe Bookstore](#). ***Students with reading knowledge of French are strongly encouraged to read Fanon in the original French.*** You can purchase these yourself online, but please try to get the same edition as me, so that we have the same pagination (I have provided the ISBN for reference). I will reference the page numbers in both the French and English versions in class.

REGISTRATION

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 me for permission. (There is a permission form to fill out for the faculty of Arts.)

Prerequisite: PHIL 442 and/or PHIL 474/475, or by permission of the instructor. *Knowledge of critical philosophy of race, critical race feminism, or prior knowledge of Fanon is desirable for students taking the seminar. Should you not have this background, you would be expected to work to supplement your reading in order to acquire it during the course.*

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES:

- (1) Term Paper, worth 65%.
- (2) Short Weekly Questions, to be submitted by email and reported orally to the class. Cumulatively worth 20%.
- (3) Participation: Because this is a discussion-based seminar, participation and attendance are crucial to your role and experience in the seminar. This is worth 15% of your grade.

FORMAT OF REMOTE DELIVERY

This class will take place live on Zoom. This means you should set aside Tuesdays 14:35–17:25 (EST) during term. We will aim to be on Zoom for 1h20, with a break of approximately 30 minutes, then Zoom again for approximately 1h. (We will make adjustments to this based on our experience as a group.)

This is a *seminar*. This means that each class begins with your ideas/feedback/questions about that week's reading. I then weave my explication of the text around our discussion. There are no preset lectures. Antiracist and decolonial learning cannot happen without such robust discussion.

As a default, this seminar will not be recorded, in order to allow free and open discussion, unless everyone who participates so desires and requests.

I will begin Zoom sessions five minutes before class time and stay afterwards for anything you wish to chat about. I will also leave the Zoom on during the break, for you to be able to chat to your colleagues, if you so wish (but feel free to use this time to get away from the screen, too).

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.

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.
