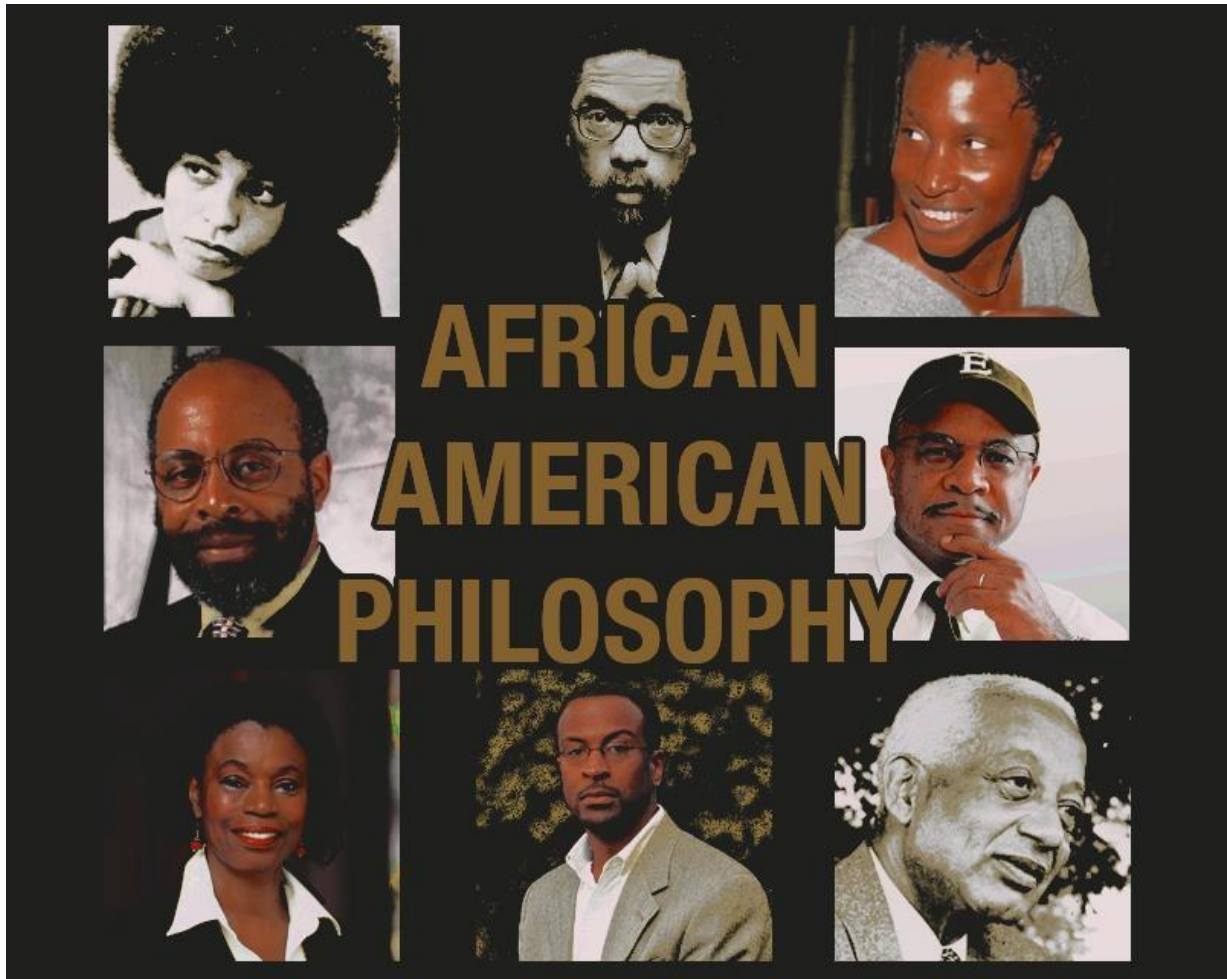


Introduction to African American Philosophy



“I’m always annoyed about why black people have to bear the brunt of everybody else’s contempt. If we are not totally understanding and smiling, suddenly we’re demons.”

—Toni Morrison

“It is a beautiful thing to be on fire for justice.”

— Cornel West

“History is a people’s memory, and without a memory, man is demoted to the lower animals.”

—Malcolm X

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MThr 10:00-11:15 Office hours: by appointment (book on
<https://www.coreybeckford.org/office-hours>)

Course Description

What is African American Philosophy, and why is it a distinctive area of Philosophy in general? African American Philosophy is a branch of Africana Philosophy that deals with major issues and problems for Black or African Americans living in the United States, and abroad in Western Europe. The major issues and problems stem primarily from the history of Trans-Atlantic Slavery and White Supremacy in the United States, consisting of, but not limited to anti-Black racism, social death, economic exploitation, and political domination. Additionally, there are at least overarching three major themes of African American Philosophy: articulation of Black experience(s), resistance against anti-Blackness, and transformation of perspectives on the major issues and problem spaces born from Trans-Atlantic Slavery, Jim Crow, the Prison Industrial Complex, centuries of racist stereotyping, and continued denial of humanity, autonomy, and property by social, political, and legal institutions.

