

PHILO 380: Philosophy and Race

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Office Hours: MW 2:45-3:45 & By appointment.

“We are now [after the election of Barack Obama to the presidency] in a ... post-racial society.”

--Lou Dobbs, *Lou Dobbs Show* 11.12.09

“The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do.”

--James Baldwin, “White Man’s Guilt”

Course Description: In this course, we will investigate philosophical questions surrounding race. It’s undeniable that race has played a major role in the history of the world. But what is race? Does race exist? Whether or not race exists, should we continue to think in racial terms? Isn’t it racist to categorize people into races? What is racism? We will consider these and related questions in the context of studying practical problems surrounding race, including: residential and educational segregation, criminal justice, the costs of noticing race, Black/Blue/All Lives Matter, and the various moral responsibilities citizens have to themselves and to each other in light of these problems. Special attention will be devoted to applying what we learn throughout the course to our lives outside of the classroom and to using our lives outside the classroom to help us learn in this course.

Learning Goals: In this course you will:

- Develop basic philosophical skills of argumentation and analysis.
- Critically evaluate arguments surrounding race.
- Apply philosophical ideas about race to your life.
- Document personal discoveries and insights you experience throughout the class.
- Search for and critically evaluate racial ideas found in the public sphere (e.g., in the news media, on social media, in popular art, etc.).

A Note about the Course: This course will regularly deal with difficult, uncomfortable, and personally challenging ideas. Enrollment in this course constitutes your acceptance of the right of students and the professor to discuss these ideas in an open manner.

Two Ideals Guiding Discussions: Given the range of experience we have with discussing difficult and uncomfortable issues surrounding race, we need to be careful in our discussions. The two ideals guiding our discussions are **Respect** and **Charity**. As speakers, we must do our best to express ourselves respectfully. As listeners, we must be respectful and we must do our best to interpret each other charitably. In both roles, when we’re evaluating things, we must focus our evaluations on the arguments, positions, and ideas, rather than the people expressing those things.

Texts: All texts will be provided on Canvas in the Readings folder.

- There will be around **60 pages of difficult reading per week**. Please plan accordingly.

A Note on Grades: Concern for grades often interferes with learning. There’s evidence that students who care primarily about learning – about raising questions, discovering answers, making connections, and so on – tend to do better in college than those who focus primarily on grades. There’s also evidence that students who have control over their education tend to do better in college than those who don’t. If I knew that you would learn without the promise (or threat) of certain grades, I would give you all A’s and we could dedicate our energy in this class solely to learning philosophy without the distraction of grades. Unfortunately, if I were to give you all A’s right from the start, I expect that many of you would learn little in this class.

Instead, I've created a more realistic, but unusual grading policy that has some of the benefits of the "everyone gets an A from the start" policy. The point of the policy isn't to sort you into A, B, and C students. The point is to help you learn. It also gives you quite a bit of choice, as you'll see. **This is your education. You will get out of it what you put into it.** If you take the assignments seriously, you can learn a lot in this class, and you'll probably get an A. If you don't take the assignments seriously, you might not learn much.

This policy will stress some of you out. It's different. But this difference is good. Don't just take my word for it: in past classes that used this policy, when asked what I should NOT change about the class, *many* students – including students who initially disliked the policy – insisted that I should not change this grading policy. Failing the class will be very difficult. Getting an A will be challenging, but doable if you focus on the learning. However, if you really feel uncomfortable with this way of grading, feel free to discuss it with me or enroll in a different class.

Please feel free to check in with me **in person** at any time to check your standing in the course if you are unsure.

Grade Policy

The **Core Assignments** are:

- Exam 1
- Exam 2
- Philosophy in Life Post 1
- Philosophy in Life Post 2
- Race in your Field Assignment
- Media Monday Assignment

You will receive an **A** (before "grade changers" are taken into account) if you:

1. Pass all of the Core Assignments.
2. Pass 2 Additional Assignments.
3. Pass at least 11 Reading Memos.
4. Participate regularly.
5. Receive 3 "Exceptional" marks.

You will receive a **B** (before "grade changers" are taken into account) in this class if you:

1. Pass all of the Core Assignments.
2. Pass 1 Additional Assignment.
3. Pass at least 9 Reading Memos
4. Participate regularly.
5. Receive 2 "Exceptional" marks.

