

PHIL 347: Philosophical Issues in Feminism

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December 31, 2014

Course Description

Feminism is one of the core social justice movements today. A commitment to gender justice raises deep philosophical issues. What is gender? What are justice and injustice? What does specifically *gendered* justice require? In this discussion-focussed class, we will investigate foundational and topical questions of feminist theory, by both classic and contemporary authors.

Topics include: the sex/gender distinction, analyses of gender and oppression, and choice under oppression. Depending on student interest, we may cover sex-positivity and -negativity, feminist criticisms and epistemologies of science, the ethics of care, or some other topics.

1 Course Information

- Meeting Times: TBD
- Class Location: TBD
- Office Hours: TBD and by appointment
- Prerequisites: One philosophy course or one WGS course or instructor's permission
- Required Text: None, readings made available through Sakai. Several papers come from anthologies, but you don't need to buy them.
- Registration Index: 04519

2 Course Narrative

To oversimplify, feminism is a (collection of) movement(s) to end gender-based oppression. Two of these terms stand out in need of further explanation. First, "oppression". What kinds of things are oppressive and what does it mean for something to be oppressive? In the beginning of the course, we'll try to figure out what oppression is and how it is harmful.

Second, "gender". Whose oppression is feminism in particular concerned with? Who counts as a woman or a man (or neither)? What makes a person be of one gender, rather than another? In our second unit, we'll see why most

people reject a biological answer and end up distinguishing between sex and gender. The “who”, as it turns out, is probably social, not biological.

As we try to figure out what gender is and how it’s different from other demographic categories, we’ll notice three things. First, it seems like the facts and effects of a person’s gender are different depending on their other social positions - race, class, age, sex, ability, and more besides. Second, because of the way the demographic categories are wrapped up with each other, we may not be able to achieve gendered justice without achieving justice along the others. Third, many issues that are normally thought of as concerning feminism can’t neatly be called gender-based.

The first two points - trying to figure out how these demographic categories relate to one another - brings us to our third topic, intersectionality. The third will lead us to discuss sexual orientation and trans* topics.

With a better idea of the abstract issues surrounding feminism, we can apply what we’ve learned to particular phenomena. First, we’ll look at a big issue on college campuses recently, consent. What is it to consent to something (particularly a sex act)? And when does that consent “count”? We’ll finish off by doing another “applied” topic, chosen as a class.

3 Work and Grading

Two Papers - 30% each

Over the course of the semester, you’ll write two papers, each 2000-2500 words. By arrangement, you can instead write one longer research paper for the end of the semester. I will offer paper topics, but you are welcome to write on an approved topic of your choice.

We will schedule one-on-one meetings for the week before each paper is due to talk about what you’re working on. These will typically be 20-30 minutes, but we can arrange more time if you want.

Weekly Response - 25%

Every week, you will write and submit a 250-300 word response on one or more of the readings for that week (subject to conditions spelled out below). These response papers can (i) examine the structure and substance of an argument, (ii) extend the basic form of an argument to other conclusions that you think the argument supports, (iii) show that an argument fails to establish its conclusion, or (iv) compare the approaches taken to a topic by the authors we are reading that week.

Response papers should be submitted by Thursday night. You don’t have to turn in a response paper on a week that papers are due. One additional response paper will be excused.

The weekly responses are a way for me to get a feel for how you are coming at these issues and what you are thinking about. They also give you an opportunity to get feedback on your writing and progress throughout the semester.

Participation - 15%

Every other week, we'll have a discussion day. You are encouraged to prepare some questions to discuss with the other students in class. Though we'll do some discussion the other days, these days will be almost entirely discussion.

If you do not feel comfortable speaking in public, I am willing to start a Sakai-based forum where you can post to earn your participation grade. Posts to a Sakai site would not count towards your response grade, but would count towards your participation grade. We'll talk more about this possibility on the first day of class.

Attendance does not directly factor into your grade. But if you don't attend, you can't participate. And that will affect your grade.

Extra Credit Opportunities

There are two ways you can get extra credit. Both require you to give a presentation. Unfortunately, we don't have enough time for everyone to give presentations. Though you are allowed to do both kinds of presentation, conflicts will be resolved so that the greatest number of people get to present.

