

PHILOSOPHY 694
Knowers, Knowing and Global Justice
 Wednesdays 4:30-7:10 pm
 East 134

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:00-3:00 pm and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this class we will focus on the intersection of ethics and epistemology, and in particular, consider the connection between epistemic injustice and global injustice, understood from a structural perspective. We will start with an examination of a relational approach to understanding global injustice offered by Iris Marion Young—the social connection model—which takes social/transnational structures to be the source of injustice. From there we'll look at epistemic injustice, as defined by Miranda Fricker, as a specific kind of injustice involving inequities in the “credibility economy,” and consider how structural injustice contributes to it. Our focus will be on the conception of the knower and of knowledge inherited from the Western philosophical tradition, the ways these have contributed to the diminishment and/or exclusion of other ways of seeing knowers and approaches to formulating knowledge, and in turn, global injustice. We will center on *ontological considerations*, i.e., how we might conceptualize knowers engaged in the work of epistemic repair, along with alternative *epistemic methodologies* or ways of knowing and for cultivating knowledge, drawing upon the works of feminist, de-colonial, postcolonial, and indigenous thinkers whose work is concerned with global justice.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students should have gained:

- 1) a critical understanding of Western philosophy's prevailing conception of the knower and how knowledge is to be attained;
- 2) an understanding of global structural injustice;
- 3) an understanding of epistemic injustice;
- 4) a critical awareness of the relationship between epistemic injustice and structural injustice;
- 5) an understanding of feminist, indigenous, critical race, and de-colonial responses to Western philosophy's account of the knower and knowing;
- 6) appreciation for how these responses can contribute to global justice;
- 7) an improved ability to engage with (read, interpret analyze) philosophical texts—individually and in relation to one another—as a reader, thinker, discussant, researcher, and writer;
- 8) an enriched capacity to write philosophically in ways that are informed by contemporary scholarship in feminist, indigenous, critical race, and de-colonial philosophy.

MATERIALS

You must buy, rent, or borrow these books in print editions (no electronic copies):

- 1) Young, Iris Marion, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 2) Fricker, Miranda, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 3) Sharpe, Christina, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
- 4) Glissant, Edouard, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1997).
- 5) Mbembe, Achille, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
- 6) Simpson, Leeanne Betasamosake, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

You must also print all articles posted on Blackboard (indicated on the syllabus as BB), and bring a hard copy of the assigned readings for the day to class with you.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Preparation and engaged participation in class sessions (25)

Please see Appendix I.

2. Two critical essays, 1 due NLT Monday after Spring Break, another NLT April 22 (30)

Please see Appendix II.

3. Research project with 5 components (45):

- a) planning meeting and final meeting-5 (all or nothing)
- b) proposal-5
- c) outline-10
- d) paper with abstract-20
- e) presentation-5

Please see Appendix III.

COURSE POLICIES

Ethics

- All students should respect and follow the university's honor code:
<https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>

Class norms and expectations

- GMU, the philosophy dept, and I are committed to an equitable, inclusive, and safe learning environment for everyone. My goal is to organize and run my classes according to these principles. If you have concerns or ideas to share, please talk with me about these.
- You must buy the required books and print out all assigned readings and bring the assigned readings to class to receive full participation points.
- Assignments are subject to change. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of developments and be respectful of others.
- Please be on time and stay the whole time.
- Use of phones and laptops is not permitted in class. If this raises a concern for you, please let me know.

Communications

- You must use your GMU email accounts, checking messages daily and sending me messages via your Mason email.
- I will send all messages through email. If you write to me, I will try to respond within 48 hours, except for weekends or holidays. If your message is urgent, please indicate this.
- If you do not hear from me within 48 hours, please write to me again. If I do not respond in the next 48 hours, please contact rghani@gmu.edu for assistance.