You will receive a **C** (before “grade changers” are taken into account) if you:

1. Pass all of the Core Assignments.

2. Pass at least 7 Reading Memos.

OR

You will receive a **C** if you don’t pass exactly one of the Core Assignments.

You will receive a **D** (before “grade changers” are taken into account) if:

- You don’t meet exactly two of the Core Assignments.

You will receive an **F** if:

- You don’t meet three or more of the Core Assignments

Grade Changers

- If you have 5 more or more absences, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade.
- For every 2 late assignments, you will lose one Exceptional mark.
- If you have 4 Exceptional marks, you may change an “Incomplete” on an **attempted** assignment to a “Pass.”

Required Assignments

All assignments will be graded as Exceptional, Pass, or Incomplete. If you earn an Exceptional, you also Pass. See Assignment Guide for more details on assignments.

Attendance: You won’t do well in this course if you don’t attend. So, attendance is required. To find out what you missed when you miss class, come to office hours or ask:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Exams: You will take two take-home exams in this course. Students who have never taken a philosophy class often feel anxiety about philosophy exams: “Isn’t philosophy just my opinion? How will I be graded on my opinion?” The exams will not be based on your opinions. They will test your understanding of course content. They are meant to assess your grasp of the readings and in-class discussions, to provide you with more incentive to reflect on the material, and to allow you to demonstrate what you’ve learned.

Reading Memos: To help you reflect on the readings, you will write weekly reading memos. On weeks when there is more than one reading assignment, you may choose which reading to write on. The memos are to be turned in on Canvas before the beginning of class on the first day we are scheduled to discuss that reading. These memos are relatively informal: You'll reflect philosophically on some component of the article. This might mean raising an objection, or summarizing and clarifying some point that you took to be obscure, or providing some additional argument in support of a claim you take the author to be making. The idea is for you to engage philosophically with the texts even before you come to class. If you write a memo and it is clear to me that you have made a good-faith effort to carefully read and understand the article, then you will receive a Pass. At the end of the semester, I will give each student one free Reading Memo Pass. No late memos will be accepted. You may rewrite up to two reading memos that you do not pass.

Participation: Participating in class benefits you and others. We often learn while we attempt to express our thoughts. And since you have a unique perspective, everyone else in the class learns when you share that perspective. In order to earn an A or a B, you need to participate regularly. Here are **some ways to participate**:

1. Ask questions about the readings or lectures.
2. Answer questions when asked.
3. Contribute your perspective to a discussion.
4. Raise objections to arguments.
5. Mention a relevant life experience at an appropriate time.
6. Discuss course material with me outside of class.
7. Participate during small group activities.
8. Complete in-class writing assignments.

Philosophy in Life Posts: To help you get in the habit of approaching your life philosophically, you will complete two "philosophy in life" posts in the discussion forums on Canvas. For these assignments, you will write about how what you've learned or thought about in this course connects to your life. You will also read and comment on some of your peers' posts.

Race in your Field: I want to give you an opportunity to reflect on what racial issues arise in your major or career field. For this assignment, you will consult an expert in your field to get their take on something you should know about the relation between your field and race. Then you will share this with the class.

Media Mondays: Racial issues arise in various forms of media. We will work together to collect media relevant to the course topics. Most Mondays in the second half of the course will be devoted to discussing race in various media. Students will be split into **six** groups. Each Media Monday members of one group will lead a casual discussion of an assigned podcast, members of the second group will post media content on Canvas the night before class and discuss how it relates to course material in class, and members of the other groups will have no responsibilities (other than participating in discussion in class). There are **six** Media Mondays. So, each group will play each role **once**.

Additional Assignments

All assignments will be graded as Exceptional, Pass, or Incomplete. If you earn an Exceptional, you also Pass. See Assignment Guide for more details on assignments.

Critical Paper: Write a 2-3 page paper that critically engages an argument from a reading. Explain the argument in your own words, then criticize the argument by either (1) arguing against its

conclusion, (2) arguing against one of its premises, (3) arguing that its premises do not lend support to its conclusion, or (4) arguing that there is a better argument for that conclusion. [I strongly encourage philosophy majors to choose this as one of your additional assignments.]

