

Department of Philosophy  
The Colorado College  
Fall 2004 - Block 3

Dennis McEnnerney  
Office: 132 Armstrong Hall  
Phone: 389-6564; E-mail:  
dmcennerney@coloradocollege.edu

Philosophy 203

## TOPICS IN PHILOSOPHY: PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS OF IDENTITY

315 Armstrong Hall

### Course Description

Philosophy 203 will investigate the meanings, problems, and possibilities of contemporary identity politics. The course will begin with an examination of three very different approaches toward identity and politics: liberal conceptions of individual rights and religious liberties; existentialist explorations of nihilism and freedom; and traditionalist understandings of virtue and action. The heart of the course will then trace the emergence of a new kind of identity politics out of racial, feminist, and queer movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The term will end by trying to make sense of the tensions of contemporary politics, especially in the context of an emerging global polity shaped by the current strange mix of market forces, religious and ethnic extremism, terrorism, and democratization.

### Course Goals

The primary aim of the course will be to help students understand some basic philosophical approaches to understanding identity – both in personal and political senses. The course will explore dilemmas and controversies associated with such approaches to identity. An equally important aim of the course will be help students gain perspective on contemporary political controversies associated with the emergence of various forms of identity politics, particularly forms associated with racial, feminist, and queer political movements of the last 40 years or so. The course will also seek to develop students' ability to bring together judgments, based upon philosophical principles and arguments, with historical understanding of the changing contexts that shape philosophical horizons.

The course will also seek to develop students' abilities to read, interpret, and respond to complex texts. Refining and developing interpretations of the texts we read will be emphasized through a number of short writing assignments, combined with discussion and presentations in class. Two longer papers will aim to give students chances to develop and defend their own judgments about the problems the course will investigate.

### Course Requirements

*Reading.* This course will have a heavy yet quite rewarding reading list. Students will be expected to keep up with the reading throughout the block. Plan to spend a fair amount of time reading *before* attending class and, at times, re-reading after class. In general, texts are to be brought to our meetings so that they may be referred to in our discussions.

*Course Meetings and Discussion.* Most course meetings will consist largely of discussion, with some lecturing from time to time. Individual students will be assigned to lead discussions or take part in debates on particular topics periodically. Students should expect to attend class meetings consistently and punctually; and to discuss the subjects and texts under investigation in a civil manner. Performance in discussions will strongly influence the participation grade.

*Writing and Examinations.* Students will write six two-page reaction papers, two longer essays (4-5 and 5-7 pages, respectively) and an in-class final examination. The two papers are to be typed (i.e., word-processed), double-spaced, and annotated in accordance with accepted norms of scholarship (that is, with citations and notes). Unexcused late papers will be downgraded one step per hour tardy.

### Required Texts

John Locke, *A Letter concerning Toleration*, ed. James Tully (Hackett Publishing, 1983)  
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New Directions Publishing, 1964)  
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Grove Press, 1963)  
Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 1990)  
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990, 1999)  
Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Guttmann (Princeton University Press, 1994)  
Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorisms Challenge to Democracy* (Ballantine Books, 1995, 2001)

### Additional Readings

John Locke, selections from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)  
Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," from *The Fabric of Existentialism: Philosophical and Literary Sources*, ed. Richard Gill and Ernest Sherman (Prentice-Hall, 1973)  
Alasdair MacIntyre, "Virtues, the Unity of Life, and the Conception of Tradition," in *After Virtue* (Notre Dame University Press, 1981, 1984)  
John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society* (Second Series), ed. Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (Oxford, 1964)

Other supplemental readings may also be assigned as the block unfolds. All additional and supplemental readings will be available as electronic reserves.

### Grading and Attendance Policies

Grades will be assigned on an 100-point scale and weighted in the following manner:

1. First paper (4-5 pages)	Sun., 7 Nov.	20%
2. Second paper (5-7 pages)	Thurs., 18 Nov.	25%
3. Final examination	Wed., 24 Nov.	30%
4. Six reaction papers (2 pages each)	Various dates	12%
4. Participation		<u>13%</u>
TOTAL:		100%

The two-page reaction papers will be graded minimally: plus, check, minus. For detail on this requirement, see p. 5 of this syllabus.

