

# Sex, Race, and the Philosophical Canon: Kant and Rawls

Yale University  
Spring 2023  
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:00-2:15pm  
220 York Street, Room 002

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This course is about grappling with the imperfect past - and present - of academic philosophy. Many key figures in the philosophical canon are, from a contemporary perspective, deeply sexist and racist. Take Kant for instance. Kant is one of the most influential philosophers in Western history, celebrated for his (apparently) egalitarian ethical theory. He also writes at length about the inferiority of women and non-Europeans. Consider for example his claim that abstract reasoning is so unnatural for women - so unfeminine - that the woman philosopher "might as well even have a beard." Or consider the racial hierarchy he asserts: "Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites. The yellow Indians have a meagre talent. The Negroes are far below them and the lowest point are a part of the [Native] American peoples..." How should we understand the relationship between his sexist and racist claims and his (apparent) moral egalitarianism? What does it mean to be a woman or person of color or ally studying Kant? Can we appropriate his work for our own liberatory purposes? Is there any principled way to take the good and leave the bad?

We will study texts from Kant and Rawls alongside a wide range of commentaries from feminist philosophers, critical philosophers of race, and other contemporary philosophers. By the end of the course, you will:

- Understand core elements of Kant's moral philosophy and anthropology
- Be familiar with a wide range of responses from Kant scholars, and think critically about how we should relate to Kant
- Understand core elements of Rawls's political philosophy
- Be familiar with a wide range of responses from Rawls scholars, and think critically about how we should relate to Rawls

- Explore broad questions about authority, disciplinarity, and canon formation
- Develop your ideas in clear, concise, well-reasoned papers

### **Grade Breakdown**

Participation: 20%

Reading Notes: 10%

Short Papers: 30%

Long Paper: 40%

### **Participation**

We expect everybody to participate actively in class: participation is part of how you learn. (And it makes class more fun!) In addition to in-class discussions, the participation grade includes miscellaneous exercises and homework assignments.

Attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss class, please let us know ahead of time. If you cannot let us know beforehand, please send us a note afterward. Communication is important to us.

### **Reading Notes**

Reading notes are due by midnight the night before each class. You can see examples [here](#). In the space of one to two pages, you should:

- give a concise summary of the philosophy paper(s), and
- list one or two questions that the reading assignment left you with.

Sometimes when you read a philosophy paper, it can be hard to see the forest for the trees. This assignment is about making you slow down, take a step back, and look at the big picture. It's about seeing the forest.

You do not need to submit reading notes on days when you have a short paper due. You can also use two free passes on reading notes over the course of the semester; if you want to use a free pass, just let us know.

### **Short Papers**

Over the course of the semester, you will write five short papers and present them in class. Each short paper should be 300-600 words. (That's a few paragraphs.) A short paper can respond to reading assignments, build on conversations from class, draw connections to pop culture or politics or personal experiences... Whatever sparks your interest.

Short papers will be due on a rolling basis. Each student will be assigned to one of four writing groups. There will be one or two students per group; that means we'll have one or two short paper presentations per class meeting. You can see short paper due dates on the calendar below.

## Long Papers

You will also write one long paper, about 1500 words. (That's about six double-spaced pages.)  
Completing the long paper will be a multi-step process.

- Paper Proposal: Monday April 3, 11:59pm
- First Draft: Saturday April 15, 11:59pm
- Peer Workshop: Monday April 17
- Second Draft: Sunday April 22, 11:59pm
- Third Draft: Sunday May 7, 11:59pm

This multi-step process might seem like a lot of work, but it's worth it. It will help you grow as a writer and set your papers up for success.

Here is the current schedule for reading assignments and short papers:

	Reading	Short Papers
Wednesday January 18	Marcia Baron "Reading Kant Selectively"	[None]
FRIDAY JANUARY 20 (Please note corrected schedule)	Immanuel Kant <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> Preface and Section I	[None]
Monday January 23	Immanuel Kant <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> Section II	[None]
Wednesday January 25	Helen Sword <i>Stylish Academic Writing</i> "Smart Sentencing"  Helen Sword <a href="#">Beware Nominalizations (a.k.a. Zombie Nouns)</a>  Peter Brown, Henry Roediger, and Mark McDaniel <i>Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning</i> "Learning Is Misunderstood"	[None]
Monday January 30	Andrea Dworkin "Objects"	Group 1
Wednesday	Evangelia Papadaki	Group 2

February 1	“Sexual Objectification: From Kant to Contemporary Feminism”	
Monday February 6	Pauline Kleingeld “The Problematic Status of Gender-Neutral Language in the History of Philosophy”	Group 3
Wednesday February 8	Dilek Huseyinzađegan “For What Can the Kantian Feminist Hope?”	Group 4
Monday February 13  Guest Speaker: Jordan Pascoe	Judy Brady <a href="#">“I Want a Wife”</a>  Jordan Pascoe “Domestic Labor, Citizenship, and Exceptionalism: Rethinking Kant’s ‘Woman Problem’”  Immanuel Kant “The Character of the Sexes”	Group 1
Wednesday February 15	Immanuel Kant “On the Different Races of Man”	Group 2
Monday February 20	Charles Mills “Kant’s <i>Untermenschen</i> ”	Group 3
Wednesday February 22	Pauline Kleingeld “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race”	Group 4
Monday February 27	Immanuel Kant <i>The Metaphysics of Morals</i> “What Is Money?” and “Rights that Follow from the Nature of the Civil Union,” Part D  Immanuel Kant <i>Perpetual Peace</i> “Third Definitive Article for Perpetual Peace”  Huaping Lu-Adler “Kant on Slavery - or Why He Never Became a Racial Egalitarian”	Group 1
Wednesday March 1	Thomas Hill and Bernard Boxill “Kant and Race”	Group 2
Monday March 6	Agnes Callard <a href="#">“Should We Cancel Aristotle?”</a>  Ray Monk <a href="#">“Gottlob Frege: The Machine in the Ghost”</a>	Group 3

Wednesday March 8	Aristotle <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Selections)  Susan Moller Okin “Feminism, Moral Development, and the Virtues”	Group 4
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Spring Break!

Monday March 27	Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor”  Aziz Rana Interview with Henry Brooks <a href="#">“The Two Faces of Freedom: Ten Years Later”</a> Parts One, Two, and Three	Group 1
Wednesday March 29  Guest Speaker: Huaping Lu-Adler	Huaping Lu-Adler <i>Kant, Race, and Racism</i> “Race and the Claim to True Philosophy” pp. 285-291 and 308-328	Group 2
Monday April 3	Maria Mejia “Which Women? A Decolonial Feminist Critique of Kant”	Group 3
Wednesday April 5  Guest Speaker: Maria Mejia	Bryan Van Norden <i>Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto</i> (selections)  Tommie Curry “On Derelict and Method” pp. 139-141  Kristie Dotson “Radical Love: Black Philosophy as Deliberate Acts of Inheritance”	Group 4
Monday April 10	Marcia Baron “Reading Kant Selectively” (revisited)	Group 1
Wednesday April 12	Alan Buchanan “A Critical Introduction to Rawls’s Theory of Justice”  John Rawls <i>A Theory of Justice</i>	Group 2

	Sections 3, 4, 11	
Monday April 17	Peer Workshop	[None]
Wednesday April 19	<p>Susan Moller Okin  “Forty Acres and a Mule’ for Women: Rawls and Feminism”</p> <p>John Rawls  <i>A Theory of Justice</i>  Sections 13, 20, 24, 26</p>	Group 3
Monday April 24	<p>Charles Mills  “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology”</p>	Group 4
Wednesday April 26	[None]	[None]