Meme Project: Analyze a “meme” from social media in light of what you’ve learned in this course. This analysis can take many forms. You might explain the idea behind the meme and then either explain why that idea is mistaken or how it exemplifies a theory or argument discussed in class.

Race, Philosophy, and Art: Find a passage in a poem, novel, play, song, or some visual piece of art that relates to course material. Provide the passage, a link to the song, a picture of the visual art, etc., and explain how it relates to the course. (Submitting your own art is welcomed and encouraged!)

Double-Consciousness: Explain DuBois’s idea of double-consciousness in your own words. Then describe an instance in your life when you experienced this phenomenon.

Change of Mind: During your time in this course, you may change your mind about some course-relevant issue. Explain the issue, describe your previous opinion and why you used to think that, and then explain what you now think and why your opinion changed. When appropriate, be sure to explain an argument, theory, or reading that caused you to change your mind.

Other: You may propose other “Additional Assignments” throughout the semester. If you want to do this, you’ll need to explain to me how it helps meet one of the course learning objectives.

Communication

Office Hours: I will have regular office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays throughout the semester. This means I will be available in my office to discuss course material (or other issues). If my scheduled office hours aren’t convenient, feel free to schedule a different time to meet.

“I wish I had come to office hours all semester!”

You can benefit from discussing course material outside of class. **True story:** One semester, a student of mine who never came to office hours earned one of the lowest grades on the midterm. Then he started regularly attending office hours. Right before the final, he told me, “I wish I had come to office hours all semester.” He ended up getting one of the highest grades on the final. Don’t be like this student! Don’t wait! The course material is difficult. Come discuss it with me.¹

I would like each student to visit me once during the 4th or 5th week of the semester.

Contact Policy: Outside of office hours, you can reach me at the email address above. I will respond promptly within 24 hours to most emails. If you do not receive a reply within 24 hours, please talk to me in class or send another email as a reminder. **If you have a question about the course mechanics or schedule, please check the syllabus before emailing.**

Your Responsibilities: I expect you to regularly check your email and Canvas for announcements.

Electronic Devices

Electronic devices are permitted in class, but must be used solely for class purposes. Browsing Facebook, catching all of the Pokemon, and captioning animal pictures are not class purposes. I will prohibit devices if they are not being used appropriately.

¹ Why should you go to office hours? <http://college.usatoday.com/2015/11/28/office-hours/> What are some things you might say in office hours? <https://studentlife.uoregon.edu/node/381050>

Cheating and Plagiarism

If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing in this course, you will receive an XF as your final grade for the course. You'll also be required to take the K-State Development and Integrity Course.

Completing this course will remove the X from your record, but not the F. Here is the university's official statement on Academic Honesty:

Kansas State University has an Honor and Integrity System based on personal integrity, which is presumed to be sufficient assurance that, in academic matters, one's work is performed honestly and without unauthorized assistance. Undergraduate and graduate students, by registration, acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Honor and Integrity System. The policies and procedures of the Honor and Integrity System apply to all full and part-time students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses on-campus, off-campus, and via distance learning. The Honor and Integrity System website can be reached via the following URL: www.k-state.edu/honor. A component vital to the Honor and Integrity System is the inclusion of the Honor Pledge which applies to all assignments, examinations, or other course work undertaken by students. The Honor Pledge is implied, whether or not it is stated: "On my honor, as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work." A grade of XF can result from a breach of academic honesty. The F indicates failure in the course; the X indicates the reason is an Honor Pledge violation.

Feel free to ask before completing assignments whether some behavior counts as cheating or plagiarism.

Disabilities

I will do my best to help students with disabilities or learning challenges succeed in this course. Students with disabilities who need classroom accommodations, access to technology, or information about emergency building/campus evacuation processes should contact the Student Access Center and/or their instructor. Services are available to students with a wide range of disabilities including, but not limited to, physical disabilities, medical conditions, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, depression, and anxiety. If you are a student enrolled in campus/online courses through the Manhattan or Olathe campuses, contact the Student Access Center at accesscenter@k-state.edu, 785-532-6441; for K-State Polytechnic campus, contact Academic and Student Services at polytechnicadvising@ksu.edu or call 785-826-2974.

Schedule

Note: The first half of the class is heavy on the reading, but light on the assignments. The second half is the opposite.