Assignments and grading

- All written work should be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins. Please also include page numbers and your name. References may be in APA, MLA, or Chicago style.
- Late assignments will lose points equivalent to a full letter grade for each full day late except in cases approved in advance or in the event of a documented emergency. If you want to request an extension, please do it as soon as possible. In any case you must request this at least 48 hours before the due date in order to avoid a lateness penalty.
- There is no make up for presentations. In cases of documented emergency, we will agree on alternatives and a completion date.
- Students are expected to know how to properly document sources and avoid plagiarism. Plagiarized work will receive a failing grade on the assignment and will result in a referral to the Honor Council.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

- The Office of Disability Services at (703) 993-2474 <http://ds.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu/>
- LGBTQ Resources: <https://lgbtq.gmu.edu>
- Emergency Assistance Funding: <https://ulife.gmu.edu/student-emergency-assistance-funding-2/>
- Student Health Services: <https://shs.gmu.edu>
- University Libraries: <http://library.gmu.edu/>
- Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>
- For further resources see: <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus/>

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1, January 17 Introductions

WEEK 2, January 24 Global Structural Injustice: Young's "Social Connection Model"

Young, Chapters 2, 4-5, pp. 43-59, 95-152.

WEEK 3, January 31 Epistemic Injustice

Fricker, Introduction, Chapters 1-2, 6-7, pp. 1-59, 142-177.

WEEK 4, February 7 Knowers and Knowing in the 17th century

Hatfield, Gary, "René Descartes" (section 3.1-3.2), in Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, eds., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2023). Available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes/#HowDoOurMindKnow>

Mignolo, Walter D. "Introduction: Coloniality," in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1-24. **(BB)**

WEEK 5, February 14 Decoloniality and Knowing I

Mignolo, Chapter 2, "I Am Where I Do": Re-mapping the Order of Knowing," 77-117. **(BB)**

Young, Chapter 7, pp. 171-187.

WEEK 6, February 21 Feminist Ontologies and Epistemologies: Embodied, Embedded, Interdependent

Harding, Sandra, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is "Strong Objectivity"?" in *The Centennial Review* 36 (Fall 1992): 437-470. **(BB)**

Lugones, Maria, "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception," in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham: MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 77-102. **(BB)**

Young, Iris Marion, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought," in *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 38-59. **(BB)**

TBA SESSION

Code, Lorraine, "Introduction" and Conclusion" in *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-24, 279-285. **(BB)**

WEEK 7, February 28 A Critical Race Approach

Sharpe, Chapters 1 and 4, pp. 1-24; pp. 102-134.

WEEK 8, March 6 - SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9, March 14 Decoloniality and Knowing II

Glissant, Imaginary, APPROACHES (all), Concerning a Baroque Abroad in the World, Dictate-Decree, pp. 1-42, 77-80, 91-102.

WEEK 10, March 20 Decoloniality and Knowing II

Glissant, THEORIES (all), pp. 131-179.

Week 11, March 27 NO CLASS**WEEK 12, April 3 Decoloniality and Knowing II**

Mbembe, Chapter 1, pp. 9-41.

WEEK 13, April 10

Mbembe, Chapter 5 and Conclusion, pp. 117-155, 184-189.

WEEK 14, April 17 Indigenous Ontologies and Epistemologies

Betasamosake Simpson, Introduction, Chapters 1 – 4, 9, pp. 11-70, 145-174.

WEEK 15, April 24 Indigenous Ontologies and Epistemologies

Betasamosake Simpson, Chapters 10-12, pp. 175-232.

