

Afro-Caribbean Political Philosophy

Course Description: A distinctive and varied, if (still) underexplored, philosophical tradition grows out of the 20th century Afro-Caribbean world, a world characterized by colonial domination. In this course, we will cover some of the key developments in that tradition through a reading of three of its most important figures, Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, and Sylvia Wynter. Each of these figures contribute and develop a line of questioning that will be our central focus throughout the semester. Is traditional (European) humanism complicit in the dehumanizing practices of colonialism? (Each author argues that it is.) If so, how? How should we understand the category of the human in light of the claim that traditional humanism contributes to colonial and dehumanizing practices? What kinds of theoretical and practical activities count as combatting the colonial legacy of dehumanization?

We will begin by reading two of Césaire's highly influential and path-breaking works, *Discourse on Colonialism* and *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Our focuses in this portion of the course will be on his use of the concept of "Negritude" and his arguments that "Europe" is historically and conceptually constituted through practices of colonial domination. In the next portion of the course, we will read the majority of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and portions of *Wretched of the Earth* and *A Dying Colonialism*. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon builds on many of Césaire's insights to develop a broad account of the social and psychological structure and effects of colonial domination. Moreover, he suggests that this project is about "Striving for a New Humanism" (xi). A question that is largely left open by this account concerns the kinds of political practices that contribute to actualizing a new humanism. In *Wretched of the Earth* and *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon addresses this question, arguing in the former, for example, that violent decolonial resistance "is truly the creation of new men" (2). For the rest of the semester, we will read a series of essays written by Sylvia Wynter, in which she offers perhaps the most systematically ambitious and historically detailed critique and reconstruction of humanism to date. Our focuses will be to understand her concept of "autopoietic" institution of human kinds or "genres", the function of historiography in her work, and her proposal for a new kind of human "genre" that is no longer plagued by that logic of exclusion characteristic of traditional humanist thought.

Assignments and Grade Composition:

Participation & Attendance 10%

All students are expected to regularly attend and participate in class. Your participation grade is, in part, determined by *respectfully* navigating any disagreements that arise in class.

Discussion Questions 20%

During the first class, students will sign up to submit discussion questions for three weeks of class. These questions should be well-motivated and refer to specific claims or arguments made in the reading for that class. The questions will be available to all enrolled students one day before class.

Midterm Paper 30%

All enrolled students will write a 4-5 page exegetical paper explaining a specific argument or claim made by *one* author in *one* text. Students must select an argument or claim and have me approve the selection.

Final Paper

40%

All enrolled students will write a 9-12 page argumentative paper that defends a specific claim that engages with the text(s) covered in the course. Students are encouraged, but not required, to incorporate material from midterm papers with appropriate revisions. All students must have their topics approved by me.

Recommended Reading:

Padget Henry *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*

Robin D.G. Kelley "A Poetics of Anticolonialism" in *Discourse on Colonialism*

John Drabinski "Césaire's Apocalyptic World" in *South Atlantic Quarterly*

Lewis Gordon *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought*

Franz Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy (ed. Elizabeth A. Hope & Tracey Nicholls)

Sylvia Wynter: *On Being Human as Praxis* (ed. Katherine McKittrick)

Elisabeth Paquette "Ceremonies of Liberation: On Wynter and Solidarity" in *CLR James Journal*

Elisabeth Paquette "Autopoietic Systems" in *Radical Philosophy Review*

Schedule of Readings:

Part 1: Césaire

Week 1

Discourse on Colonialism

Week 2

Discourse on Colonialism

Week 3

Notebook of a Return to the Native Land

Part 2: Fanon

Week 4

Black Skin, White Masks (Introduction and Chapter 1)

Week 5

Black Skin, White Masks (Chapters 4&5)

Week 6

Black Skin, White Masks (Chapter 6)

Week 7

Black Skin, White Masks (Chapters 7&8)

Week 8

Wretched of the Earth (Ch 1)

Week 9

A Dying Colonialism (Ch 1)

Part 3: Wynter

Week 10

“1492: A New World View”

Week 11

“The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism”

Week 12

“Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument”

Week 13

“Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What it is Like to be ‘Black’”

Week 14

“On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project”

Week 15

“The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overtturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency, and the Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition”