

SPRING 2014
PHI 202, Section 03
PHILOSOPHICAL VISIONS OF AMERICAN PLURALISM

Location: John Jay College of Criminal Justice
524 West 59th St. / Room NB L2.81
New York, NY 10019

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:50 to 4:05

Instructor: Dr. Douglas Ficek

Email: dficek@jjay.cuny.edu

Office: If you would like to schedule an appointment with me, please speak with me before or after class or send me an email with your relevant information (full name and course section).

Description: What is philosophy, and what is American philosophy? These are not easy questions, and there is little consensus on them. Some argue that philosophy should be defined in terms of the work of academically trained philosophers, and that American philosophy thus refers to the work of American thinkers who are so trained. On the other hand, others argue that philosophy should not be limited to the work of professional philosophers, and that American philosophy should thus be more inclusive. After all, *everyone philosophizes* – not just people with advanced degrees from elite educational institutions.

As a course, “Philosophical Visions of American Pluralism” takes diversity seriously, and in it we will take the inclusive approach. We will read a number of texts – from David Walker to Lewis R. Gordon, from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Nel Noddings – all of which speak to the complexity and dynamism of the United States as a country. The readings will not be comprehensive – it would be impossible to cover everything in one semester – but we will discuss abolitionism, feminism, transcendentalism, pragmatism, and several other movements. Hopefully, this exploration will inspire you to read more on your own.

Requirements: This course is reading-intensive, and it is your responsibility to read the appropriate texts before class begins. To this end, I will be giving you several pop quizzes throughout the semester, all of which will be given at the beginning of class, so do not make lateness a habit. *You may use your hand-written notes on these quizzes.*

There will also be three paper assignments. All three will be six-to-eight pages in length, and I will give you the details in a few weeks. As you will be able to choose the questions yourself, begin thinking about those aspects of American philosophy that interest you the most.

Obviously, attendance is mandatory, and excessive absences (more than three) will negatively affect your final grade. Excessive tardiness will also negatively affect your final grade. Bottom line: *If you cannot fully commit to this course, then you should not take it.*

Outcomes: John Jay College of Criminal Justice now requires that specific learning outcomes be specified on course syllabi. Here are three general learning outcomes for PHI 202: (1) Students will be able to identify and evaluate arguments; (2) students will be able to explicate key philosophical texts on the American philosophical tradition; and (3) students will be able to discuss these texts both in class discussion and in their written work.

Caveats: As an instructor, I am pretty easy-going. I do, however, insist upon a respectful atmosphere in

the classroom. What exactly does this mean? It means: no phone calls, no texting, no sleeping, and no ridiculously long bathroom breaks. If your phone does go off during class, you can either sing a song for the class – Johnny Cash would be fantastic – or I can assign an additional writing assignment that *everyone* must do. This is not a joke.

“My flash drive broke” has become the new “My dog ate my homework,” and I will not accept it as an excuse for late or incomplete work. Please use dropbox.com or docs.google.com to ensure the security of your written work. Also, they are *free*.

Finally, I take academic dishonesty *very* seriously and will fail anyone who plagiarizes on any of the written work. Do not test me on this. Please review the official policy:

“Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas, words, or artistic, scientific, or technical work as one's own creation. Using the ideas or work of another is permissible only when the original author is identified. Paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as direct quotations, require citations to the original source.

Plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. *Lack of dishonest intent does not necessarily absolve a student of responsibility for plagiarism.*

It is the student's responsibility to recognize the difference between statements that are common knowledge (which do not require documentation) and restatements of the ideas of others. Paraphrasing, summarizing, and direct quotation are acceptable forms of restatement, as long as the source is cited.

Students who are unsure how and when to provide documentation are advised to consult with their instructors. The Library has free guides designed to help students with problems of documentation.”

Grading: Attendance – 10%
Pop Quizzes – 15%
First Paper – 25%
Second Paper – 25%
Third Paper – 25%

Texts: Nancy Stanlick, *American Philosophy: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2013)
David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, ed. Peter P. Hinks (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000)
Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, *Nature Walking* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991)
William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, abr. ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013)
How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova, ed. Kathleen Dean Moore, Kurt Peters, Ted Jojola, and Amber Lacy (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007)

The other required texts for this course are available at douglasficek.com. Download and/or print them out ASAP. *Always bring the appropriate texts to class.*

Schedule: January 28 – Course Introduction
January 30 – *American Philosophy: The Basics*, pp. 1-19
February 4 – Selections from *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville
February 6 – *American Philosophy: The Basics*, pp. 20-41
February 11 – Selections from *The Federalist Papers*

February 13 – *American Philosophy: The Basics*, pp. 42-57

February 18 – *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, pp. xi-36

February 20 – NO CLASS

February 25 – *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, pp. 37-82

February 27 – “Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions” by Elizabeth Cady Stanton

March 4 – *American Philosophy: The Basics*, pp. 58-76

March 6 – *Nature Walking*, pp. TBA

March 11 – *Nature Walking*, pp. TBA

March 13 – “The Conservation of Races” by W.E.B. Du Bois

March 18 – “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For” by Emma Goldman

March 20 – *American Philosophy: The Basics*, pp. 77-103

March 25 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 19-52

March 27 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 53-88

April 1 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 88-129

April 3 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 129-160

April 8 – *American Philosophy: The Basics*, pp. 104-122

April 10 – *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*, pp. 1-45

April 15 – NO CLASS

April 17 – NO CLASS

April 22 – NO CLASS

April 24 – *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*, pp. 49-129

April 29 – *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*, pp. 133-179

May 1 – *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*, pp. 183-232

May 6 – *American Philosophy: The Basics*, pp. 123-148

May 8 – “Why Care About Caring?” by Nel Noddings

May 13 – “Black Feminist Epistemology” by Patricia Hill Collins

May 15 – “African-American Philosophy, Race, and the Geography of Reason” by Lewis R. Gordon