WEEK 16, May 1 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**May 6 PAPERS DUE**

APPENDIX I. CLASS PARTICIPATION

DESCRIPTION

This is a seminar. Therefore, while I will at times lecture and lead us in the class sessions, discussion is an integral part of the course proceedings. Through discussion we will work to clearly articulate what we wonder or think, and often revise it as we engage with other people's ideas. Informed discussion shows respect for ourselves as thinkers and for others as our classmates, and more generally, fellow members of humanity and the social and moral fabric.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

1. Value: 25 points

General criteria for evaluating class participation:

1. Consistently attends and makes contributions to discussions;
2. Consistently demonstrates knowledge and understanding of reading and other course content, and ideally an ability to offer insights and critiques on this content.
3. Consistently demonstrates ability to identify important questions or issues: presents highlighted material that emphasizes ethical arguments and concerns and other relevant points for discussion.
4. Deepens or moves discussion forward: builds on ideas of others, integrates various points, and/or offers further distinctive and relevant insights; works to engage others in discussion.
5. Consistently demonstrates respect for others and class etiquette: shows interest in and respect for the views of others; acknowledges the contributions of others; has camera on and sits upright and in a professional manner during class (professional etiquette).

Additional requirements for class participation¹:

For each session from week 2 onwards, each class member will be expected identify three key 'takeaway' points and/or key questions from the week's reading. At the start of the session, we will each list our 'takeaway points' and/or questions, with specific page references, and explain briefly why they seem important to us.

Takeaway points could include, for example: what you take to be a key claim being made by the author; a concept that seems particularly important or useful to you; an insight that changed your perspective on something. These points and questions should be clearly rooted in the text and may be questions of explication, interpretation, or critical analysis. Questions that raise genuine puzzles or confront uncertainty about the claims being made or how to interpret the text are most welcome. You should provide enough specific information to contextualize your points and questions, including making specific references to the text.

Please note that identifying critical points and asking good questions is a valuable skill that takes time and practice – resist the temptation to dash these off at the last minute (25 points, roughly 2 points per class).

APPENDIX II. SYNTHESIS ESSAYS

DESCRIPTION

In two separate short essays, you will take one or more of your ‘takeaway’ points from at least two different readings from different sessions in the given period, explain it and why you think it is important to the authors’ arguments concerning knowers and/or how to cultivate knowledge, and justice, and offer an additional insight of your own or pursue an original question. The first will focus on one or two feminist thinkers and Christina Sharpe. The second will focus on a decolonial thinker and Leeanne Betasamosake Simpson’s work; it may also integrate feminist and/or critical race thinkers’ texts if you wish. Your focus should be on somehow deepening understanding of an author/authors’ arguments, offering an original analysis of an issue or issues, comparing and contrasting authors’ approaches, for example.

It is crucial that your essays be grounded in specific claims and passages from the texts. They must offer **clear explanation** of the portions of the texts you wish to focus on with **comparative analysis** (how are the ideas and arguments of these thinkers connected or intersecting, and how are they different?), in addition to **original insight**.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

1. Value: 15 points for each
2. Recommended length: 4-5 pages double-spaced, and no longer.
3. Due: NLT the Monday after Spring Break and no later than April 22.

EVALUATION

1. Identify your takeaway points. /1
2. Explain why these are important to the authors’ arguments. /3
3. Identify your own insight or question. What is the specific point(s) you want to make and/or questions you want to raise? /3
4. Explain how these insights/questions enrich our understanding of the authors’ ideas. /3
5. Conclude. What have you contributed to this conversation? /2
6. Syntax, diction, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing /3

APPENDIX III. RESEARCH PROJECT

DESCRIPTION

Students will write a final paper that either, (a) analyses a selection of the philosophical texts, theories and concepts examined on this course and assesses their implications for theorizing knowers, knowing and knowledge, and global justice; or, (b) explicates a number of the theories and concepts studied and applies them to a specific social or political issue to be selected, researched and contextualized by the student (in consultation with the course instructor). In either case, papers are expected to make substantial use of the set texts by at least two thinkers studied on the course, show a good understanding of the relevant texts and concepts, and demonstrate an ability to deploy those concepts appropriately and effectively in sustained philosophical analysis. Your paper will also make use of additional sources identified in your research.

