

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 3930
African Philosophy
Fall 2010

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Philosophy began in Africa. We begin with Ancient Egyptian philosophy. The text written inside the pyramid walls concern justice and the soul, cosmogony and the relations between humans and gods. We then jump up to post-colonial African philosophers. We look at several movements in recent African philosophy, touching on most of the major African philosophers, dealing with such topics as reason and culture, time and destiny, witchcraft and aesthetics. We will view some African films during the course. Part of the focus of this part of the course concerns the relation between philosophy and the culture from which it arises. Many different approaches to this relation are possible. We then move to Fanon's great work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, which deals with the movement to de-colonize African nations: politically, existentially, aesthetically, and psychologically. Finally, we discuss a range of African-American philosophies, ranging from the early works of DuBois, through the writings of King and Malcolm X, to current philosophers. We discuss both basic theories of race, Afrocentrism, and cosmopolitanism, as well as topics like gender issues, affirmative action, hate speech, electoral politics, ebonics, and communicability across cultures. We will also look at very current political issues as they arise during the semester.

Some issues in this course are controversial and challenging. The course is designed to be respectful to all respectful points of view. Since there are always several plausible positions within any philosophical topic, and many approaches within the long and rich traditions of African philosophy, participants in this course will have to read the texts carefully and critically, with open minds—as philosophers always do. I look forward to many interesting discussions in class. –Jay Lampert

Texts:

Mosely, *African Philosophy*
Montmarquet and Hardy, *Reflections: An Anthology of African American Philosophy*
Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*
--Coursepack

Readings:

Sept 15 Introduction to the course; Introduction to the relation between philosophy and culture; Introduction to Ancient Egyptian philosophy (no readings)

Sept 22 Lesko, Lichtheim (both in Coursepack - "C"): Cosmogony (origins of the universe), religious syncretism (combinations of gods), polytheism and monotheism, identifications of humans and gods, parts of the soul, theory of justice, the Egyptian theory of rebirth and Egyptian challenges to the theory of rebirth

Discussion: Is there reason to believe there are many gods, not just one?

Sept 29 Odera Oruka, Parker (both readings) (all in C), and Senghor (in "African Philosophy" – "A"): Reason and non-rational thought, critique and tradition, modernity, philosophy and politics, individual philosophers and cultures.

Discussion: Is it possible to generalize about the philosophical viewpoint of a culture, e.g. to describe general difference between Western, Eastern, or African cultures or philosophies?

Oct 6 Wiredu, Hountondji (both in A), and Gbadegesin (in C): universalism and cultural difference, custom and thought, religion and morality, the concept of person and destiny.

Discussion: Is "destiny" a concept that makes sense in the modern world?

Oct 13 Mbiti, Oluwole (both in A): Time; Witchcraft

Discussion: Is personal experience sufficient evidence to believe in phenomena like witchcraft?

Oct 20 Mudimbe (in C); film viewing: Postmodern, postcolonial, aesthetics

Discussion: Is cultural appropriation always entirely wrong? When, if ever, is it OK to use ideas, images, or products from another culture? And when, if ever, is it OK to modernize, change, or abandon one's own cultural traditions?

Oct 27 Fanon, chapter "Concerning Violence": The nature of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, neo-colonialism, cultural oppression, etc.; Fanon's Existentialism

Discussion: Is violence ever justified in the service of gaining liberty from an oppressor?

Nov 3 Fanon, chapters "On National Culture", "Colonialism and Mental Disorders" (Read to the end of Series A, p. 270): Traditional, modern, and political art; relation between social relations and psychology

Discussion: Is anything truly non-political (e.g. art for art's sake, or individual feelings?)

Nov 10 Dubois, Appiah (both in A), and Appiah, King, Malcolm X, Asante, and Karenga (all in "Reflections" – R): Nationalism, Afrocentrism, Cosmopolitanism; Does "race" exist?; What is the explanation for stereotyping, and to what extent does it still

exist? Is it possible for a white person not to be prejudiced? What are the experiences of people of different races when they see each others' bodies?

Discussion: Is "colourblindness" an ideal? I.e., should we try to get to the point where nobody notices another person's race, or should we always acknowledge differences?

Nov 17 West, Smitherman, hooks, Mills (all in R): Racism, ebonics, race and gender

Discussion: Do Black men have a moral duty to marry black women (Mills)?

