

Special Topics: Contemporary African Philosophical Thought (491-01)
GL812

Mondays 4:40 pm–7:10 p.m.

Professor Lewis Gordon

We will explore a variety of philosophical and metaphysical problems in recent African philosophy through an examination of the treatment of the concept of “invention” in the work of several influential philosophers and social theorists.

Required texts:

Barry Hallen, *A Short History of African Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. ISBN: 0253215315.

John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. Reed Educational & Professional Publishing, Limited, 1990. ISBN: 0435895915.

V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. ISBN: 0253210801.

K. Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford, 1992. ISBN: 0195068521.

Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophy: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995. ISBN: 1566393809.

Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. ISBN: 0253210801. [**This book is out of print, so excerpts will be handed out**]

Elias Kifon Bongmba, *African Witchcraft and Otherness: A Philosophical and Theological Critique of Intersubjective Relations*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. ISBN: 0791449904.

Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse*. New York: Routledge, 1994. ISBN: 0415908027.

Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2000. ISBN: 0415926467.

Charles Finch, III, M.D., *Echoes of the Old Darkland*. Decatur, GA: Khenti, Inc., 1996. ISBN: 0-9639444-0-8.

Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*. ISBN 0-8166-24410

Writing requirements:

You will be required to write 2 papers. The first paper will be a 10-page critical discussion of one of the texts read up to this point in the course. It will be worth 30 percent of your grade. It will be due on Wednesday, October 13, 2004 at 12 pm in the assigned box in the Philosophy Department. The second paper will be a 15 to 20-page philosophical paper on any topic discussed or philosophical problem raised by the class discussions and readings.

Class participation and attendance:

You are encouraged to ask questions and offer arguments in critical evaluation of the material. Class participation and attendance count for 10 percent of your grade.

Syllabus

Date	Topics and Texts
8/30	Introduction: Philosophy in the African context. <i>Recommended Reading:</i> Barry Hallen, <i>A Short History of African Philosophy</i> .
9/6	No class. Labor day.

Part I: Africa's "Invention"

9/13	Through ethnographic eyes—Is the translation of Africa indeterminable? <i>Text:</i> John Mbiti, <i>African Religions and Philosophy</i>
9/20	The colonization of knowledge. <i>Texts:</i> V.Y. Mudimbe, <i>The Invention of Africa</i>
9/27	The invention of race and Pan-Africanism. Anthony Appiah, <i>In My Father's House</i>
10/4	No class. Special reading day and, if you'd like, day of imperial atonement
10/11	Inventions of the Gender kind. <i>Texts:</i> Oyeronke Oyewumi, <i>The Invention of Women</i>

Part II: Sage Philosophy and African Academic/"Professional" Philosophy

10/18	What is the significance of "invention" in the study of cultural subjects? Metaphilosophy, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Theodicy, and Ethics in the context of the Akan. <i>Text:</i> Kwame Gyekye, <i>An Essay on African Philosophy</i>
10/25	Gyekye continued
11/1	Critique of contemporary philosophy of human science, the ethical turn as first philosophy, and problems of cultural and epistemological relativism continued. <i>Text:</i> Elias Kifon Bongmba, <i>African Witchcraft and Otherness</i>

Part III:

Hermeneutics, Pragmatism, Existential Phenomenology, Philosophical Anthropology, and African Philosophy *Engagé*

11/8	The political significance of interpretative methodologies. <i>Text:</i> Tsenay Serequeberhan, <i>The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy</i>
11/15	Cultural relativism and human rights in the African context. <i>Text:</i> Kwasi Wiredu's <i>Cultural Universals and Particulars</i> . [handout selections]
11/22	The formation of consciousness and the poetic and historical construction of self. <i>Text:</i> Paget Henry, <i>Caliban's Reason</i>
11/29	The question of Africa and the formation of Humanity revisited. <i>Text:</i> Charles Finch, III, M.D., <i>Echoes of the Old Darkland</i>
12/6	Concluding discussion