

Philosophy 213

Professor William

Lewis

Skidmore College
wlewis@skidmore.edu
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LADD 207
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
TU-TH 12:40-2:00

e-mail:

office: Ladd 216

office hours:

phone: (518) 580-5402



Philosophy of Race and Gender

Course Description and Goals

Reasoned arguments about the status and meaning of the categories of race and gender have been a part of philosophy almost since its inception. For the most part, these arguments have taken two forms, with some philosophers arguing that race and gender are essential categories that must be taken account in any comprehensive account of human existence and other philosophers arguing that race and gender are secondary characteristics whose discussion is not worthy of philosophical consideration in regard to what is the good for human beings. In fairly recent times, these positions have been somewhat complicated by thinkers who point out that, essential or no, the categories of race and gender tend to color, influence and maybe even determine the way in which we are able to live in the world and think about it. Though this class will frequently refer to the history of philosophy, its will focus on relatively recent and contemporary arguments about the ontological status and the practical effects of the categories of race and gender on our lives. It is hoped that, by exploring and critiquing historical and contemporary understandings of race and gender, we will emerge from the class better able to understand the way in which these categories can and do function in shaping our selves, our culture and our world.

Student Learning Objectives

- Be able to demonstrate an understanding of the major positions on a particular philosophical topic: race and gender
- Be able to recognize and formulate philosophical questions
- Be able to work with and understand difficult texts in philosophy
- Be able to explain and critically examine philosophical arguments
- Be able to engage in dialogue with their peers and support their own positions
- Be able to read and think about philosophy profitably in the future (outside the context of philosophy courses)
- Be able to relate course contents and ideas to other areas of study and to student's lived experience.

How Class Is Run

Class will be conducted as a discussion animated principally by the texts that we have read in preparation for the class or the questions that we have been asked to consider. At any time during a class session, feel free to ask a question or to start debate. Also, don't be surprised if I ask you questions about the reading or about the topic we are addressing. Your communication with me and with the rest of the class is integral to our learning experience. In addition to being concepts, race and gender are deeply felt and profoundly experienced. Their discussion can bring up feelings of anger, sadness, joy, pessimism, optimism, as well as many other powerful feelings. Words and opinions expressed by our classmates can make some appear as allies and some appear as enemies. We must respect these feelings but we should also attempt to understand why and how they exist and what they add to our understanding of race and gender. In all classes but especially with race and gender and because of this sensitivity, all communication in this class must be predicated on the mutual respect that we have for each other as differently informed discussants participating with good will in a mutual inquiry into the nature of race and gender. Approached in this way, our discussions should help to bring what can at times seem obscure philosophical arguments into relation with our everyday lives. Of course, any discussion depends on your knowledgeable participation for it to be worthwhile and interesting. Because of this, it is expected that you will come to class having read the texts and having formulated some opinions and/or questions about them. For my part, I promise to come with opinions and questions of my own and, when possible, to have answers to your questions. When I don't, I'm sure that the rest of the class will be glad to help us in jointly finding their solution.

Evaluation and Grading

a. class participation: 15%

Philosophy and philosophical texts are very difficult and often hard to understand on our own. Because of this and because this class includes discussion and discussions need participants, attendance is mandatory, you are expected to take part in all class discussions. This aspect of your performance will be reflected in a small portion of your grade that in no way reflects its overall importance to the class. However, it should also be an easy 15% given that this participation is basic to the class and demands no more of you than showing up ready to express an informed opinion after having read the texts or thought about the questions assigned for the day. [A good guide for this preparation is to sketch-out, everyday, the first three parts of a journal entry. Even if you don't write it, you will be suitably prepared for class.] The participation grade is based upon the quality (not necessarily quantity) of your contribution as evidenced by your thoughtful and appropriate engagement with the material and with the ideas of your peers and myself. It is very hard to participate well if you don't show up to class. At the end of the semester, you will be asked to assess your own class participation and attendance. This assessment will be compared against my records and impressions in order to determine a final grade.

b. journal:¹ 40%

The purpose of this journal is to prepare you for class discussion and to provide a basis for understanding the material in addition to your class notes. The journal's content will consist primarily of two things: (A) a summary and analysis of the reading for class that day; and (B) reflections on questions that I pose to you about the readings or about issues we raise in class. For the former, I will expect each journal entry on a reading to include:

1. A Summary of the essay's main theme and points
2. An analysis of the author's argument that recounts the author's evidence for her or his points and notes significant passages in the text.
3. The formulation of questions about the text and/or the identification of points of confusion in regards to the author's argument.

Better entries may also include:

4. Consideration of the context (historical, geographic, economic, philosophical) that informs the author's piece.
5. Comments on whether the piece is relevant to your or our experience, in what way, and how. If it is irrelevant, then provide some criticism detailing why this is so.
6. Consideration of the piece's relationship to other essays that we have read in class. For instance, does it compliment them, refute them, or supersede them?
7. The reconsideration of other journal entries in light of the new piece.