Nov 24 Boxill, Steele, Lawrence and Gunther (all in R): Affirmative action, welfare, voting, immigration, hate speech, snitching, intervention in other cultures

Discussion: The desire to end hate speech, and the desire to encourage free speech, are both good. In cases where these two values conflict, which should take precedence?

Dec 1 Group presentations (no readings)

Grading Scheme:

5-page paper on philosophy's relation to culture, based on one or two of the readings

Oct 20 30%

10-12 page term paper, on a topic of the student's choice, based on the course

Dec 1 40%

1-page outline of the term paper Nov 17 5%

* Discussion question, submitted each week 10%

Class Participation 10%

** Group presentation, Dec 1 5%

* There will be small-group discussions on each class day, just after the coffee break. The topics will be given in the course outline above. Bring three written sentences indicating what position you expect to start with in the discussion. You will hand this in just after the break in each class (around 8:30 pm). Of course, you are free to alter your views once the discussion begins.

** To be presented on Dec. 1. After Nov. 17, once everyone has outlined their paper topic, we will divide the class into groups of five, based on who has similar paper topics. Those five students will meet once, probably for about an hour, to work out how they would like to present that topic area to the rest of the class. For example, if five students have chosen to write about the African concept of destiny, and each has a different approach to the question, they will work out how to present the similarities and differences of their approaches to the class. Depending on how many students there are in the class, these presentations may have to be extremely brief, perhaps as short as 5 minutes per group, followed by perhaps 5 more minutes of discussion in the class as a whole. I will say more about the format on Nov. 17.

Selection of African films (one or more to be presented in class):

Brightness, Souleymane Cissé, Mali 1987

Night of Truth, Fanta Régina Nacro, Burkina Faso, 2004

Black Girl, Ousmane Sembene, Senegal, 1966

Guimba the Tyrant, Cheik Oumar Sissoko, Mali, 1995

Karmen Gei, Joseph Gai Ramaka, Senegal, 2001

Killer of Sheep, Charles Burnett, USA 1977

Superfly, Gordon Parks Jr., USA, 1972

5 Standard Statements for Dissemination to Students in the BA Program, Fall 2010

E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement...

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor [or designated person] in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. Where possible, this should be done in advance of the missed work or event, but otherwise, just as soon as possible after the due date, and certainly no longer than one week later. Note: if appropriate documentation of your inability to meet that in-course requirement is necessary, the course instructor, or delegate, will request it of you. Such documentation will rarely be required for course components representing less than 10% of the course grade. Such documentation will be required, however, for Academic Consideration for missed end-of-term work and/or missed final examinations. See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration.

(<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/co8/c08-ac.shtml>). Also see the BA Counselling Office website (www.uoguelph.ca/baco)

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester **Fall 2010 courses**, without academic penalty, is **Thurs, Nov. 4, 2010**.

For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar. (<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>)

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins all members of the University community - faculty, staff, and students - to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. The University of Guelph takes a serious view of academic misconduct,

and it is your responsibility as a student to be aware of and to abide by the University's policy. Included in the definition of academic misconduct are such activities as cheating on examinations, plagiarism, misrepresentation, and submitting the same material in two different courses without written permission from the relevant instructors. To better understand your responsibilities, read the Undergraduate Calendar.

(<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c01/index.shtml>) for a statement of Students' Academic Responsibilities; also read the full Academic Misconduct Policy (<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>). You are also advised to make use of the resources available through the Learning Commons (<http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/>) and to discuss any questions you may have with your course instructor, TA, or academic counsellor.

Instructors have the right to use software to aid in the detection of plagiarism or copying and to examine students orally on submitted work. For students found guilty of academic misconduct, serious penalties, up to and including suspension or expulsion, can be imposed. Hurried or careless submission of work does not exonerate students of responsibility for ensuring the academic integrity of their work. Similarly, students who find themselves unable to meet course requirements by the deadlines or criteria expected because of medical, psychological or compassionate circumstances should review the university's regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration in the calendar

(<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-ac.shtml>) and discuss their situation with the instructor and/or the program counsellor or other academic counsellor as appropriate.

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Resources

The Undergraduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs. It can be found at:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/>