To better understand how African American philosophers have wrestled with such issues, we will explore philosophical works in epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, politics, law, and meta theory. Such a broad investigation will allow us to better understand the themes of articulation, resistance, and transformation in African American Philosophy at large. Overtime, we will come to understand how thinkers spread out across time, spanning from the 1600s to 2010s, have *articulated* their experiences as Black people, and resisted systems of political domination, social oppression, and existential abjection using philosophical methods of argumentation. And finally, how African American philosophers as such have continually transformed their thinking about those experiences, and their relation to not only White supremacy in the United States and Western Europe, but globally.

Learning Goals

To develop a historical understanding of African American Philosophy.

To critically engage the assigned readings, keeping an open mind to each author's philosophical contributions to our discussion of African American Philosophy, and the three themes disclosed.

Develop the habit of active, slow reading. *By active reading*, I mean frequently asking yourself how the parts of the essay or chapter are connected, support or not support the author's argument(s), and whether something could be better stated or left out entirely.

By slow reading, I mean carefully reading each line, paragraph, and footnote of your assigned reading. To aid you in this very important endeavor, I will only assign roughly 300 pages of reading, averaging ~ 15-30 pages of reading per class.

Actively participate in discussions with your peers. Because learning is not always had in the classroom, it is important to me that you all have a safe, intellectual space to talk about the problem of evil.

Developing your philosophical writing skills. Some of those skills include comparing and contrasting philosophical concepts in order to elucidate their similarities, and differences. Learning how to present philosophical ideas to others.

Course Policies

- † Classroom etiquette is crucial for a healthy, safe, and thriving intellectual space. To facilitate that, it is important that we all uphold the following rules and policies.
- † No electronics allowed during class. That includes laptops, cellphones, gaming devices, and anything that can grant internet access. It is important that everyone respect each other's class time by not distracting each other with electronic devices.
- † No interrupting your fellow classmates when they're speaking. It is important to allow everyone to articulate their thoughts. Of course, everyone should also keep in mind that a question exceeding 3-5 minutes is pushing it. Remember: everyone wants a chance to share their ideas, ask questions, and discuss the class material.
- † **Aim** to attend every class and attend them on time. Although transportation in NYC is finicky, and indeed, life happens, it is still important to try to be on time to class. Five to ten minutes is fine so long as you're genuinely late, but otherwise do your best to not be late to class.
- † Racism, sexual violence, and bullying are not welcome in our classroom. If you're experiencing any of these things please contact me, and we can discuss how to move forward.
- † Plagiarism of any kind is unacceptable and will result in an automatic zero on an assignment, and, if done more than once, a zero for the course. If you use ChatGPT or any kind of AI assisted tool you will automatically fail the course.
- † Students with Disabilities: In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 4 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of Access/ABILITY located in room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call (212-7724857)/TTY (212-650-3250).
- † Sexual Misconduct: In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of *sexual violence* on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College. Such students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444). Students experiencing *all other forms of sexual misconduct* are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123. For more on the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, see:

<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-114with-links.pdf>

- † Religious Observances: If you need to miss a class for a religious observance, please let me know.
- † Students called to active duty: Please let me know if your active military service interferes with your class attendance and performance, and I can make an accommodation.

Assignments & Grading System

Doing philosophy at a high level requires a strong foundation in critical thinking, time management, and self-care. Although discussions about time management and self-care may arise during class discussions or during office hours, your primary assignments will be dedicated to building your critical thinking muscles. To build those muscles, you will be given bi-weekly writing assignments throughout the semester, five total. One important aspect of a philosopher's toolkit is their ability to read, annotate, and comprehend a text while actively reading it.

Grading breakdown:

Participation: 10%

BWEs (5): 25%

Final Paper: 30%

Final Exam: 35%

Assignments

Bi-Weekly Exercises (B.W.E.s) are writing exercises designed to help you sharpen your writing skills. There is a total of five B.W.E.s – annotation, exegesis, positive critique, negative critique, and compare/contrast – all due bi-weekly starting from the 2nd week of class. *Note: See Dropbox for documents with detailed instructions on how to complete each BWE. Final Exam

Your final exam is a traditional open blue book exam. The purpose of the exam is to test your active knowledge and understanding of the course material after nearly eighteen weeks of thinking about philosophy of law, and critical race theory. You will be asked four questions, two of which are identify and respond questions, and two of which are open response questions. Identify and respond questions will consist of a selected quote from one of the readings and will ask that you:

- **Identify** the author
- **Explain** the context of the quote and the meaning of the text as such, and
- **Offer a critical response**, positive, negative, or comparative to the quote

The open response questions will challenge your ability to offer a positive critique, and your ability to offer a response of your own on the spot. And because the exam is open book, you're allowed up to a page of notes to help you during the exam.

