

## PHIL 387: Early Modern Feminist Philosophers (Fall 2023)

Instructor: Gillian Gray (call me Gillian!)

Pronouns: she or they

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Class Meetings: TuTh 1-2:30pm, B116 MLB

Office Hours: W 1-3pm, 1156 AH *and by appointment – just email to schedule!*

**Course Description:** Though there were many women philosophers doing important work during the 17th and 18th centuries, their work has been largely neglected. Only recently has there been a significant effort by feminists to incorporate the work of these women into the philosophical canon. The first aim of this course is to study the work of women philosophers during the early modern period. Some of the philosophers whose work we will discuss may include: Princess Elisabeth, Margaret Cavendish, Anne Conway, Emile du Chatelet, Marie de Gournay, Anna Maria van Schurman, Mary Astell, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Topics will range from metaphysics and epistemology to moral and political philosophy. The second aim of this course is to critically engage with important questions about the feminist project of re-envisioning the philosophical canon. How is the study of early modern philosophers a feminist project, even if these philosophers were not all themselves feminists? How ought we to situate the work of early modern women philosophers in the philosophical canon? How can re-envisioning the philosophical canon disrupt harmful assumptions (which are still present today!) about who can and cannot be a philosopher?

### Goals and Expectations:

#### *Course goals:*

- Practice engaging in cooperative and productive philosophical discussion
- Strengthen your abilities to charitably interpret and reconstruct complex philosophical positions and arguments
- Develop the skill of critically examining philosophical positions and arguments, drawing out their assumptions and implications
- Learn how to construct and clearly communicate your own arguments verbally and in writing
- Learn how to provide and respond to respectful, constructive feedback

#### *How you should expect me to support you in achieving those goals:*

- By fostering active learning opportunities in class and assigning increasingly challenging assignments so that you can develop skills over the course of the term
- By being transparent and honest with you about my expectations in assignments
- By being clear and constructive in my feedback on your work
- By listening and responding to your academic needs throughout the term

#### *How you can best achieve these goals:*

- By approaching this course with an open mind and willingness to learn from mistakes
- By coming to class on time and prepared to engage
- By seeking help through email/appointments/office hours if you're ever confused
- By working collaboratively and respectfully with me and your fellow classmates

**Communication:** If you have any questions about the course, you can...

- Come to my office hours. Really, please do! This is the single easiest way to work through any aspects of the coursework that you find challenging.
- Email me at [graygv@umich.edu](mailto:graygv@umich.edu). I'll respond within 48 hours.
- If you can't make it to my office hours and have a question that would be better to talk about face-to-face rather than over email, I'm happy to make an appointment.

*Please* do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns. I'm here to support you!

Also, I will be making every effort to make this an inclusive, accessible, and equitable learning space. If you have any suggestions or notice any ways in which I can improve (I'm only human, after all), please let me know in office hours or by email.

**Evaluation:** Your final grade will be calculated according to the following percentages:

10% Participation

15% Daily reading guides (19 total, 1% each, lowest 4 dropped)

30% Philosophical letter assignments (3 total, 10% each)

10% Paper proposal and outline

10% Peer review of paper outlines

25% Final paper

97-100 = A+

94-96 = A

90-93 = A-

77-79 = C+

74-76 = C

70-73 = C-

87-89 = B+

84-86 = B

80-83 = B-

67-69 = D+

64-66 = D

60-63 = D-

**Participation:** Participation in our discussions will be crucial for your understanding of the course content and for developing your philosophical skills. Please see here [for a participation rubric and guidelines for our discussion](#). If the expectations here seem daunting, I encourage you not to fret; you'll be given a wide range of opportunities to engage with the course material and with your peers. My aim is not to constantly force you out of your comfort zone, but rather to ensure that you're improving your understanding of the material, learning how to collaborate with others, and developing your own ideas. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways to suit your strengths (and *sometimes* push you out of your comfort zone!).

**Reading Guides:** For many of our class days, I'll post to the Canvas site an assignment with questions that will help guide your reading and preparation for class. Some questions will guide you in identifying, understanding, and interpreting the main issues and ideas of the text. Some will prompt you to clearly and concisely summarize the main issues and ideas of the text in your own words. Others will be intended to prompt your own questions, concerns, and alternatives in response to text. The reading guides will help you engage with the texts more effectively than

you would by simply reading them cold, and will help you develop skills over time to read more critically, communicate what you've read more clearly, and form and communicate your own ideas more effectively. These skills will help you with the short writing activities and final paper/creative project, but are also valuable philosophical skills to take with you beyond this class.

