

Winter 2020 Seminar

PHIL 675: Seminar in Contemporary European Philosophy

Seminar Topic: The Phenomenology of Frantz Fanon from Psychiatry to Politics

Tuesday 14:35 – 17:25 (Leacock 927)

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Office hours: Tuesdays 17:30–19:30. (With the exception of this week: Thurs, Jan. 9th, 17:00–19:00)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The past decade has seen intensified engagement with Frantz Fanon's work, with renewed interest for his two principal books, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. But it was not until recently that the question of the place of his psychiatric practice and writing began to be posed. Published in 2015, and translated into English in 2018, *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté (Alienation and Freedom)* collected together Fanon's psychiatric writings, including many hitherto unpublished letters and journals and difficult-to-find articles in psychiatry (the volume also includes two plays and some political writing). What this volume attests to is Fanon's sustained engagement, indeed investment, in psychiatry throughout his life. Rather than play a secondary role to his political or philosophical work, his psychiatry both mirrors that work and informs it. In particular, the psychiatric sphere is where we see Fanon experimenting, failing, reworking methods, and caring for his fellow colonized patients. This psychiatric practice, and publications, continued throughout Fanon's career, not only during his medical studies in France, but in his appointment as head of four wards of the psychiatric hospital of Blida-Joinville in Algeria in 1953, his subsequent resignation in 1956, and his move to Tunisia in 1957, where he opened a psychiatric day unit.

My thesis, then, is that Fanon's phenomenological and political philosophy found its development, in good measure, through his psychiatric work. That it is by reading these articles, which seem at times set apart from his considerations of racism and colonialism, that we can find the clues for how Fanon came to invent his own phenomenological method, both *critical* and *decolonizing*, aimed at doing justice to the experiences of colonized and racialized oppression. Significantly, I would claim that Fanon's considerations on colonial violence only make sense when read in conjunction with his psychiatric and psychopathological work. For they show how colonial pathologies and aberrations of affect pervade the atmosphere and infect the structures of institutions, imaginaries, and selves in a colonial society, including its psychiatric institutions, and cannot simply be held at bay at its doors.

In recent years, much has been made of the promise of "critical phenomenology" as a reconfiguration that corrects for classical phenomenology's bracketing of the social and historical. My argument is that in Fanon we find not merely an appropriation of previous philosophies (Hegel, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty), but an invention of a new way of doing phenomenology out of his own psychopathological experience and practice, both affective and epistemological, both as racialized subject and colonial medical practitioner. It is this dual and split perspective, this tension, that allows Fanon to chart the oppositional structures and occlusions of racism and colonialism.

In this seminar, we begin by reading sections of Fanon's first major phenomenological work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, to set the groundwork for our study and to understand Fanon's orientation in writing on racism and colonialism. We will read significant parts of both his psychiatric publications

and his philosophical psychopathological ones. Crucial here is Fanon's "The 'North African Syndrome,'" which was published in the same year as *BSWM*. Focusing on his articles during his time at Blida-Joinville and in Tunisia, we will ask after Fanon's methods and the affective and epistemological terrain he charts. And we will aim to read a significant part of his last book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, to see how his engagement with psychopathology reveals colonial and racial violence.

This course is part of a monograph I am currently writing. Please cite my lectures accordingly.

READINGS:

Frantz Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom*, ed. Jean Khalfa and Robert Young, trans. Steven Corcoran (Bloomsbury, 2018). ISBN: 9781474250214.

[*Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté*, ed. Jean Khalfa et Robert Young (Éditions la découverte, 2015). ISBN: 9782707186386.]

Frantz Fanon, "The 'North African Syndrome'" and "Racism and Culture" from *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Grove Press, 1967).

[*Pour la révolution africaine: Écrits politiques* (Éditions la découverte, 2006). ISBN: 9782707149039.] On *MyCourses*.

Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled" from *A Dying Colonialism* (Grove Press, 1965).

