

Oppression and Injustice (YHU2280)

M R 10:30–12:00

Active Learning Room, Education Resource Centre Level 2, University Town

Instructor: Prof. Robin Zheng

Contact information

email: robin.zheng@yale-nus.edu.sg

website: on Canvas, via <http://yale-nus.instructure.com/>

office hours: M R 15:30–16:30 (Cendana RC3–02–05D)

to book an appointment, visit: <https://calendly.com/prof-zheng>

Please don't hesitate to contact me; I am here for you and happy to help insofar as I can. However, note that I do **not** respond instantaneously to emails, especially on evenings and weekends, and I cannot guarantee meetings without *at least* 24 hours' advance notice, so make sure you allow plenty of time to get in touch.

Course description

How can we fight oppression and eliminate injustice in the world? Philosophers and activists confronting exploitation, colonialism, imperialism, racism, and sexism have relied on self-produced bodies of theory to guide their analyses and actions. This course focuses on the moral and political thought of oppressed groups with respect to the question of overcoming injustice, that is, on philosophy born of struggle and aimed at emancipation. It explores themes of intersectionality and epistemology, education and liberation in the traditions of Black feminist thought and decolonial Latin American philosophy.

Course requirements

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|--|
| Attendance and participation | 5% | |
| Discussion facilitation | 10% | |
| Class/after-hours contributions | 10% | 8p on the day before/after each class |
| Critical analysis paper (5pp) | 20% | 11:59p, Sat. 12 Sep |
| Concept illustration (poster) | 10% | 12:00a, Tue. 13 Oct |
| Final paper (6–8pp) | 25% | 11:59p, Sat. 14 Nov |
| Building Collective Knowledge | 20% | 11:59p, Sat. 28 Dec |

(5% class proposal, 15% individual section)

Required Texts

All texts should be read *in advance* of the lecture. Texts other than the books below are available through E-Reserves on Canvas.

- bell hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (Boston: South End Press, 1984) [*Yale-NUS e-book*]
- Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment [*Yale-NUS e-book*]
- Angela Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete? [*Yale-NUS e-book*]
- Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks [*Yale-NUS e-book*]

- Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000) **or** Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020)

Unless otherwise marked, multiple readings listed on the same day are all required. **Optional** readings contain material directly related to course themes and class discussion, but may be skipped. (Discussion facilitators, however, are strongly encouraged to read them.) **Further reading** contains useful background information or more tangentially related content, and are provided for your reference.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is mandatory, because participating in discussion is a crucial part of your own and your classmates' learning. If you must miss class, please obtain an Assistant Dean's note or Medical Certificate to excuse your absence, and use the Buddy System to catch up on any material you miss. Note: An inordinate record of unexcused absences is enough reason to fail the class.

The participation grade will consist of your contributions to class discussion and (if relevant) your time spent in office hours. A steady record of high or low participation can make a difference when it comes to borderline grades.

Discussion Facilitation

Each of you will (in small teams) facilitate one class discussion. You are encouraged to organize the discussion however you think is most appropriate to the material, where that will typically include things like identifying the main arguments of the text, generating discussion questions, distributing handouts, making a presentation, designing individual and/or group exercises, or bringing in further materials (e.g. videos, articles) relevant for learning. Meeting with me beforehand to discuss your less plan is strongly encouraged, but not required.

Class Contributions & 'After Hours' Contributions

For each (set of) reading(s), submit a brief write-up (no more than 200 words) on Canvas describing some contribution that you would like to make in class, by **8p the day before class**. For example, you might:

- Identify one significant claim made in the text along with the reasons given for it.
- Write a definition of one key concept from the text, backed up with textual evidence.
- Draw connections between the ideas in this text and other texts in the course.
- Describe something in the text that you were confused by or still have questions about.
- Apply the ideas in the text to other readings or to your own context.

Your contributions will be graded for completion rather than quality, though a steady record of exceptionally or insufficiently thoughtful questions may make a difference to the overall grade.

At the end of each class, make a follow-up post in the 'After Hours' discussion forum on Canvas by **8p after class**. You can either:

- Offer additional thoughts on something that came up during the class discussion.
- Reflect on your planned contribution. Did it come up in the discussion, or did you make a different contribution instead? Did your confusion get cleared up, or your question(s) get answered? Did you draw any further connections to other readings or your own context?

Papers

Critical analysis paper: 5–6 pp (1500–1800 words), due 11:59p, Saturday, 12 September
Final paper: 6–8 pp (1800–2000 words), due 11:59p, Saturday, 14 November

All papers should be submitted through Canvas. Do not put your name anywhere in the paper! Save the document using a title that includes your student ID and the number of the question you're answering. e.g. "AO634890X_Question5.docx." You do not need a cover page. Do not use any nonstandard fonts or formatting. Please number all your pages. **Please use at least 2.0 line spacing, i.e. double-space.** Detailed instructions will be distributed closer to deadline. Note: Feedback on final papers will be provided only upon request.