Regular, timely attendance and active participation in discussion are essential parts of the course. Unexcused absences and regular tardiness will be noted and will affect grades negatively. If you have a good reason to be absent or late, notify me as soon as possible. Be sure to write a note (so that I remember!) as well as speak to me.

The schedule of assignments appears above and below. You will be expected to meet all of these deadlines. Exceptions will be made only in extreme and unavoidable circumstances. If you expect to miss the exam or submit a paper late, contact me immediately. Either see me in my office, or give me a note or an e-mail message explaining your circumstances. If religious observances or other serious obligations conflict with the course schedule, let me know as soon as possible, and we can work out an alternate schedule for you.

Plan to attend class for the whole period, focusing on coursework throughout. If you have a good reason for arriving late or leaving early, please notify me in advance in writing (e-mail is best). If you cannot notify me in advance, do so as soon as you can afterwards.

***As a courtesy to all, please turn off pagers and telephones while in class.***

Note that this entire syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

### Office Hours/Communication

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30-3 p.m. I am also generally be in my office (132 Armstrong) in the afternoon. The easiest way to meet with me would be to make an appointment after class, or via telephone (x6564) or e-mail (dmcennerney@coloradocollege.edu).

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS, TOPICS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note: All assignments are to be completed *before* class.  
Class will meet from 9:20 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., with a 15-minute break  
\* Indicates electronic reserve reading.

### ***I. Week 1 : Three Conceptions of Identity and Politics***

- Monday, 1 November            Introduction – Identity, Philosophy, and Politics  
Reading: Begin reading Locke and Sartre as soon as possible!
- Tuesday, 2 November        Lockean Consciousness and the Right of Liberty  
a. \*Locke, “Ch. 27: “Of Identity and Diversity,” in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*  
b. Locke, *A Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 21-58.
- Wednesday, 3 November    Sartrean Existentialism and the Problem of the Self  
**\*\*Class Meets at 1PM\*\***  
a. Sartre, *Nausea*, pp. 1-56.  
b. Sartre, *Nausea*, pp. 56-94.
- Thursday, 4 November       Nothingness and Modern Freedoms  
a. Sartre, *Nausea*, pp. 94-135.  
b. Sartre, *Nausea*, pp. 135-178.
- Friday, 5 November         Selfhood: Experiences, Choices, Virtuous Roles?  
a. \*Sartre, “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” pp. 519-533.  
b. \*MacIntyre, “Virtues, Unity of Life, and Concept of Tradition,” pp. 204-225.
- Fri.-Sat, 5-6 November      Optional Individual Appointments to Discuss Paper Drafts
- Sunday, 6 November         **FIRST PAPER DUE AT 11 AM**

### ***II. Weeks 2-3: New Identifications and New Forms of Political Action***

- Monday, 8 November         Colonization, Racism, Violence, and National Identity  
a. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 35-106.  
b. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 206-248.
- Tuesday, 9 November       Losing Identity: Problem or Good?  
a. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 249-316.  
b. Rawls, “Justice as Fairness,” pp. 132-157.
- Wednesday, 10 November    The Liberal State and the Problem of Oppression  
a. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, pp. 3-38.  
b. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, pp. 39-95.

- Thursday, 11 November From Impartial Justice to Difference Politics  
 a. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, pp. 96-163.  
 b. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, pp. 163-191.
- Friday, 12 November Subjects in Question: Sex, Gender, and Normative Violence  
 a. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. vii-xxxiii.  
 b. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 3-44.
- Monday, 15 November Deconstructing Identifications, Queer Performativity  
 a. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 45-100.  
 b. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 101-190.