[*L'Algérie se dévoile* in *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* (Éditions la découverte, 2001).] On *MyCourses*.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004). ISBN: 9780802141323.

[*Les damnés de la terre* (Éditions la découverte, 2002). ISBN: 2707138533.]

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Markmann (Grove Press, 1967). ISBN: 9780802150845.

[*Peau noire, masques blancs* (Éditions du Seuil, 1952). ISBN: 97827578-41686.]

Note that there are two translations of this book. I strongly prefer the Charles Markmann translation. This is out-of-print, but can still be found online. I will also make the required chapters available in PDF. Paragraphe Bookstore only has the newer translation by R. Philcox.

The English translations of Fanon's texts are available at Paragraphe Bookstore. ***Students with reading knowledge of French are strongly encouraged to read Fanon in the original French.*** You can purchase these yourself online, but please try to get the same edition as me, so that we have the same pagination (I have provided the ISBN for reference). I will reference the page numbers in both the French and English versions in class.

Registration: *Seminars are open to graduate students and to undergraduates in U3 or higher.* If you are an undergraduate and would like to take this course, please contact the professor for permission. (There is a form to fill out, applying to the faculty of Arts.)

Prerequisite: PHIL 442, 474, 475, or by permission of the instructor. *Knowledge of critical philosophy of race, critical race feminism, or prior knowledge of Fanon is desirable for all students taking the seminar. Should you not have this background, you would be expected to work to supplement your reading in order to acquire it during the course.*

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES:

The grade depends on: a major term paper, 60%; mandatory paper proposal (5%); weekly questions (15%); and consistent and engaged participation in the class as well as regular attendance, 20%.

- (1) The **TERM PAPER**, worth **60%** of your grade, should be approximately **15-20 pages** in length (closer to 15 pages for undergraduates; closer to 20 pages for graduate students). Formatting should be: Times New Roman 12 font, double spaced. *The topic of this paper is to be designed by you, in consultation with the instructors.* It is recommended that you begin work on this paper early, since you should consult secondary sources for the purpose. ***The paper will be due at the end of the term (date TBA) .***
- (2) **Topic Proposal (5%):** Comments will be given in person or in writing. Submission of the topic proposal is mandatory.
- (3) **Short Weekly Questions (15%):**
You should come to the all weeks of class with ***one short written question/concept***, designed to generate discussion. **You should be ready to contribute this orally, if there is a lull in discussion or when called on.** Questions will not be individually graded, but I ask that you hand them in at the end of each class; I will grade them at the end of term taken as a whole. (As a rough guideline, short weekly questions should be about *75-100 words* in length.)

Hints: The aim is not to give an exhaustive interpretation of the reading; rather it is to interrogate as precisely and attentively as possible an issue in that week's reading that you think is significant for understanding the text. *Questions/concepts must be clearly formulated and elaborated in light of the text we are reading.* (Please motivate your question by referring to passage(s) from the text, but avoid linear summaries of the text.)
- (4) Since this is a discussion-based seminar, **ATTENDANCE** and **PARTICIPATION** are crucial to your role in the seminar. Together they are worth **20%** of your grade.

Expectations with respect to Participation and Attendance

It is your responsibility as a member of this graduate seminar to come to each class, having done the readings and prepared for substantial and nuanced discussion. **You are expected to attend all sessions of the seminar** (unless you have a valid medical reason for absence).

You are expected to engage seriously with the questions, interventions, and presentations of your fellow students. Oral participation should be thoughtful, respectful of others, and constructively critical, as well as on-going.

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Instructor generated course materials are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Note that this schedule is flexible. We will be doing close readings and take more time as needed.

January 7 Introduction

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [*Peau noire, masques blancs*]

January 14 Introduction and Chapter 1 “The Black Man and Language” [*Le Noir et le langage*]

21 Chapter 4 “The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized” [*Du prétendu complexe de dépendance du colonisé*]
And begin Chapter 5.

