

Topics in History of Philosophy SYLLABUS

Class time and room: Thursday 10am – 12 noon Arts, G01
Instructor: Professor Rob Wilson
Office: Arts 1.04
Office hours: Wednesday 11am – 1pm, and by appointment
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Please read the whole syllabus ASAP.

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

This honours seminar provides an advanced discussion of select topics in the history of modern philosophy—roughly the period from 1600 to 1800—by focusing on the texts of some of the most influential thinkers of the period, the problems and issues that these philosophers were grappling with, and the dialectics they were enmeshed in. It will also draw on contemporary philosophical work in order to reflect on the historiography, boundaries, and demography of traditions of thinking in Western philosophy from this productive period in its history. The unit is organized into four multi-week themes, with three of the four themes having a corresponding focus on particular historically important philosophers:

- A. The Material World and Its Qualities (Author Focus: John Locke)
- B. Contract Theory: Social, Sexual, Racial (Author Focus: Thomas Hobbes)
- C. Boundaries and Limits of Philosophy and its History
- D. Philosophical Silences: Race and Sex (Author Focus: Immanuel Kant)

Contemporary authors we will also read include Margaret Wilson and Peter Anstey (on A); Carole Pateman and Charles Mills (on B); Kristie Dotson, George Yancy, and Bryan Van Norden (on C); and Emmanuel Eze, Robert Bernasconi, and Barbara Herman (on D). We will also read a couple of papers of mine on Locke, and I will make available a recent paper of mine on race, gender, and disability relating to D. All subject materials **will be available through the library**; you do not need to buy any textbooks.

II. CLASS OBJECTIVES

This is an advanced class in the history of philosophy. There are **five chief goals** for student learning that the class is designed to facilitate. Through weekly classes and unit assessments, students should develop and display abilities to:

1. **understand** the context and nature of several widely-discussed issues in modern philosophy: the nature of primary and secondary qualities and the role of appeals to the state of nature and a social contract in accounts of political obligation;
2. **read and interpret** original, corresponding texts by Locke and Hobbes on these topics;
3. **raise and address** historiographical questions about how the history of philosophy relates to contemporary discussions of philosophical issues;
4. **respond to** challenges posed to the conduct of contemporary academic philosophy posed around issues of inclusivity, diversity, and canon formation.
5. **appreciate** both the richness of texts and discussions in the history of philosophy and their boundaries and limitations.

I also want your curiosity to be stimulated; for you to persist when understanding seems difficult; and for us all collectively to have collaborative and constructive discussions throughout the semester. It might even be fun.

III. WORKLOAD AND SUBJECT REQUIREMENTS

(i) Reading and writing loads

The *reading load* for the subject is moderate in quantity and moderate-to-difficult in overall level. After Week 1 (with just 10 pages of reading), the required reading each week averages at **45-50 pages**. The *writing load* for the subject is moderate. We will focus on ***developing your philosophical thinking skills through your writing*** in this subject, as well deepening the dialectical skills that you will have begun to develop in lower-level university subjects, especially in philosophy units.

(ii) Grades and Assessment

Assessment will be determined by the following components, fitting within the general parameters for assessment in Philosophy Honours classes at UWA, which require (a) 4000 words of writing, typically in a term paper; and (b) a final examination, time-limited and written, and typically 90-minutes in length and writing a single essay response:

- Draft of term paper (up to 1000 words), based on Themes A or B, due by 5pm, Monday **12th September, 2022** (20%)
- Term paper (up to 3000 words), based on revisions to draft of term paper above, due by 5pm, Monday, **24th October, 2022** (40%)
- Final examination covering material in Themes C and D and requiring two written answers, one to a question from each of these themes; the time for this examination will fall during the regular university examination period, which begins 29th October. (40%).

In addition, there is the expectation for honours classes that class members actively participate week by week. To ensure this, there will also be what I call **WALPs**: weekly active learning paragraphs, which will give your short response to the guiding question for that week, and will be due by 10pm the night before the corresponding class. Having these will also help me to monitor your preparedness for class discussions and to more optimally use the class time itself. Although there is no formal assessment of these, students who complete fewer than 8 of these for the semester will be subject to a **5% grade penalty**, subtracted from the grade calculated through the summation of the assessment components listed above.