## ***II. Weeks 3-4: Making Sense of Identity Politics in the Contemporary Era***

- Tuesday, 16 November Identities and the Politics of Recognition  
 a. Charles Taylor, et al, *Multiculturalism*, pp. 3-25.  
 b. Charles Taylor, et al, *Multiculturalism*, pp. 75-104.
- Wednesday, 17 November Perspectives of Multicultural Identities and Politics  
 a. Habermas in Taylor, et al, *Multiculturalism*, pp. 105-148.  
 b. Apiah in Taylor, et al, *Multiculturalism*, pp. 149-164.
- Thursday, 18 November Writing Day  
**NO CLASS – SECOND PAPER DUE AT 4 PM**
- Friday, 19 November The Context of Contemporary Western Identifications  
 a. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, pp. 1-87.  
 b. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, pp. 88-151.
- Monday, 22 November Can Difference and Democracy Co-Exist?  
 a. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, pp. 155-216.  
 b. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, pp. 219-300.
- Tuesday, 23 November Terror, Identities, and Politics  
 a. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, pp. xi-xxxii.  
 b. Review Locke, Sartre, MacIntyre, and Rawls.
- Wednesday, 24 November **FINAL EXAMINATION**

## Two-Page Summary And Reaction Statements

Over the course of the term, students will write at least six short, informal summary-and-reaction statements. These pieces should:

- a) state in summary form what strikes you as the most significant or interesting point (or two points) made in the assigned text or texts; and
- b) explain your reaction to that aspect of the reading.

These statements should be the equivalent of 1 ½ - 2 word-processed, double-spaced pages – so about 375-525 words long. The format is informal: your statement should list your name, the date, the assignment (the authors, titles, and chapters/pages discussed), and your own title at the top. You should divide the statement into two parts, one summarizing the reading's most important point or points and the other giving your reaction to the reading. You need neither quote nor cite the text, though you can, if you think it important to do so. The statements should be written in clear, Standard English prose. The style may be informal.

As you write, don't try to summarize *all* the points made in the reading. Focus on one or points (or, at most, three) that seems highly significant *to you*. This point or these points ought to have led you to think about something that seems important, significant, or meaningful. This point or these points need not be central to the reading, although in most cases I expect they will be. You may well write about some minor aside that the authors make, if that aside has led you to begin thinking. Just be sure to explain clearly and accurately what the authors say when you say the authors say something. Also, explain your reaction, your interest, your thought process. When I say, "explain," I don't mean saying that something is "interesting" or it has "made you think." Instead, identify what *in particular* strikes you as interesting, or what specific problems or ideas the reading raised for you, and then give the reader some sense of why any of these ideas seem important or significant to you. What has led you to react in the way you have?

This assignment is meant to be focused both on the reading and on your thoughts insofar as they relate to the readings. For the second half of the papers, you may explain why the authors' claims seem to you wrong-headed, or really cogent; why they excite or repel you; why they have made you think of something in a new way, or why they seem to point to a dead end. You may explain why the piece seems really bad or really good to you. This assignment lets you think aloud, as it were. However, the first part of the paper should accurately summarize what the author says.

The assignment also, I hope, will further four other aims. First, it will give you a chance to work on mastering the readings, as well as to demonstrate to me that you have done the reading. If there are parts of the readings that you don't understand, then write about the problems you have in seeing the author's points. I'll try to address those problems, either directly, by commenting on your paper, or indirectly, in class. Second, these assignments are designed to give you some easy practice in writing clearly and coherently. The more you learn to clarify your thoughts on paper, the better off you will be as a writer and student. Third, your comments may provide food for thought for you and your fellow students in class discussion and when you prepare to write exam essays.

These papers will be graded minimally: plus, check, minus. At most, I will add only a few comments.

- Plus: a) the paper clearly and coherently develops an idea; b) it also accurately and fully summarizes what the readings say; and c) it convincingly and clearly shows why this point or line of thought is significant to you.
- Check: the paper is a serious effort that contains a reasonably accurate summary and a serious reaction.
- Minus: the paper is just thrown together, it lacks careful thought, or it is inaccurate about the reading,

Pluses will earn extra credit (**2.5%**), with checks gaining full credit (**2%**), check/minus partial (**1.5%**), and minuses partial (**1%**) or **zero** credit. I will give pluses rarely. A check is the equivalent of an "A+" already for 2% of your final grade.

There are 11 authors assigned in this course. You must write reaction papers on six of them., but you may write on additional authors. – in which case only the six best grades will be counted for the final grade. No late papers will be accepted.

Note: Reaction papers must come from across the term. There must be *two* from each of the three parts of the course:

I. Locke, Sartre, MacIntyre

II. Fanon, Rawls, Young, Butler.

III. Taylor, Habermas, Apiah, Barber