28 Chapter 5 “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” [*L’expérience vécue du Noir*]
And selection from Chapter 6 “The Black Man and Psychopathology” [*Le Nègre et la psychopathologie*]

Background reading with chapter 6: Angela Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist” from *Women, Race, and Class*.

Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* [*Pour la révolution africaine*]

February 4 “The ‘North African Syndrome’” [*Le ‘syndrome nord africain’*]
“Racism and Culture” [*Racisme et culture*]

Fanon’s Psychiatric Writings from *Alienation and Freedom* [*Écrits sur l’aliénation et la liberté*]
[*Read alongside this:* Jean Khalfa, “Fanon, revolutionary psychiatrist”]

February 11 “Our Journal” [*Notre Journal*]
“Social therapy in a ward of Muslim men: Methodological difficulties” [*La Socialthérapie dans un service d’hommes musulmans: difficultés méthodologiques*]
“*Trait d’Union*”

Background: Read Fanon’s thesis in medicine (AF 168–232)

February 18 [*Class cancelled and moved to later in the same week: either Thursday, Feb. 20 or Friday, Feb 21.*]

“Daily life in the douar” [*La vie quotidienne dans les douars*]
“Ethnopsychiatric considerations” [*Considérations ethnopsychiatriques*]
“Conducts of confession in North Africa.” Read BOTH (1) and (2). [*Conduites d’aveu en Afrique du Nord (1) et (2)*]

Optional: Also read the letters and articles in between.

Recommended: Jean Khalfa, “Fanon, revolutionary psychiatrist”

- February 25 “Maghrebi Muslims and their attitude to madness” [*Attitude du musulman maghrébin devant la folie*]
 “TAT in Muslim women: Sociology of Perception and Imagination” [*Le TAT chez les femmes musulmanes, sociologie de la perception et de l’imagination*]
 “Letter to the Resident Minister” [*Lettre au ministre résident*]

Required: “Algeria Unveiled” [*L’Algérie se dévoile*]

March 2–6 is reading week.

- March 10 [Class may be cancelled on this day. Moved to later in the same week: Thursday/Friday]
 “The phenomenon of agitation in the psychiatric milieu” [*Le phénomène de l’agitation en milieu psychiatrique*]
 TBD readings from Tunisia (1957–)
- 17 “Day hospitalisation in psychiatry: Value and limits” [*L’hospitalisation de jour en psychiatrie, valeur et limites*]
 “Day hospitalisation in psychiatry: Value and limits. Part two—doctrinal considerations” [*L’hospitalisation de jour en psychiatrie, valeur et limites. Deuxième partie: considérations doctrinales*]
 “The meeting between society and psychiatry” [*Rencontre de la société et de la psychiatrie*]

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [*Les damnés de la terre*]

- March 24 Continue *Alienation and Freedom*. TBD.
 We will begin with *The Wretched of the Earth*, Chapter 5 “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” [*“Guerre coloniale et troubles mentaux”*]
- March 31 [Class cancelled and moved to later in the same week: Thursday]
Chapter 1 “On Violence” [*“De la violence”*]
- April 7 Chapter 2 “Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity” [*“Grandeur et faiblesses de la spontanéité”*]
 Chapter 4 “On National Culture” [*“Sur la culture nationale”*]
And Fanon’s Conclusion.

TOPIC PROPOSALS are due in class on March 24. Appointments for all students are required, to discuss topic proposals on April 2/3, 6, and 7. [Please sign up on the google-sheet that will be circulated.] Since the professor is out-of-town for most of April, this will be your chance to discuss your final papers in person. The professor will, however, be available on email and by phone.

TERM PAPERS will be due at the end of the semester. Date to be announced.

Scheduling Note: Most probably three classes will need to be rescheduled during term. We will decide rebooking dates together. Please confirm with the instructor that you can attend these dates.