

Sample Syllabus (200-level)

Africana Universalisms: Négritude and Beyond

When/Where: TBD

Instructor: Carmen De Schryver

Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

This course provides a historical overview of key philosophical and literary texts which deal with questions of Eurocentrism, decolonization and universalism within Africanist thought. Beginning with the writings of Paulette Nardal, Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, we will critically engage with an underdiscussed dimension of the Négritude movement, namely, its interest in affirming the orientation of particular African cultures to universalism. We then trace how this strand of Négritude is taken up in the writings of Frantz Fanon, Paulin J. Hountondji and contemporary Africanist intellectuals. Ultimately, the course provides students with the theoretical background to engage in weekly discussions regarding universality and decolonization, such as: how and in what ways does Eurocentrism continue to inflect universality? Is decolonization necessarily connected to the assertion of particularity, and in what way? Are difference and universality in conflict, or do they in fact complement one another? Beyond writing up weekly reflections on the readings, students are evaluated on the basis of (i) a final presentation which utilizes the course materials to reflect critically on a contemporary, public article of their choosing on the broad themes of universality and decolonization which will then form the basis for (ii) a final paper.

Prerequisites

A background in philosophy is expected but not required. Please contact me directly if you are unsure whether you are prepared for this course. The course is designed to equip students with key philosophical skills which will be helpful across a range of disciplines, as well as invite students to think about the purview and limits of “philosophy”.

Accessibility

This seminar is committed to accessibility among all dimensions of identity. If you require accommodations for any reason, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Learning Outcomes

- Gain familiarity with seminal texts in Africana philosophy, including the Négritude movement and modern African philosophical debates

- Develop a critical perspective on debates about the decolonization of academia and the use and misuse of universality in that context
- Think critically about what constitutes “philosophy” and its implicit geographical biases
- Develop skills in closely reading and evaluating technical philosophical material
- Constructively engage with the work of peers by providing written feedback on a presentation

Course Assessment

Grades for this course are based on:

- Participation (15%). Your participation grade is based on:
 - (i) Initial one-on-one meeting with instructor. The aim is for us to get to know each other and for me to get a sense of your background interests as they relate to the course. You will not be graded on what you say during the meeting; you just need to show up!
 - (ii) Weekly submission of a short (one sentence) question about the reading *in advance* of the class meeting.
 - (iii) Participation in the classroom. This can take on a variety of forms and should not depend on your confidence. I encourage you to meet with me during office hours if speaking up in larger group settings is uncomfortable.
- Final presentation (30%) and written commentary (one-page) on a peers’ presentation (10%). This presentation should utilize the course materials to reflect critically on a contemporary, public article on your choosing on the broad themes of and decolonization
- Final paper (45%) of no more than 5 pages. This can build on the presentation or develop a novel argument on a topic of your choosing.

Note on Office Hours

I encourage you to come to office hours regularly. I particularly encourage you to come to my office hours with any questions, ideas, or worries that were raised for you during the lecture; any difficulties that you are experiencing with the material or your own learning process; or additional help and guidance you might need for assignments.

Course Materials

All the readings will be made available in PDF.

Note on the Readings

In order to get the most out of the course, it is necessary that you read the assigned texts closely *in advance* of the class meeting. Do not be discouraged if you find the readings difficult or even confusing. Our class discussion is designed to (i) collaboratively make sense of the text and (ii) equip you with the skills that you need to fully comprehend and critically interrogate the course material. I will not expect you to understand everything that you read.

I do, however, expect you to make a good-faith effort to interpret the text on your own, and to participate in the class discussion on this basis. I would also like to emphasize that raising clarificatory questions is not just okay but very much encouraged; if you are confused about something, it is likely your peers will be as well, and your questions will be welcomed!

Course Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the semester. Changes to the schedule will be announced in class.

Week 1: Africana Universalisms? Background to the Course and Discussion of the Syllabus
Souleymane Bachir Diagne, “On the Post-Colonial and the Universal?”, pp.7-18
Nadia Yala Kisukidi, “The Universal in the Bush?”, pp.1-12.

Week 2: Introduction to Négritude
Irele, “Négritude: Literature and Ideology”, pp.499-526.

Week 3: Foundations: The Women of Négritude
Nardal, “The Awakening of Race Consciousness Among Black Students”, pp.180-185

Week 4: Leopold Senghor and Negritude as Universal Humanism
Senghor, “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century”, pp.55-65.

Week 5: Aimé Césaire: Negritude and the Critique of European Universalism
Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pp.31-64

Week 6: Aimé Césaire continued
Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pp.65-78
Césaire, “Interview with René Depestre”, pp.81-94

Week 7: The Itineraries of Négritude: Fanon and Négritude as Dialectic
Fanon, “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” (*BSWM*), pp.29-43

Week 9: Fanon continued: Particularity
Fanon, “On National Culture” (*WE*), pp.145-170

Week 10: Fanon continued: Reclaiming Universality
Fanon, “Medicine and Colonialism” (*DC*), pp.121-145
Fanon, “Conclusion” (*WE*), pp.235-239.

Week 11: Paulin J. Hountondji: African Philosophy and the legacies of eurocentrism
Hountondji, “History of a Myth”, pp.47-54.
Hountondji, “African Philosophy: Myth and Reality”, pp.55-70.

Week 12: Paulin J. Hountondji: Philosophical Marginalization and Enclosure in the Particular
Hountondji, “Knowledge as a Development Issue”, pp.529-537.

Week 13: Contemporary Views I - Paulin J. Hountondji: Towards a Decolonial Universality
Hountondji, “Constructing the Universal: A Transcultural Challenge”, pp.1-12.

Week 14: Contemporary Views II - Ato Sekyi-Otu’s Transcendental Universality
Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalisms, Africentric Essays*, pp.1-57

Week 15: Contemporary Views III - Seloua Luste Boulbina
Seloua Luste-Boulbina, *Kafka’s Monkey and Other Phantoms of Africa*, pp.269-282.