



PHIL 4015/6014 Philosophy of Race (Fall, 2017)

Contact Information (and Policy):

Professor: Daniel Wodak dwodak@vt.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday, 3.20–5.20 pm 217 Major Williams Hall
Contact Policy: questions sent via email will be responded promptly, unless the student has not checked the syllabus, google, or readings; requests for appointments should include three suggested meeting times.

Course Description:

Philosophy of race is an important and growing sub-discipline. And it has two features that make it a particularly interesting sub-discipline. First, it is of significant *public* interest given the pertinence of issues about race in public discourse. Second, it is of significant *philosophical* interest given how it draws on, and draws connections between, central topics in metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, ethics.

We will focus on two central topics in philosophy of race. First, the metaphysics of races: do races exist, and if so, are they biological kinds, or socially constructed? Second, racism and criminal justice: do racial biases lead to injustices before the law, and if so, what should be done about it?

Meetings and Course Materials:

Meeting times: Thursdays, 3.30–6.15 pm in Goodwin 244

Required text: All readings are available as PDFs on Canvas under Files.

Prerequisites: Students should have some familiarity with philosophy. Exceptions can be made to this policy; contact me if you are unsure.

Class Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Speaker
August 31	The Metaphysics of Race	Charles Mills, 'But What Are You Really?', pp. 41-49	
September 7	Racial Realism	Quayshawn Spencer, 'What 'Biological Racial Realism' Should Mean' and 'A Radical Solution to the Race Problem'	Quayshawn Spencer
September 14	NO CLASS	*NB: the readings for next week are unusually long. Start early.	
September 21	Error Theories About Race	Naomi Zack, <i>Philosophy of Science and Race</i> , pp. 87-88; Anthony Appiah, 'Race, Culture, Identity. Part 1: Against Race'.	
September 28	Racial Constructivism I	Charles Mills, 'But What Are You Really?', pp. 48-66	
October 5	Racial Constructivism II	Sally Haslanger, 'A Social Constructionist's Analysis of Race'	
October 12	Eliminativism vs. Conservativism	Ron Mallon, 'Race': Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic'	IN-CLASS PEER REVIEW SESSION
October 19	Race and Criminal Justice	Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow</i> , 'Introduction' and 'The Color of Justice'	
October 26	Racial Bias Among Police	Vanessa Wills, 'Bad Guys and Dirty Hands: "Ethical Policing" in the Face of Racial Injustice'	Vanessa Wills
November 2	Racial Bias Among Citizens	Renee Bollinger, 'Reasonable Mistakes and Regulative Norms: Racial Bias in Defensive Harm'	
November 9	Racism & Mass Incarceration I	Angela Davis, <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> , 'Introduction' and 'Abolitionist Alternatives'	
November 16	Racism & Mass Incarceration II	Andrea Pitts, 'White Supremacy, Mass Incarceration, and Clinical Medicine'	Andrea Pitts

November 30	Against Racial Profiling	Naomi Zack, <i>White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide</i> , chapter 2	
December 7	Racial Profiling: A Defense	David Boonin, <i>Should Race Matter?</i> , ch. 11 'Is Racial Profiling Immoral?'	David Boonin (via Skype)

Expectations for Classroom Conduct:

This class will discuss some very controversial issues, and within each section there will be a wide variety of moral, political, and religious commitments, some of which may be radically opposed to your own views. Questions we discuss may have special personal significance to someone in the class: perhaps they, or a loved one, faced a similar dilemma in the past. And especially since philosophers and your fellow students are also intelligent and thoughtful people, be open to the possibility that when you disagree with their views you may well be the one who's wrong. So always frame your comments in ways that are:

1. Charitable – take the most plausible and sympathetic interpretation of classmates' (and authors') comments, positions, or arguments.
2. Sensitive – respect that the issues we discuss could have a special political, religious or personal significance to others in the room.
3. Impersonal – evaluate positions and arguments, not people.
4. Humble – are open to the possibility that you are wrong.

Assessments:

The table below provides a snapshot of the assessment schedule, including when you can expect assessments to be returned with feedback. Each assessment is briefly described immediately after the table.

Due Date	Assessment	% of Grade	Date Graded/Returned
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Ongoing	Participation	10	December 15
Weekly	Reading Responses	20	Weekly
October 12	Peer Review	10	November 1
October 18	Essay I	30	November 1
December 14	Essay II	30	December 20

Participation

You are expected to attend, *and actively participate* in, every class. That means that you are expected to attend each class with the course text and your notes, and to participate in the discussion of the week's material.

Accommodations will be made for students with out of town athletic events, for medical reasons, or on other reasonable grounds. In all cases, appropriate documentation will be required, in advance of the session.

Reading Responses

Every Sunday from week two onwards you will be expected to submit a one-page Reading Response. Your reading response should convey your understanding of the following week's course materials, and your ability to apply the main philosophical skills discussed in the course. Each response is worth 2%. You will be graded on your ten (10) best responses.

Your reading responses are partly intended to teach you to ask good questions. To that end, each reading response should contain at least one succinct, clear question: it should be no longer than this sentence, and should be sufficiently informative that a speaker could answer it without further elaboration. Questions can aim to clarify ("What is the difference between X and Y?") or challenge ("X is thought to be a problem for other views, but isn't it also a problem for this view?"); they can be constructive ("Would X be a further advantage of the author's view?") or destructive ("Isn't X a counterexample to the author's claim that *p*?"). What makes a question good or bad is whether it prompts good discussion; the question itself is not an essay, and need not settle the issues under discussion.