Writing a good paper is in some ways like writing any other good paper, but there are certain standards and demands that are particular to philosophy. You are advised to read through this [handout: https://tinyurl.com/WritePhilPaper](https://tinyurl.com/WritePhilPaper). I will not read drafts of your papers, but I am happy to talk through outlines and ideas. To get feedback on drafts, you should ask your peers or make an appointment at the Writers' Centre: <https://writerscentre.yale-nus.edu.sg/>.

Note: Detailed instructions will be distributed closer to deadline.

Building Collective Knowledge (BCK) Project

You will be asked, as a class, to collectively create a set of epistemic resources for the course: a series of pamphlets or posters, a print or online magazine, a wiki, etc. A portion of the project (the class proposal) will be graded in common, but sections for which you are individually responsible will be graded individually. Detailed instructions will be distributed closer to deadline.

Late Policy

You are expected to plan and manage your workloads, allowing sufficient time so that you do not lose work through IT malfunction or poor planning. Late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for the first 24 hours they are late (e.g., A- to B+), or by a whole letter grade (e.g., B to C) for submission any time later. Class/after-hours contributions will not be accepted late.

Classroom Climate, Access and Inclusion

Maintaining a respectful, safe, and inclusive classroom is a necessary condition for the co-creation of liberatory knowledge that forms the subject of this course. Note that "inclusive" here alludes not only to the importance of bringing together a generally diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives, but also more specifically to redressing the historical injustice of groups who have been systemically excluded and marginalized. For this reason, it is particularly important to avoid racist, sexist, ableist or other discriminatory language in class discussions or written work – while recognizing compassionately that people may make mistakes or lack relevant background knowledge, and that language, concepts, and discourse are constantly evolving and always context-dependent.

If you have any physical, psychiatric or learning conditions that may impact your performance in this course, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we may arrange for the appropriate accommodations. If you observe any religious or cultural practices that may interfere with this course, please also let me know.

This is a check to see how carefully you have been reading the syllabus. If you see this, please post a cute animal photo somewhere in the “Syllabus” discussion forum on Canvas, using the “Upload photo” function.

As the instructor, I take final responsibility for what happens in my classroom, so if you have suggestions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out. More generally, the College is committed to providing a respectful, safe, and inclusive learning environment for all community members regardless of race, religion, nationality, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class. If you or someone you know has been subject to bias, discrimination, sexual harassment, misconduct, or assault in or outside class, I encourage you to follow up with one or more of these authorities as appropriate: me (YHU2280), your faculty advisor, or your Assistant Dean.

Intellectual Property and Privacy

To help ensure that we may all freely engage in rigorous intellectual discussion and disagreement, you may not record and/or distribute course discussions, lectures, lecture slides or handouts, readings, videos, or other course-related materials without obtaining my permission. This includes audio recording, video, transcription, and photography. Lectures and seminars that are delivered in-person, online, or as a pre-recorded videos should never be recorded or distributed beyond the course for which it was intended.

Though you are encouraged to reflect upon and share their own learning experiences and ideas in whatever forum you wish, you should not share course content produced by myself or your peers (e.g. a peer’s essay, comments made in class, posts to a Canvas discussion thread) without prior permission. Violation of this policy is addressed in the Student Code of Conduct and could result in disciplinary and/or legal consequences.

Academic Integrity

I will hold you to the highest standards of academic integrity. The library provides examples, tip, and resources on plagiarism at <http://library.yale-nus.edu.sg/plagiarism/>. If I suspect any kind of academic dishonesty, I am required to report you to the Academic Disciplinary Committee. Any assignment on which that the Academic Disciplinary Committee judges that plagiarism has occurred will receive zero credit.

If you are in any way unclear as to what constitutes plagiarism, come talk to me *before* you write your papers. Ignorance or confusion will not be accepted as excuses for plagiarism or other academic misconduct.

Health and Wellness

If you are experiencing undue stress or feel you might benefit from private counseling, please contact the Yale-NUS Health and Wellness Center. You may also wish to reach out to your Assistant Dean or Residential Life Officers in your Residential College. For more information on this and other kinds of support, visit <https://studentlife.yale-nus.edu.sg/wellness/>.

