

this is a draft - the syllabus is subject to change

Philosophy of Race Syllabus

Semester (year) | Days | TBD

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Course Description and Aims

This course explores foundational and contemporary philosophical issues concerning race by investigating major areas of philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, and political philosophy—to examine how race is constructed, understood, and experienced. We will engage with both historical and current debates on the nature of race, its social construction, and the implications of these perspectives on knowledge, identity, and justice. The course will conclude with a forward-looking exploration of pressing ethical and social issues posed by artificial intelligence (AI), specifically focusing on how these technologies intersect with racial biases and the philosophy of race. This approach aims to equip students with philosophical tools to critically analyze AI's impact on racial dynamics and broader societal structures.

Course Requirements

Assignments:

1. **Discussion Questions:** 100-150 words each. For each class, you'll submit one question based on the assigned readings, helping shape our discussions. Your question can address points that were unclear, intriguing, or particularly challenging. Consider connecting ideas from the readings to themes we've discussed in class, topics from other courses, your personal experiences, or relevant societal issues. If you'd like, you may also practice reconstructing an argument from the reading in your question, explaining why you interpret the argument in that way or critically responding to it. This approach can deepen our discussions and enhance your understanding of philosophical analysis.
2. **(2) Papers:** First paper should be no more than 1,350 words. The second paper must be no more than 3,500 words. All papers should be double-spaced. You may use any academic citation format, such as MLA or Chicago, but be consistent throughout—points may be deducted for inconsistency in formatting. Each paper must include a clear thesis statement, a developed argument, a counterargument, and a response to that counterargument. Your thesis statement must be approved at least one week before the paper is due.

Grades will emphasize clarity and persuasiveness in your writing. If this is your first philosophy paper, don't worry—we'll have targeted activities throughout the course to help you prepare. On the first day, I'll outline these preparatory activities in detail. You'll have the option to choose from my prepared prompts, or, if you wish to develop your own topic, you'll need to meet with me in advance for approval.

3. **Public Philosophy Assignment:** For this assignment, you'll choose from three options. Please set up a meeting with me in advance so we can chat because all topics must be

approved at least one week before the due date. Each option should engage with themes from this course.

Final Grade Breakdown:

Attendance & Participation: 15%

Discussion Questions: 10%

Paper 1: 25%

Paper 2 (Final): 35%

Public Philosophy: 15%

Grading Scale	
A+ 97-100	C 74-76
A 94-96	C- 70-73
A- 90-93	D+ 67-69
B+ 87-89	D 64-66
B 84-86	D- 60-63
B- 80-83	F 0-59
C+ 77-79	

Metaphysics of Race

Week One

- 1) Course overview and review of syllabus.
- 2) Hochman, Adam, "In defense of the metaphysics of race"

Week Two

[The Classification of Races]

Monday

- 1) Bernier, François, *The Idea of Race*. "A New Division of the Earth," Chp 1, p. 1-4.
- 2) Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, *The Idea of Race*. "On the Natural Variety of Mankind," Chp 5, p. 27-37.

Wednesday

- 3) Kant, Immanuel, *The Idea of Race*. "Of the Different Human Races," Chp 3, p. 8-22.
- 4) Kitcher, Philip, "Does 'Race' Have a Future?"

Week Three

[The US Race Debate]

Monday

- 1) Glasgow, Joshua, *What is Race?* "Is Race an illusion or a (Very) Basic Reality?," p. 111-144.

Wednesday

- 2) Spencer, Quayshawn, *What is Race?* "How to Be a Biological Realist," p. 73-104.
- 3) Hardimon, Michael, *Rethinking Race*. "The Minimalist Concept of Race," Chp 2, p. 27-64.

Week Four

[The US Race Debate Cont'd]

Monday

- 1) Du Bois, W.E.B., *The Idea of Race*. "The Conservation of Races," Chp 13, p. 108-117.
- 2) Appiah, Kwame Anthony, *The Idea of Race*. "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," Chp 14, p. 118-135.

Wednesday

- 3) Outlaw, Lucius, "Conserve' Races? In Defense of W.E.B. Du Bois."
- 4) Jeffers, Chike, "Du Bois, Appiah, and Outlaw on Racial Identity."

Week Five

[Social Constructionism]

Monday

- 1) Zack, Naomi, "The Ordinary Concept of Race"; "White Family Identity"

Wednesday

- 2) Zack, Naomi, "Black Family Identity"; "Mixed-Race Family Identity"

Week Six

[Social Constructionism Cont'd]

Monday

- 1) Haslanger, Sally, *What is Race?* "Tracing the Sociopolitical Reality of Race," p. 1-34.

Wednesday

- 2) Jeffers, Chike, *What is Race?* "Cultural Constructionism," p. 38-72.

Week Seven

[Social Constructionism Cont'd]

Monday

- 1) Alcoff, Linda Martín, "Philosophy and Racial Identity."

Wednesday

- 2) Review of this section.

Epistemology and Race

Week Eight

Monday

- 1) Medina, José, *Epistemology of Resistance*. "Epistemic Resistance and Culpable Ignorance" Chp 4, p. 119-161.

Wednesday

- 2) Frantz, Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness"

Week Nine

Monday

- 1) Mills, Charles, "White Ignorance"

Wednesday

- 2) Davis & Ernst, "Racial gaslighting"

Week Ten

Monday

- 1) Collins, Patricia Hill, "Black Feminist Epistemology"

Wednesday

- 2) Review of this section.

Political Philosophy and Race

Week Eleven

Monday

- 1) Van Norden, Bryan W. (31 October 2017). "Western philosophy is racist". *Aeon*. (<https://aeon.co/essays/why-the-western-philosophical-canon-is-xenophobic-and-racist>).
- 2) Mills, Charles, *The Racial Contract*, Chp 2, p. 41-90.

Wednesday

- 3) Mills Charles, *The Racial Contract*, Chp 2, p. 91-134.

Week Twelve

Monday

- 1) Hanchard, Michael. "Contours of Black Political Thought: An Introduction and Perspective." *Political Theory* 38, no 4 (2010): 510-536.

Wednesday

- 2) Wilson, Yolanda. (2009), "When is Omission a Fault? Or, Maybe Rawls Just Isn't That Into You." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 47: 185-190.

AI and Race

Week Thirteen

Monday

- 1) Tolbert, Alex, "Causal Agnosticism about Race: Variable Selection Problems in Causal Inference."
- 2) Glymour, Clark and Madelyn R. Glymour. 2014. "Commentary: race and sex are causes". *Epidemiology* 25 (4):488–490.

Wednesday

- 3) Sen, Maya and Omar Wasow. 2016. "Race as a Bundle of Sticks: Designs that Estimate Effects of Seemingly Immutable Characteristics". *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (1):499–522.