

Omar Fakhri

Philosophy of Race

Course Description

The central question for us will be: what is race? Broadly speaking, there are two main answers to this question: racial anti-realism and racial realism. The former is the view that there are no races, and the latter is the view that there are races. In the former camp, there are the so-called racial skeptics, and we will consider the reasons why they deny the existence of race. On the realist camp, there are a host of different perspectives. The naturalist argues that racial groups are distinguishable by biological features, but this fact does not justify discrimination. The constructivists argue that race is socially constructed. Here we will look at different constructivists. For example, there are those who think that race is marked by visible and external signs, such as a particular social-political function in society. On other constructivists view, the important thing about our socially constructed concept of race is the history. In particular, how certain groups are treated today because of what has happened to this group in the past. There are also basic racial realists who hold that race is real, but in a non-biological and non-social way.

Before looking at the contemporary answers to the main question, we will look at important historical background on race in the ancient and early modern world. The aim of this course is twofold: first, to provide the student with the necessary tools to assess the main question properly. Second, to be able to appreciate the different views on the metaphysics of race, and the reasons for these different views.

Course Requirements:

- Biweekly Assignments 40% – These are short reaction papers between 400-500 words. You are expected to summarize an important part of the reading and then critically evaluate it.

Pick only **one** of the following requirements (note: for those interested in applying to graduate programs in philosophy, I highly recommend doing the latter option):

- Three Papers 20% each – These are shorter papers, about 5-7 double-spaced pages. Prompts will be handed out a week before the paper is due.

Or

- Long Paper 60% - This is a substantial paper, about 15 double-spaced pages. You will be required to get your paper topic approved by me first. Ideally, you should aim to do this at least a month before the paper is due. This paper will engage with a big bulk of the assigned readings and perhaps some outside sources as well. If you decide to write this paper instead of the three short papers, please let me know as soon as you make this decision. I will provide extensive comments on this paper, and I would be happy to read future drafts of it, even after the class is done.

Required Text:

There is no required text. I will post all the reading online.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Race in the ancient and modern world

Benjamin Isaac: *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, pp. 1-38.

Unit 2: Polygenesis vs monogenesis

Hume: Of National Characters

Kant: Of the Different Human Races

Darwin: "On the Races of Man" in *The Descent of Man* (optional)

Richard Popkin: Hume's Racism (optional)

Arguing that Hume was espousing polygenesis

Andrew Valls: *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, pp.127-149 (optional)

Argues that Hume was not espousing polygenesis

Unit 3: General

Ron Mallon: 'Race' - Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic

Naomi Zack: "Race and Contemporary Anthropology" in *Philosophy of Science and Race*

(Zack's book, *Philosophy of Science and Race*, probably has a good chapter on the strong scientific consensus that discrete, essentialist races do not exist)

Unit 4: Methodology and tools for assessment

Sally Haslanger: *Tracing the Sociopolitical Reality of Race*, pp. 4-24.

Unit 5: Racial naturalism

Quayshawn Spencer: *How to Be A Biological Racial Realist*

Unit 6: Racial skepticism

Anthony Appiah: *Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections*

Naomi Zack: "Race and Contemporary Anthropology" in *Philosophy of Science and Race*

Unit 7: Thin and institutional constructivism

Charles Mills: *Blackness Visible*, ch. 3

Paul Taylor: Appiah's Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Reality of Race (optional)

Unit 8: Racial population naturalism

Robin Andreasen: *The Cladistic Race Concept: A Defense*

Cladistic Races

Philip Kitcher: *Race, Ethnicity, Biology, Culture in Racism*

Socially isolated race

Neven Sesardic: *Race: A Social Destruction of a Biological Concept*

Genetically clustered race

Unit 9: Race and ethnicity

Cornell and Hartmann: *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, pp. 1-40.