(iii) Workflow and General Class Expectations

As the preceding paragraphs on WALPs suggests, there is a premium in this honours class in coming prepared for class discussion each week, even allowing for the vagaries of a less-than-optimal week for any one of you from time to time. Since I think that ensuring that everyone meets a minimum level of preparedness, I tend not to rely on individual class presentations to structure my classes. But I am happy to explore such presentations, and variations on them, in the second half of the unit, when we reach Themes C and D, especially if class members feel that their learning will benefit from these. This matter can be settled before the semester break (5-9th September), and we can adjust other aspects of how class time is spent in light of your ongoing feedback and discussion.

(iv) Paper topics, essays, examination

Topics for the papers will be distributed in Week 4; topics for the final examination will be distributed in Week 12. Everyone will have 30 minutes in addition to the usual 90 minutes for the final examination, and the two responses you write will be equally weighted.

Comments on your essay drafts will be returned to you shortly after the due date for the draft in order to maximise the time you have to prepare the final version.

(v) Due Date Policy and Plagiarism

Submission of essays by their due date is strongly encouraged; many students lose crucial grades simply because they miss deadlines. If it helps you, think of it like this: if you submit your essay on time, in effect you are increasing your grade from (say) a Pass to a Credit, compared to if you submit it a day late. We will grant extensions on due dates for personal medical and family emergency reasons that may require documentation, but not for other reasons, such as: my internet wasn't working, my phone got dropped in the toilet, and there were a lot of parties on last weekend. The subject will otherwise follow the general university policy on the submission of late assignments.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense that is grounds for disciplinary action at a number of levels within the university system. As students in an honours class, you are expected already to be familiar with what plagiarism is and why it must be avoided. We would encourage you **not to risk the consequences of plagiarizing** in this subject, which could include not only *outright failure in the subject* but have more severe repercussions for your future at the University. More generally, please take **academic integrity** seriously since the University does and will discipline you when it is violated.

IV. ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

I was an undergraduate honours student in philosophy at UWA before completing my MA and PhD at Cornell University in New York. Material from the history of philosophy structured many of the classes I took: we read Descartes' *Meditations* in first year, covered social contract theory in second year political philosophy, and had a third-year class on a glommed-person I called "Locke-Berkely-Hume". Yet the history of philosophy didn't really feature as an area of study per se. In graduate school, where there were professors who were specialists in historical figures, I took advanced classes on Aristotelian and Stoic Ethics (with T.H. Irwin), on Marx (with Richard W. Miller), and on Kant's ethics (with Allen Wood). I missed taking what no doubt would have been the most useful historical class for me to take, one on medieval philosophy of mind (with Norman Kretzmann), because at that stage I was unduly dismissive of the value of the history of philosophy.

My interests in philosophy have varied over time: my honours thesis was in the philosophy of law and I wrote, in addition, 5000-word papers on action theory and on time-travel and began a career-long interest in philosophy with children. As a PhD student, I wrote a dissertation (and my first book) on individualism in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science. During my first job (at Queen's University, Canada), I moved into the philosophy of biology, concentrating initially on species and the levels of selection, later leading a team of 80 people working with eugenics survivors on eugenics and its contemporary significance. I am currently focused on finishing a book in the philosophy of anthropology on kinship. Other topics I have published on include constitution views in metaphysics, pluralism in science, disability and dehumanization, Locke's metaphysics and epistemology, and group-level cognition.

V. THEMES AND WEEKLY SCHEDULE

A. The Material World and Its Qualities (4 weeks)

Week 1

1. Locke, John 1690, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1975). Book II.viii, (“Some farther Considerations concerning our simple Ideas”), pp.132-143.

Guiding question: (1) How should we understand Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities?

Week 2

2. Wilson, Margaret D., 1992, “The History of Philosophy and Philosophy Today; and the Case of the Sensible Qualities”, *Philosophical Review* 101(1), pp.191-243.

Guiding question: (2) In what ways have interpretations of Locke’s discussion of primary and secondary qualities changed with the philosophical times?

Week 3

3. Anstey, Peter R., 2013, “The Theory of Material Qualities” in his *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp.240-260.
4. Wilson, Robert A., 2016, “Primary and Secondary Qualities”, in M. Stuart (ed.), *A Companion to Locke*. Wiley-Blackwell, pp.193-210.

Guiding questions: (3) How do corpuscularians conceptualize the material world? (4) Does RA Wilson think that Locke has a clear account of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities?