Schedule of Readings

| Week | Day | Text(s) |
|--|-----|--|
| <i>(U.S.) Black Feminist Thought: Intersectionality and Epistemology</i> | | |
| 1 | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kristie Dotson, “Concrete Flowers: Contemplating the Profession of Philosophy,” <i>Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy</i> 26, no. 2 (2011): 403–409. |
| 2 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement” ○ Frances M. Beal, “Black Women’s Manifesto; Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” ○ hooks Ch. 2, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” in <i>Feminist Theory from Margin to Center</i> (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 17–33. |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kimberly Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” <i>The University of Chicago Legal Forum</i>, 140 (1989), 139–167. |
| 3 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collins Ch. 5. “The Power of Self-Definition” (pp. 97–122) ○ Collins Ch. 12, “Toward a Politics of Empowerment” (pp. 273–290) <p>Optional: hooks Ch. 6, “Changing Perspectives on Power”</p> |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Davis Chs. 1-2, “Introduction—Prison Reform or Prison Abolition” & “Slavery, Civil Rights, and Abolitionist Perspectives Toward Prison” (pp. 9–39) |
| 4 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Davis Chs. 3-4, “Imprisonment and Reform” & “How Gender Structures the Prison System” (pp. 40–83) ○ Optional: Nirmala Everelles, “Crippin’ Jim Crow: Disability, Dislocation, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline” in <i>Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada</i>, ed. by Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 81-99. |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Davis Chs. 5-6, “The Prison Industrial Complex” & “Abolitionist Alternatives” (pp. 84–115) |
| 5 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kristie Dotson, “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression,” <i>Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies</i> 33, no. 1 (2012): 24–47. <p>Optional: Collins Ch. 11, “Black Feminist Epistemology” (pp. 251–273)</p> |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ José Medina, “Meta-Lucidity and Epistemic Heroes” 5.1 (pp. 186–206) and 5.3 (pp. 225–249) |
| 6 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, “The Conclave: A Dialogic Search for Equality” in <i>Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture</i> (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), 157–198. |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>No Readings</i> |
| <i>Decolonial Latin American Philosophy: Education and Liberation</i> | | |
| 7 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fanon, “Introduction” (pp. xi–xviii) ○ Fanon Ch. 1, “The Black Man and Language” (pp. 1–23) <p>Optional: Fanon Ch. 7, “The Black Man and Recognition” (pp. 185–197)</p> |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enrique Dussel, “Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism,” <i>Nepantla: Views from South</i> 1, no. 3 (2000), 465–478. ○ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” <i>Nepantla: Views from South</i> 1, no. 3 (2000), 533 – 556. <p>Further reading: 556–580.</p> |
| 8 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” <i>Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy</i> 22, no. 1 (2007):186–219. |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interview with Walter Mignolo, “Key Concepts” ○ Walter Mignolo and Michelle K., “Decolonial Aesthesis: From Singapore, To Cambridge, To Duke University” |
| 9 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Freire Ch. 1, “The Justification for a Pedagogy of the Oppressed...” (pp. 43–70) |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Freire Ch. 2, “The ‘Banking’ Concept of Education as an Instrument of Oppression...” (pp. 71–86) <p>Further reading: Freire Ch. 3 “Dialogics” (pp. 87–124)</p> |
| 10 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Freire Ch. 4, “Antialogics and Dialogics as Matrices of Opposing Theories of Cultural Action” (pp. 125–183) |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rigoberta Menchú, “Farewell to the community: Rigoberta decides to learn Spanish,” “The CUC comes out into the open,” “Political activity in other communities,” “Contacts with ladinos” (pp. 180–200) ○ <i>A Dream Compels Us</i> Ch. 2, “With One Single Voice: Women’s Organizations of El Salvador” (pp. 75–117) <p>Optional: Linda S. Maier, “The Case for and Case History of Women’s Testimonial Literature in Latin America” (pp. 1–9)</p> |
| 11 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Julius K. Nyerere, “Ujamaa – The Basis of African Socialism” (pp. 1–9) ○ Che Guevara, “Man and Socialism in Cuba” |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sergio Gallegos and Carol Quinn, “Epistemic injustice and resistance in the Chiapas Highlands: the Zapatista Case,” <i>Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy</i> 32, no. 2 (2017): 247–262 |
| 12 | M | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Excerpts from Subcomandante Marcos, <i>Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings</i>, ed. Juana Ponce de León (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001). ○ Nash, June, “The Fiesta of the Word: The Zapatista Uprising and Radical Democracy in Mexico.” <i>American Anthropologist</i> 99, no. 2 (1997), 261–274. ○ Enrique Dussel, Theses 2–4, “The Political Power of the Community as <i>Potentia</i>,” “Institutional Power as <i>Potestas</i>,” & “<i>Obediential Power</i>” in <i>Twenty Theses on Politics</i> (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008): 13-29. <p>Further reading: Richard Stahler-Sholk, “The Zapatista Social Movement: Innovation and Sustainability,” <i>Alternatives: Global, Local, Political</i> 35, no. 3 (2010), 269–290.</p> |
| | R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Susan Babbitt, “Is Anarchy a False Hope? Latin American Revolutionaries Knew <i>Dhamma</i> and <i>Saddha</i>,” in <i>Comparative Studies in Asian and Latin American Philosophies: Cross-Cultural Theories and Methodologies</i>, ed. Stephanie Rivera Berruz and Leah Kalmanson (London: Bloomsbury, 2018): 175–200. |
| 13 | | <i>No Readings</i> |