

On Being: Theory and the Ancestor

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Brief Rationale of how the course relates to Theory and Criticism

In many, if not most indigenous traditions, the figure of the ancestor is central to a people's cosmology and, therefore, their way of being. This proposed course invites students to consider the founding ancestors (and theories) of their disciplines. The course leans on African and African Diasporic (Black) thought and historiography to imagine transformative theory and practice in the making of knowledge. Students will read both familiar and unfamiliar texts, as the objective is that they come away with a new appreciation of their own chosen discipline. Appreciation means being a subjective and objective experience engaged with in the reading, reflection, and writing, rather than a presumed positive, negative, or ambivalent experience.

Course Description (1/2 to 3/4 page)

Leaning on indigenous (African) and Black radical thought, this course is designed to support and challenge students as they: 1) re-historicize an aspect of their (own) academic discipline(s), 2) re-evaluate the conceptual and theoretical paradigms that inform their research and writing, and 3) imagine transformative epistemic futures in a bid to be better ancestors. As the late Toni Morrison in her essay, "Rememory," articulated, her intellectual journey included a wrestling with received, often unexamined, intellectual traditions about literature and criticism. She realized that her struggle was because: "I wanted my imagination as unencumbered as possible *and* as responsible as possible." It is in this spirit of finding one's intellectual voice and path within one's discipline(s) that this course seeks to engage the figure of the ancestor in epistemic practices. The assumption is that in the particularity lies the universal.

Furthermore, attentive to the past, the course will also closely read some classic texts in the Western tradition to consider how those works still influence disciplinary thought and epistemic practice in, for example, history, philosophy, anthropology, literature, psychology, and ecology. This class will be held in the intellectual and spiritual space intended to comprehend history for what it was and is, what memory has made of it, and the possibilities of scholars' work making a bid to be better ancestors. This means the course is not a search and rescue exercise, but a deep rethinking of the modern humanities and social sciences in a bid to re-indigenize the human into a planet in peril. If the planet were not *an it*, but an ancestor, how would we live, think, and write? In a word, this course reassesses the meanings of ontology (theories of being); axiology (theories of value, ethics and aesthetics); epistemology (theories of power, knowledge, and its production); and methodology (theories, systems, and tools of knowledge) from indigenous traditions that valorizes the past, present, and futures of possibility and flourishing.

- Term (fall or winter), if known—Fall term preferred, but can be flexible
- Syllabus, including theorists or texts to be studied:

Sample of Potential Readings:

Anna Sims Bartel and Debra A. Castillo. Eds. 2021. [The Scholar as Human: Research and Teaching for Public Impact](#).

Kwasi Wiredu. "[Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion](#)." *African Studies Quarterly*, Volume 1, Issue 4, 1998.

Sylvia Wynter. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257-337.

Pascah Mungwini. 2022. *African Philosophy: Emancipation and Practice*.

Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, "Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts..." *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*.

Amina Mama. "African Feminist Thought." <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.504>

Kelbessa, Workineh, "Indigenous Environmental Philosophy" in William Edelglass, and Jay L. Garfield (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy, Oxford Handbooks*

Steve Biko. *I Write What I Like*.

Lewis Gordon. 2022. *Fear of Black Consciousness*.

Achille Mbembe. 2017. *Critique of Black Reason*. Duke University Press (selection)

Cedric J. Robinson. 2020. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Revised and Updated third edition (selection)

Michel-Rolph Trouillot. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

bell hooks. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. (selection)

Gaurav Gajanan Desai and Supriya Nair. Eds. 2005. *Postcolonialisms : An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*. (selection)

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2007. "On The Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 240–70. doi:10.1080/09502380601162548.

Paul Ricœur. 2004. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. (selection)

Edward Carr. 1961. *What Is History?*, London: Macmillan; revised edition ed. R.W. Davies (selection)

Toni Morrison. 1993. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

Tom C. McCaskie. "Exiled from History: Africa in Hegel's Academic Practice." *History in Africa* 46 (2019): 165–94. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2018.27>.

Marc Epprecht. *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*. (selection)

Rafey Habib. 2017. *Hegel and Empire: From Postcolonialism to Globalism*. (selection)

James Lorand Matory. 2018. *The Fetish Revisited : Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make*.

Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2013. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge...*(selection)

Historical Anthropology—the Ancestors in Africa
(http://www.era.anthropology.ac.uk/Era_Resources/Era/Ancestors/)

David Schoenbrun. "Early African Pasts: Sources, Interpretations, and Meanings." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. 20 Nov. 2018.

Green, Lesley (ed) 2013. *Contested Ecologies: Dialogues in the South on Nature and Knowledge*.

Leonhard Praeg & Siphokazi Magadla. Eds. 2014. *Ubuntu: Curating the Archive*. (selection)

C. W. Maris. "Philosophical Racism and Ubuntu: In Dialogue with Mogobe Ramose." *South African Journal of Philosophy*. 2020, 39(3): 308–326

Mabogo Percy More. 2024. *Noel Chabani Manganyi: Being-While-Black-and-Alienated...*

Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider* (selection)

Roger S. Gottlieb. 2013. *Spirituality: What it is, and Why it Matters*. (selection)

Farhad Dalal. "[Jung, A Racist](#)." *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 4 (1988): 263-279

Fanny Brewster. 2017. *African Americans and Jungian Psychology: Leaving the Shadows*.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. 1923. *Primitive Mentality*. (selection)

Robert A. Segal. 2007. "Jung and Lévy-Bruhl." *Journal of Analytical Psychology*. 52 (5): 635–58.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5922.2007.00690.x>.

Johnson, Jane. "Being white, Being Jungian: Implications of Jung's Encounter with the 'non-European' Other." *The Journal of Analytical Psychology*. vol. 65,4 (2020): 707-718. doi:10.1111/1468-5922.12619

Jewsiewicki B. "African Historical Studies Academic Knowledge as 'Usable Past' and Radical Scholarship." *African Studies Review*. 1989;32(3):1-76. doi:10.2307/524548

Amanda Behm, et al, "Decolonizing History: Enquiry and Practice," *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 89, Spring 2020, Pages 169–191,

Francis B. Nyamnjoh. Ed. 2017. *Drinking from the Cosmic Gourd...* (selection)

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2018). *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (1st ed.)

*Mary E. Prendergast, Elizabeth A. Sawchuk, and Kendra A. Sirak. "Genetics and the African Past." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. 19 Oct. 2022.

*Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 2009. *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*. (selection)

*James Baldwin. *Collected Essays*. Toni Morrison. Ed. (selection)

*Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations*. Hannah Arendt. Ed. (selection)

*Brett Ashley Kaplan. Ed. *Critical Memory Studies: New Approaches* (selection)