Week 4

5. Locke, John 1690, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1975). (a) Book II.iv (“Of Solidity”), pp.122-127; (b) Book II.viii, (“Some farther Considerations concerning our simple Ideas”), pp.132-143.
6. Wilson, Robert A., 2002, “Locke’s Primary Qualities”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40 (April 2002), pp.201-228.

Guiding questions: (5) Why do you think that Locke treats solidity in its own chapter? (6) Why is RA Wilson dissatisfied with existing views of Locke’s primary qualities?

B. Contract Theory: Social, Sexual, and Racial (3 weeks)

Week 5

7. Lloyd, Sharon and Susanne Sreedhar, 2018, “Hobbes’s Moral and Political Philosophy”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Sections 1-5.

8. Baumgold, Deborah, 2017, *Three-Text Edition of Thomas Hobbes's Political Theory: The Elements of Law, De Cive and Leviathan* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp.127-160, corresponding to chapters 1-2 of *De Cive* and chapters 13-14 of *Leviathan*.

Guiding questions: (7) What are the key components of Hobbes's political philosophy?
(8) How does Hobbes conceive of the natural state or condition of humankind in *Leviathan*?

Week 6

9. Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), Introduction and Overview, pp.1-40.

Guiding question: (9) What is the racial contract and how does it stand with respect to the social contract in political philosophy?

Week 7

10. Carole Pateman, "The Settler Contract", ch.2 of Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp.36-78.

Guiding question: (10) In what ways does (and doesn't) the settler contract provide an informative model of Australian political obligation?

C. Boundaries and Limits of Philosophy and its History (2 weeks)

Week 8

11. Kristie Dotson, "Why is This Paper Philosophy?", *Comparative Philosophy* 3(1)(2012): 3-29.
12. George Yancy, *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly About Racism in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), Introduction: Talking about Racism: When Honesty Feels Like Too Much to Bear", and ch.1, "The Letter: Dear White America", pp.1-24.

Guiding questions: (11) How does Dotson's paper respond to the call "to genuinely assess whether the field of philosophy has the capacity to sustain the work of diverse peoples"?
(12) Is Yancy's letter philosophy?

Week 9

13. Bryan Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), ch.1 "A Manifesto for Multicultural Philosophy", and ch.5, "The Way of Confucius and Socrates", pp.1-37, 138 – 160.

Guiding question: (13) Do Van Norden's chapters support the view that Western philosophy is racist and ethnocentric?

D. Philosophical Silences: Race and Sex (3 weeks)

Week 10

14. Kant, Immanuel, 1777, "Of the Different Human Races", translated by Jon Mark Mikkelsen, in Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lott (eds), *The Idea of Race* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), pp.8-22.
15. Bernasconi, Robert, 2001, "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race", in Robert Bernasconi (ed.), *Race* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), pp.11-36.
16. Bernasconi, Robert, 2002, "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism", in Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott (eds.), *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers), pp.145-166.

Guiding questions: (14) Why do you think that Kant appeals to different human races? (15) How does Bernasconi argue for Kant's importance in the history of thinking about races? (16) What textual support does Bernasconi provide for his claim that Kant is a source of racism?

Week 11

17. Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi, 1995, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology", *The Bucknell Review* (Jan 1 1995) 38(2), pp.200-241.
18. Bernasconi, Robert, 2002, "Critical Philosophy of Race and Philosophical Historiography", in P.C. Taylor L.M. Alcoff, and L. Anderson (eds), *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Race*. New York: Routledge.

Guiding questions: (17) What would you say is Eze's best reason for thinking that "reason" is colored for Kant? (18) How does Bernasconi's view of the historiography of modern philosophy compare to that of Margaret Wilson from her 1992?

Week 12

19. Mills, Charles, 2005, "Kant's *Untermenschen*", in Andrew Valls (ed.), *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp.169-191.
20. Herman, Barbara, 1993, "Could it be Worth Thinking about Kant on Sex and Marriage?", in Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (eds.), *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp.49-67, (or pp.53-72 of the second edition, 2002).

Guiding questions: (19) What strikes you as the best argument that Mills gives in defending the idea that Kant's theories presuppose beings with moral status between those of persons and things? (20) Why does Herman think that the answer to the question posed in her article's title may be "yes"?