Reading Presentation - +5%

You'll present on one of the readings that we'll do through the semester. Your presentation should include notes on the reading assignment (about 850-1000 words). Notes should be sent to me two nights before you present. I will be available through email and in person to discuss presentations.

Paper Presentation - +5%

During the last week of classes, we will have a "mini-conference". Students will talk about their final papers. The time should be split equally between presenting your material and responding to questions and criticisms for the rest of the class. You will be required to send an 850-1000-word precis to me, which I will then send around to the class. Your note can either give an outline of your paper or focus on a specific argument that you're working on.

Above all: I strive for fairness and transparency in the grading process. Where possible, grades will be determined anonymously. I will not know who wrote what. If any element of the grading process is not clear or does not seem fair to you, contact me and we'll work something out.

4 Accessibility

First, a note that reflects my personal views:

I am committed to making our classroom a place where everyone feels safe and respected. This means that our classroom, practices, and interactions must be

as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen and observe others carefully are crucial to this goal.

Any student with particular needs should contact [the Office of Disability Services](#) at the start of the semester. The office will forward any necessary information to me, but will otherwise keep information confidential. Then you and I can work out the details of any accommodations needed for this course. If you have some need that does not fit in with the ODS, then I encourage you to contact me, and we can make appropriate arrangements.

Second, the disclaimer that the university requires:

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide [documentation](#). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the [Registration](#) form on the ODS web site.

Syllabus

As with any syllabus, what follows is a highly idealized and unrealistic schedule. Expect substantial change as the semester progresses.

Week 1: Introduction and Course Topics

Introduction, syllabus, and starting on the course
Ann Cudd and Leslie Jones, “Sexism”
Martha Nussbaum, “Objectification”

Week 2 (and probably 3): Oppression

Marilyn Frye, “Oppression”
Iris Young, “Five Faces of Oppression”
Alice Walker, “Definition of Womanist”
Optional: Excerpts from Patricia Hill Collins *Black Feminist Thought*
Optional: Ann Cudd, “How to Explain Oppression”
Optional: Audre Lorde’s “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”

Week 3: What is Gender? (The Classics)

Excerpts from part 2 of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*
Excerpts from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*
Excerpts from Catharine MacKinnon’s *Toward’s a Feminist Theory of State*

Week 4: The Sex/Gender Distinction

Excerpts from Anne Fausto-Sterling’s *Sexing the Body* and *Sex/Gender*
Possible: Excerpts from Cordelia Fine’s *Delusions of Gender*
Excerpt from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*
Suggested: Ásta Sveinsdóttir, “The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender”

Weeks 5 and 6: Intersectionality

Anna Carastathis “The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory”
Excerpts from bell hooks’s *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*
Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”
Probably: Chapter 7 of Jennifer Saul’s *Feminism: Issues and Arguments*
María Lugones either: “The Inseparability of Race, Class, and Gender”
or excerpts from *Pilgrimages/Pregrinajes*
TBD from last 15 years
Optional: Excerpts from Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*

Week 7: What is Gender? (Contemporary Theories)

Natalie Stoljar, "Different Women"
Sally Haslanger, "(What) Are Gender and Race?"
Mari Mikkola, "Ontological Commitments, Sex, and Gender"

Week 8: Sexual Orientation

John Corvino "Homosexuality and the PIB Argument"
Timothy Hsiao "A Defense of the Perverted Faculty Argument against Homosexual Sex"
Adrienne Rich "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"
TBD re: lesbian separatism

Week 9: Trans* Issues

Emi Koyama "The Transfeminist Manifesto"
Talia Mae Bettcher "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority"
Cressida Heyes "Changing Race, Changing Sex: The Ethics of Self-Transformation"

Weeks 10 and 11: Applying Theory - Consent and Autonomy Under Oppression

Excerpts and papers from [Relational Autonomy](#)
Natalie Stoljar
Catriona Mackenzie
Paul Benson
John Christman

Weeks 12 and 13: Topics Chosen with Students

We may need to use some of this time for previous topics. We'll choose from:

Sex-positivity and Sex-negativity

Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science

Ethics of Care

Pornography and Sex Work

Reproductive Issues and the Family

Masculinity and Male Feminism

Feminist Philosophy and Philosophy of Language

Week 14: Mini-Conference