

PHIL-174: Philosophy of Reparations

Georgetown University 2020

Instructor: Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò

Email: Olufemi.Taiwo@georgetown.edu

Lecture: 9:30-11:30 MTWR (until Aug. 26th), then 11:00-11:50 Wednesdays

Office Hours: 10:30-11:30 MTWR (until Aug. 26th), then 10:00-11:00 Wednesdays or by appointment

1. Course Summary: What this course is about

In this issues course we will discuss the topic of reparations, in dialogue with the specific case for trans-Atlantic slavery and the associated colonialism on the African continent. Reparations, and moral repair generally construed, are a kind of act that aims to respond to historical harms or injustices. They are a particularly interesting subject from the standpoint of ethical and political philosophy, in that they complicate, challenge, and (hopefully, ultimately) clarify central concepts in these aspects of philosophy, including responsibility, harm, restitution, and welfare. Finally, they provide the occasion for engaging productively with other relevant disciplines, notably history, social science, and even natural sciences like geology and environmental sciences.

Our aim at the level of contemporary moral issues will be to clarify for ourselves the debate around reparations for trans-Atlantic slavery. Our philosophical aim will be to clarify what political and moral relationships are at stake in issues like these, how they can be damaged and what it takes to repair them. These aims, with any luck, will support each other.

2. Course Requirements

Given the aims of the course, I have designed the requirements in such a way as to maximally encourage attendance, completing the course readings, and participating in discussion. Each of these components will be crucial to successful completion of the course. Final grades for the course will be determined on the basis of short reading responses, in-person participation, and two take-home essay exams. The breakdown looks like this:

Class Participation: 20%

Midterm Essays 1 and 2: 25% each

Final Essay: 30%

2.1 Class/Section Participation

15% of your grade for this course is determined on the basis of class participation: attending some combination of class, section, and office hours, and contributing to these spaces while you are there in ways that contribute to rather than detract from the experience of those you share the rooms with. Some students will feel more comfortable contributing thoughts or asking questions in one forum over another, which is fine. A passing grade for the course will simply require students to be active participants in some form or other. Active participation may involve asking question, weighing in with an interpretation of what some author is claiming, or sharing one's

own point of view, insofar as it may helpfully inform the discussion at hand. It also involves being a thoughtful and engaged listener.

A good rule of thumb if you want a participation grade of a B or higher: Don't miss class, and don't disappear: in-class contributions, participation in section, attendance at office hours, reading responses that include thoughtful reflections on class discussion (rather than being limited to the reading), or (worst case scenario) emails explaining why you couldn't do any of the aforementioned are ways to check in if you aren't the chatty type in class.

2.3 Grading

The grade breakdown is as follows:

Grading Criteria:

Essays ought to: 1) clearly articulate the main point of the reading, 2) are relatively well organized, 3) rely on fairly strong evidence and arguments, and 4) are stylistically clear—thereby presenting a *competent* argument, reconstruction of the reading, or separate reading-inspired point. 'A' grades will be awarded when papers *excel* in every one of these categories, exhibiting a clear capacity for *doing philosophy*—and 'A-' grades will be awarded where papers excel in one of these areas. 'B' grades will be awarded to papers that are weaker in one of these areas—but that are still satisfactory. 'C' grades will be awarded to papers that are weak in two or more of these categories; and 'D' grades will only be awarded to papers that are weak all categories or that omit one category altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for a thesis).

Paper deadlines:

If you need an extension on any assignment, please ask *before* the due date. In general, I will be willing to give a 48-hour grace period (no questions asked). If you are still having trouble completing the assignment after that, you must set up an appointment to go over your ideas and set a schedule for finishing the paper. Unless an extension is granted in advance, assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day they are late.

Appealing a grade:

You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and no sooner than 48 hours after you receive your grade. Requests must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can result in lower grades if there are more serious problems that were missed on the first reading.

The honor code:

The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

2.4 Class Conduct

In this class I hope we can come to respect two things: the truth, and each other. There's a connection between these: we all know things, and so we all have things to learn from each other. But we can only acquire and build on each other's knowledge collaboratively – saying what we think others want to hear is not genuine contribution to discussion, and neither is the lack of *voiced* dissent equivalent to genuine consensus. Respect for each other, for knowledge, and for learning requires that we articulate our own views, opinions, misgivings, and questions with courage and respect, and that we contribute

The we will be discussing in this class may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about – most importantly, it's part of what it is to live with other people as full people rather than as objects of management. I promise you all to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. My part, as instructor, is not the same as yours – but you all have a necessary part nevertheless and I ask you all to do yours as well.

3. Tentative Schedule

All readings will be made accessible from the course website:

- **Intensive Week 1 – Reparations / History**

Rachel L. Swarns, “272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe Their Descendants?”

Violence Over the Land by Ned Blackhawk (excerpts from)

- **Intensive Week 2 – History (cont'd)**

Capitalism and Slavery by Eric Williams (excerpts from)

- **Intensive Week 3 – Overall Vision of Class**

Open Veins by Eduardo Galeano (excerpts from)

Once a Week schedule

- **Week 1 – Review**

“The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates
“The Case Against Reparations” by Kevin D. Richardson

Midterm 1 Due: September 4th

- **Week 2 – Harm Repair**

From Here to Equality by Andrea Mullen and William Darity

- **Week 3 – Harm Repair**

“The Legacy of Injustice” by Rahul Kumar and David Silver

- **Week 4 –**

Concerning Violence (film)

- **Week 5 – Relationship Repair**

Moral Repair by Margaret Walker (selections from)

- **Week 6 – Relationship Repair**

“Reparations for US Slavery and Justice Over Time” by Seana Shiffrin

- **Week 7 – Relationship Repair**

”Lockean Argument for Black Reparations” by Bernard Boxill

Week 8 – Relationship Repair

Myisha Cherry, “Love, Anger, and Racial Injustice”; Charles Murigande, “Lessons Learned from the 1994 Rwanda Genocide”

Midterm 2: Tentative due date, November 1st

- **Week 9 – Constructive Views**

Why We Can't Wait by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (selections from)

- **Week 10 – Constructive Views**

Message to the Blackman in America by Hon. Elijah Muhammad (selections from); “Indian Control of Indian Education” by the National Indian Brotherhood / Assembly of First Nations

- **Week 11 – Constructive Views**

: “Reparations and Self-Determination” by Nkechi Taifa

- **Week 12 – Constructive Views**

Kyle Whyte, “Indigenous Climate Justice”; 'Climate apartheid' between rich and poor looms, UN expert warns

- **Week 13 – Constructive Views**

Rachel L. Swarns, “272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe Their Descendants?”

- **Week 14 – Topics in Reparations**

Review / Current Events

- **Week 15 – Topics in Reparations**

Review / Current Events

FINAL PAPER DUE

4. Resources

Accessibility and diversity:

One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to work with the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please feel free to talk to me in office hours. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of services provided by the university. Finally, please let me know if you learn during the semester that something would make the classroom accessible.

Sexual misconduct:

As a faculty member and an educator, it is my responsibility to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault.

And university policy requires all faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. But Georgetown also has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include: [Jen Schweer](#) (202.687.0323) Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention; [Erica Shirley](#) (202.687.6985) Trauma Specialist (CAPS). More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.