A. PLANNING MEETINGS

DESCRIPTION

We will meet twice about your project. The first meeting should be held anytime from the week of February 12th through the week of March 11th. The second should be held anytime between April 3rd and 15th.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

1. Please schedule these meetings at your earliest convenience and no later than two weeks in advance.
2. Value: 2.5 points each.

B. PROPOSAL

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

1. These are due no later than the class following Spring Break.
2. Value: 5 points.
3. They should be 1-2 paragraphs.

EVALUATION

1. topic in general terms (2)
2. your particular questions or concerns (2)
3. syntax, diction, spelling, punctuation (1)

C. OUTLINE WITH ANNOTATED REFERENCES

DESCRIPTION

Your outline should present the basic structure for your research paper and presentations.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

1. Value: 10 Points
2. Recommended length: 1 page, with subheadings and bullets for each element (1-2 sentences) following the introduction, and a separate page for references.
3. References: ideally four, but at least two, annotated and using MLA, APA, Chicago Style. Class materials don't count in this number, but should be represented in your biblio., according to your specific focus.
4. You must schedule a meeting to be held to discuss your outline after submitting it. Please schedule the meeting as soon as possible.
5. Due: NLT week of April 15th

In *many* (not all, and we will discuss your project specifically) cases it will follow this structure:

1. Introduction

- a. What issue do you intend to focus on?
- b. What specific question(s) or concern(s) do you intend to analyze?

2. Arguments in the relevant literature

- a. Present what authors have said about the issue at hand.

3. Your concern(s) and tentative argument

Present your insight in relation to these other ideas/arguments, explaining how your analysis somehow changes and/or deepens our understanding of the issue/ideas, and/or adds to the authors'

arguments, and/or opens a new lens or frame for analysis....etc.

EVALUATION

1. Introduction /1
2. Presentation of others' arguments /1
3. Presentation of your tentative argument: thesis and reasoning /3
4. Organization, syntax, diction, spelling /2
5. References /3

D. RESEARCH PAPER

DESCRIPTION

Please use the following structure unless we have agreed on an alternative one in a meeting:

Introduction

1. What issue do you intend to discuss & why is it pressing?
2. What position do you intend to argue for and what are your reasons?
3. Give a concise summary of how the paper will be organized to get to your conclusion.

Background information

1. If appropriate, present any relevant empirical background information (case law, statistics, existing or developing law, policy) to help orient the reader to the issue, its scope and significance.

Arguments identified in the literature

1. Present what others have said about the issue in the literature you have reviewed. Give each line of argument its own paragraph, at least.

Your concerns and argument

1. Present your view in as much detail as possible.

Objections or challenges

1. Identify at least one and ideally, two or three possible criticisms or objections to your view OR identify the challenges to following up on your argument.
2. Respond to these and tell us why your view is best, ethically speaking.

Conclusion

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

1. You must have at least 4 academic references not including course materials;
2. Papers should be between 15 and 20 pages double-spaced with references on a separate page.
3. Value: 20 points.
4. Due: May 6th.

EVALUATION

1. Introduction: statement of issue, why it's pressing, thesis (2)
2. Presentation of others' arguments (2)
3. Presentation of your position (4)
4. Objections and clarification of why your argument should prevail (2)
6. Discussion of recommendations for policy & practice if relevant (2)
7. Organization of the argument (2)
8. Syntax, diction, punctuation, spelling, paragraphing (2)

9. Referencing (4)

E. PRESENTATION**DESCRIPTION**

You will present your research project to the class at the end of the semester.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

1. Value: 5 points

EVALUATION

1. Introduction: statement of issue, why it's morally pressing (1)
2. Presentation of others' ethical arguments (2)
3. Presentation of your position and moral reasons (3)
4. Objections / challenges and response (1)
5. Discussion of recommendations for policy & practice (1)
6. Integration of ethical theories and concepts (2)

¹ Adapted from Prof. Rachel Jones