Peer Review

Prior to the first essay we will have a peer review session, where you will each (a) present the central ideas behind your first essay, and (b) provide critical feedback on others' presentations. You are only graded on (b).

Essay I

You are expected to write a 2,000-word essay defending a position on one of the issues that we have considered in the first half of the course. You will explain your position, offer at least two well developed argument that support it, and consider and respond to at least one objection.

Essay II

You are expected to write a 2,000-word essay defending a position on one of the issues that we have considered in the second half of the course. You will explain your position, offer at least two well developed argument that support it, and consider and respond to at least one objection.

How Do I Get an A?

Most students in this course will not need most of the advice below; but I am including it all the same, as some of the below may be helpful.

The six points below are quite obvious and easy to implement. Doing all of six won't guarantee that you get an A: you're graded on how you perform on the assessments, not how you prepare for them. But if you ignore the six points below, you can expect to underperform.

1. Read in advance, and read actively.

If you cram the readings just before the assessments, you'll do badly. Do each week's readings before class. And don't just skim readings. If you do that, you will absorb little of their content. Make notes as you go, & write a paragraph summarizing the central points of the reading afterwards.

2. Take notes in class.

If you passively sit through each class, you will not absorb or remember

the content. You will not be provided with lecture notes. (Except for students with disabilities who require volunteer a note-taker.)

3. Improve your research habits.

If you mostly rely on Wikipedia, blogs, or whatever else turns up on a quick google search, you're doing it wrong. And you'll do badly. These sources *might* contain some good legal or philosophical analysis. But they're just as likely to contain simple mistakes. Instead, you should rely on sources that are peer reviewed. Use google scholar instead of google. For especially useful starting points, try the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (www.plato.stanford.edu) or the journal *Philosophy Compass*.

4. Read about reading (and writing) about philosophy.

I strongly recommend that you read Jim Pryor's 'Guidelines on Reading Philosophy' and 'Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper'. They're short, and will save you much time and stress in the long run:

www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html;
www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html.

5. Practice makes perfect.

Learning philosophy for the first time involves learning some new skills. Like learning to ride a bike, that takes time and involves some trial and error. It also becomes easier and easier the more you do it. If you practice throughout the course—including on your own and in the weekly response tasks, which are designed for exactly this purpose—then completing the bigger assessments will be much easier and less stressful.

6. Philosophy is a social activity.

The best ways to study for this course are fairly simple. Do the readings carefully, actively taking notes on the central ideas, arguments, and objections. Then talk about these with a group of (old or new) friends from the course. They will help you understand material that you are struggling with. And you will reach a far deeper understanding yourself when you explain ideas, arguments, and objections to others.

Honor Code Procedures:

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states: “As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit:
<https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>

The Virginia Tech honor code pledge for assignments is as follows: “I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this assignment.”

The pledge is to be written out on all graded assignments at the university and signed by the student. The honor pledge represents both an expression of the student’s support of the honor code and an unambiguous acknowledgment that the student has, on the assignment in question, abided by the obligation that the Honor Code entails. In the absence of a written honor pledge, the Honor Code still applies to an assignment. All assignments submitted shall be considered “graded work” and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Honor Code. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

Commission of any of the following constitutes academic misconduct: cheating; plagiarism; falsification; fabrication; multiple submission; complicity; violation of university, college, or department rules.

I take this very seriously. I will not hesitate to recommend an **F***.

Other Administrative Issues:

Electronics Policy

Students are also expected to not use electronic equipment in class (including phones and laptops). Please bring printed copies of the applicable readings to lectures and sections. Exceptions will be made for students with disabilities and volunteer note takers with SSD.

Lateness Policy

Late assessments will be penalized at the rate of 5% per day, unless (a) you have a documented illness or other extenuating circumstance, and (b) you have the explicit authorization to hand in the assignment late. If you foresee a conflict between a due date and another commitment, please email me well in advance so that I can provide a fair alternative. I reserve the right to deny otherwise reasonable requests for accommodation if a request is made at the last minute without a good justification.

Absences

“Students who miss class due to circumstances beyond their control can request to have the absence verified. Each faculty member will make the final determination in allowing the request to make-up missed academic work. Verification of absence does not override the authority of a faculty member. For family or personal emergencies, contact the Dean of Students Office (109 East Eggleston Hall, 231-3787). For absence related to mental health, contact Cook Counseling Center (McComas Hall, 231-6557). For absence related to physical health, contact Schiffert Health Center (McComas Hall, 231-6444). Please note, Schiffert Health Center will only verify absences resulting from prolonged illness (at least 5 days). In addition, Schiffert does not notify faculty of one-time student appointments in the Health Center. Relevant documentation is required for any verification of absence. The Dean of Students office does not verify absences related to religious and ethnic holidays.”

Disabilities

I wholeheartedly endorse Tech's policy and practice of creating inclusive learning environments for all students, including students with disabilities. If aspects of this course – such as time limited exams or inaccessible web content – result in barriers to your inclusion or your ability to meet course requirements please notify your GTA as soon as possible. We will adapt methods, materials or testing in order to offer fair terms of participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Services for Students with Disabilities office to discuss and arrange reasonable accommodations. Please visit www.ssd.vt.edu/students.htm for more information.

This syllabus is subject to change.

Changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.