As for the latter aspect of the journal, your "reflections on questions that I pose to you," I will provide specific instructions about how these are to be handled when we get to each of them. Journal entries are due in class the day that the article or question that it addresses is discussed. Entries may be handwritten but must be clear and well edited. At the top of each entry, put the date, your name, and the name of the reading assignment you are summarizing or the question you are answering. From those journal entries that you submit, I will use the 10 best to compute your grade. For the individual entries, a "√+" will indicate a good summary or thoughtful answer to the question which is extended by your own

¹ For the basic format of this journal and for many ideas about its purpose and use, I am indebted to Margaret Duncombe of the University of Colorado and her syllabus for ES212, "Race, Class and Gender."

reflection and integration with other materials, a “√” will indicate a solid summary or complete answer, and an “–” will indicate significant misreading (or non-reading) of the text or a failure to answer the question asked.

c. 3 short papers: 45% (15% each)

There will be 3 short papers (3-5 pages) written for the class.

- One will be a reflective paper on how race and gender categories inform your own self-understanding.
- The second will examine disciplinary perspectives on race.
- The third will have you assess the status of race and gender as objects of philosophical discussion. An assignment sheet will be given for each essay detailing what need be accomplished in the paper.

No late assignments will be accepted without express permission of the instructor obtained at least 24 hours before the assignment’s due date. Violations of the Skidmore College Honor Code will result in an “F” for a class grade as well as all penalties imposed by the Honors System.

Required Readings

Most readings are in either of the two anthologies available at the bookstore.

- The first anthology is the Alcoff and Mendieta edited, *Identities*, designated in the class schedule by an “(I)”.
- The second anthology is the Bernasconi and Lott edited, *The Idea of Race*, designated in the class schedule by an “(IR).”
- All other texts will be in the PH “(pc).

Note

I encourage you to see me if you are having problems with the readings, with understanding class discussions or lectures, or if you just wish to talk more about issues raised in the class. I am willing to spend time with you in person to help you get as much out of the course as you wish. Email is the best way to get in touch with me outside of the class.

Schedule

Introduction to Philosophy of Race and Gender

- Thursday, Sept. 4th Introduction: "Is Race or Gender a Philosophical Object?"
- Tuesday, Sept. 9th Discussion: "In What Way is Race or Gender a Philosophical Object?"

Modern Notions of the Self and of Race

- Thursday, Sept. 11th Locke, Second Treatise, selections (pc)
- Tuesday, Sept. 16th Kant, "Of the Different Human Races" (IR)
Darwin, "On the Races of Man" (IR)
Houston, "Distribution of the Human Race" (pc)

The Construction of Identity

- Thursday, Sept. 18th Freud, "Consciousness and What is Unconscious"(I); "Femininity" (pc)
- Tuesday, Sept. 23rd Marx & Engels, "The German Ideology"(pc)
- Thursday, Sept. 25th Engels, "The Origin of the Family"(pc)
- Tuesday, Sept. 30th Mead, "The Self"(I)
•••essay #1 assigned•••

The Ideal of Race and the Science of Race

- Thursday, October 2nd Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races" (I)
- Tuesday, Oct. 7th Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument, Du Bois & the Illusion of Race" (IR)
•••essay # 2 assigned•••

Articulations of Racial Identity

- Thursday, Oct. 9th Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness" (I)
- Tuesday, Oct. 14th Alcoff "Mestizo Identity" (IR)
•••essay #1 due•••

Revisiting Sociological, Biological & Conceptual Arguments

- Thursday, Oct. 16th Omi & Winant, "Racial Formation in the United States" (IR)
- Tuesday, Oct. 21st Glasgow, "On the New Biology of Race"(pc)
Rushton & Whitney, "Cross-National variation in violent crime rates: Race, r-K theory & income"(pc)
•••essay #2 research component due•••
- Thursday, Oct. 23rd Hardimon, "The Ordinary Concept of Race" (pc)
- Tuesday, Oct. 28th Haslanger, "What Good Are Our Intuitions? Philosophical Analysis and Social Kinds" (pc)

Reports

- Thursday, Oct. 30th Reports
- Tuesday, Nov. 4th Reports

A Modern Notion of Gender

Thursday, Nov. 6th Rousseau, *Emile* (pc)
•••Essay #2 Due•••

Phenomenologies of Gender

Tuesday, Nov. 11th De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (I)

Thursday, Nov. 13th Young, "Throwing Like a Girl (I)

Identity as Difference

Tuesday, Nov. 18th Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One* (pc)

Thursday, Nov. 20th Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, selections (pc)

Revisiting Conceptual Arguments

Tuesday, Nov. 25th Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory and Psychoanalytic Discourse"(I)
•••essay #3 assigned •••

Thursday, Nov. 27th **Thanksgiving Break**

Tuesday, Dec. 2nd Mikkola, "Ontological Commitments, Sex and Gender" (pc)

Thursday, Dec. 4th Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman'"
(pc)

Conclusion

Tuesday, Dec. 9th Discussion: The Academic Study of Race and Gender

Finals Week

•••essay #3 due•••
•••self-evaluations due•••