Week 1

1/17: Introduction: Getting to Know Each Other

1/19: Introduction: Course Mechanics and Language Read the syllabus. Seriously.

Week 2: Some History

1/22: History of Race

Blum "Race: A Brief History"

1/24: History of Race

Blum (Cont'd)

1/26: Segregation and Reparations

Coates "A Case for Reparations"

Assignments

Weekly Reading Memo

Week 3-4: Segregation

1/29: Segregation Today	Anderson “Why Integration Remains an Imperative” (Recommended)
1/31: Segregation and Social Inequality	Anderson “Segregation and Social Inequality”
2/2: Segregation and Material Inequality	Anderson “Racial Segregation and Material Inequality”
2/5: Segregation Today Again	Anderson “Racial Segregation Today”
2/7: Imperative of Integration	Anderson “Imperative of Integration”
2/9: Against the Imperative of Integration	Shelby “Integration, Inequality, and the Imperatives of Justice”

Assignments

Weekly Reading Memos

Weeks 5-6: Criminal Justice

2/12: Race and the Criminal Justice System	Alexander <i>The New Jim Crow</i> selections
2/14: Race and the Criminal Justice System	Alexander <i>The New Jim Crow</i> selections
2/16: Race and the Criminal Justice System	Alexander <i>The New Jim Crow</i> selections
2/19: Questioning the New Jim Crow	Forman “Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration”
2/21: Crime as a Response to Oppression	Shelby “Crime”
2/23: Catch-Up/Exam 1 Discussion Day	

Assignments

Weekly Reading Memos

Weeks 7-8: Metaphysics of Race

2/26: Media Monday	
2/28: Do Races Exist?	Blum “Do Races Exist?”
3/2: Do Races Exist?	Blum (Cont’d)
3/5: Media Monday	
3/7: Social Construction	Blum “Racialized Groups and Social Construction”
3/9: Social Construction	Alcoff “Latinos/as, Asian Americans, and the Black White Binary”

Assignments

Weekly Reading Memos
2/26 Media Monday
2/27 Exam 1 Due by 1pm on Canvas
3/5 Media Monday
3/6 Philosophy in Life Post 1

Week 9: Racism	
3/12: Media Monday	
3/14: What is Racism?	Blum “Racism: Its Core Meaning”
3/16: What is Racism?	Tatum “Defining Racism”
Assignments	
Weekly Reading Memo	
3/12 Media Monday	

Week 10
3/19-3/23: Spring Break!!

Week 11: Colorblindness	
3/26: Race in Your Field Discussion Day	
3/28: Colorblindness	Tatum “Colorblind Racial Ideology”
3/30: Raising Colorblind Children?	TBD
Assignments	
Weekly Reading Memo	
3/25 Race in Your Field Post on Canvas	
3/26 Race in Your Field Discussion	
3/28 Race, Philosophy, and Art	

Week 12: Existential Costs of Color-Consciousness	
4/2: Media Monday	
4/4: Existential Costs of Color-Consciousness	DuBois <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> Selections
	Taylor “Existence, Experience, and Elisions”
4/6: Existential Costs of Color-Consciousness	Taylor (cont’d)
Assignments	
Weekly Reading Memo	
4/2 Media Monday	
4/5 Meme Project	

Week 13: White Privilege and White Responsibility	
4/9: Media Monday	
4/11: White Privilege	McIntosh “White Privilege”
4/13: Whites’ Responsibilities	Alcoff “What Should White People Do?”
Assignments	
Weekly Reading Memo	
4/9 Media Monday	
4/11 Critical Paper	

Week 14-15: Protest, Dissent, and Black Lives Matter

4/16: Media Monday

4/18: Responding to Injustice

4/20: Impure Dissent

King "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Shelby "Impure Dissent"

4/23: Black Lives Matter

4/25: Black Lives Matter (Cont'd)

4/27: Black Lives Matter (Cont'd)

LeBron *Black Lives Matter* selections

LeBron (Cont'd)

LeBron (Cont'd)

Assignments

Weekly Reading Memos

4/16 Media Monday

4/17 Double-Consciousness Assignment

4/18 Philosophy in Life Post 2

4/25 Change of Mind

Week 16

4/30-5/4 Dead Week

Catch-Up

5/4: Exam 2 Discussion Day

Assignments

None.

Week 17

Finals week: Exam 2 due.