Late work policy

In general, I am flexible on late submissions so long as you provide a good reason, along with proof. Assuming you do not have a good reason, you are allowed to submit an assignment at most two days late before your assignment is severely penalized.

Awards

To motivate your interest in philosophy, and the course, I offer up to three awards: **the Alain LeRoy Locke Award, the Fredrick Douglass Award, and the Socratic Award**. Each award speaks to your commitment, persistence, and engagement with the course, and your classmates.

- The **Alain Locke Award** is given to the student who has the highest grade in the course, consistently attends office hours, participates in class, and overall makes outstanding contributions to the course.
- The **Fredrick Douglass Award** is given to that student who has one of the highest grades in class, and has earned that grade overtime, demonstrating a thoughtful interest in their intellectual development throughout the semester.
- The **Socratic Award** is given to the student who consistently makes insightful, substantive contributions to class discussions regardless of their grade.

***Note: The specific prizes will be revealed during the final week of class.**

Course Schedule

**Note: All readings will be provided on Blackboard*

[Articulation – The Chronicles of White Supremacy & Sub-personhood: Politics, Morality, and Law]

First Day (1/26/2022) Course mechanics, syllabus reading, and crash course on important terminology used throughout the course.

Week 1: (1/30/2023) *To Thomas Jefferson from Benjamin Banneker* (1791) + (02/02/2023) Article's I & II from *David Walker's Appeal* (1830)

Week 2: (02/06/2023) *Modernisms in Black* (2006) by Frank M. Kirkland; (02/09/2023) *Radicalizing Feminisms from the "Movement Era"* (2006) by Joy James

--First B.W.E. due: Annotation

Week 3: (02/16/2023) *Philosophy and the Afro-American Experience* (2006) by Cornel West; (02/21/2023) *Some Group Matters: Intersectionality, Situated Standpoints, and Black Feminist Thought* (2006) by Patricia-Hill Collins

Week 4: (02/23/2023) *Some Reflections on the Brown Decision and Its Aftermath* (2006) by Howard McGary; (02/27/2023) *Race and Criminalization: Black Americans and the Punishment Industry* (2003) by Angela Y. Davis

--Second B.W.E. due: Exegesis

Week 5: (03/02/2023) *White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System: A Philosophical Perspective* (2003) + *Black Trash* (2001) by Charles W. Mills; (03/06/2023) *The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal* (2017) by Frank B. Wilderson, III

[Resistance – A Glimpse of the Aesthetic, Moral, and Epistemological Dimensions of African American Philosophy]

Week 6: (03/09/2023) *The New Negro* (essay) (1925) by Alain LeRoy Locke; (03/13/2023) *Criteria of Negro Art* (1926) by W.E.B. DuBois

--Third B.W.E. due: Positive Critique

Week 7: (03/16/2023) Selections from Paul C. Taylor's *Black is Beautiful* (2016); (03/20/2023) *Impartiality, Compassion, and Modal Imagination* (1991) by Adrian M.S. Piper

Week 8: (03/23/2023) *The Harlem Renaissance and Philosophy* (2006) by Leonard Harris; (03/23/2023) *Black Cinema and Aesthetics* (2006) by Cylde R. Taylor

--Fourth B.W.E. due: Negative Critique

Week 9: (03/27/2023) *Rap as Art and Philosophy* (2006) by Shusterman; (04/03/2023) *Sex and Sexuality in Contemporary Hip-Hop* (2005) by Kathryn Sophia Bell

Week 10: (04/17/2023) *Be Like Mike?: Michael Jordan and the Pedagogy of Desire* (1993) by Eric

Michael Dyson (04/20/2023) *Racist Humor* (2015) by Luvelle Anderson

--Fifth B.W.E. due: Compare and Contrast

Week 11: (04/24/2023) *White Ignorance* (2007) by Charles W. Mills; (04/27/2023) *Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing* (2011) + *Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability* (2017) by Kristie Dotson

[Transformation – What Has African American Philosophy Become, and Where Can it Go?]

Week 12: (05/01/2023) *Is there a distinctive African-American Philosophy?* (1997) Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr. and Michael D. Roth; (05/04/2023) *On Derelict and Method* (2011) Tommy J. Curry

Week 13: (05/08/2023) *On Tommy Curry's "On Derelict and Method"* (2011) by Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr. ; (05/11/2023) *It's a Criticism...because "I" Said So?* (2011) by Tommy J. Curry

Week 14: (M) *Derelict Africana Philosophy?* (2011) Robert E. Birt; (W) *It's Still Black in the Details* (2011) by Tommy J. Curry

Week 15: Final remarks --- Note: Exam day (TBA): exam + final paper due (11:59PM)