Each reading guide will be available on Canvas at least 3 weeks in advance. The guides will be most helpful if you look at the questions for each day before you read, and then type your responses as you're reading and/or right after you're done. **Reading guides are due 15 minutes before the start of class (ie, at 12:45 pm). Class days when reading guides are due are noted and highlighted in the reading schedule below. Your four lowest reading guide scores will be dropped; the remaining reading guides will be worth 1 percentage point each, adding up to 15% total.** You will get a check (full credit) for a completed and thoughtful reading guide or a minus (half credit) if the reading guide is incomplete and/or contains errors that demonstrate that you did not read.

**Philosophical Letter Assignments:** As you will see, many philosophers during the early modern period corresponded through letters. These letters included important and substantive philosophical moves, demonstrating that good philosophy doesn't need to be confined to academic papers. In fact, the letter format can keep us from getting distracted by some of the rules and assumptions about writing papers that actually get in the way of good writing. These letter assignments will take advantage of this feature. You'll be asked to practice some important philosophical skills in the less formal format of a letter. Each letter will focus on a different skill. More information about this assignment, as well as a rubric, will be distributed later in the semester.

**Paper Proposal and Paper Outline:** This is a set of two assignments meant to help you develop the idea for your final paper. They will be graded together. The proposal is worth 20% of the total assignment grade and the outline is worth 80%. The proposal is not so much a *proposal* as a low-stakes conversation; you and I will discuss your ideas for the final paper in office hours or by appointment during the week of 11/14. If you engage in the conversation, you'll get full credit for the 20%. But the more prepared you are when you come to the conversation, the easier it will be for me to give you substantive feedback that will help in creating your outline. The paper outline will involve giving a rough sketch of the philosopher's argument you are engaging with as well as a rough sketch of your argument. More information about this assignment, as well as a rubric, will be distributed later in the semester.

**Peer Review:** For this assignment, you will read one of your peer's paper outlines and provide respectful, constructive feedback on their outline. There are two goals of this assignment: first, to give you additional feedback on your paper idea before completing the paper; and second, to build the difficult skill of providing respectful feedback to others. More information about this assignment, as well as a rubric, will be distributed later in the semester.

**Final Paper:** Your reading guides and letter assignments throughout the term will help you build the foundational skills to write your final paper for this course. The goal of the final paper is to substantively engage with a philosophical argument from one of the philosophers we've read in the course; you will not only be summarizing the philosopher's argument, but also offering an argument of your own. More information about this assignment, as well as a rubric, will be distributed later in the semester.

**Class Policies:**

1. Rubrics: I will share grading rubrics for assignments (when their due dates come nearer). Rubrics help to ensure consistent grading.
1. Anonymity: I will grade assignments anonymously, to ensure fair grading. Please do not put your name in the assignments or file names; use only your UMID number.
2. Group work: The course will involve substantial in-class group discussions and exercises, but all of the graded assignments are to be done on your own; working in groups on graded assignments is not permitted.
3. Extensions and Late Work: Most of the assignments in this course are designed to be flexible, with some important exceptions for various reasons. I will break down the extension policy for each assignment group:
  - a. There will be no extensions granted for the reading guides, because we will discuss the answers in class the day they are due. To make up for this lack of flexibility, you can get a "zero" on up to four reading guides without penalty – so please use this to your advantage!
  - b. For the philosophical letter assignments, everyone has a 'grace period' automatic extension of two calendar days. In the case of longer-term emergencies, please don't hesitate to email me and we can talk about whether a longer-than-two-day extension is possible. If we haven't discussed a longer extension, your grade for any assignments turned in after the grace period will be lowered three percent per day; late assignments won't be accepted once five total days after the original deadline have passed. That's because accepting work after that point would make it very difficult for me to grade everyone's assignments swiftly.
  - c. There will be no extensions granted for the paper outlines, because your peers need enough turnaround time to complete their peer reviews; similarly, there will be no extensions granted for the peer reviews, because your peers need enough turnaround time to use the feedback when writing their final papers. That being said, these are not meant to be especially demanding assignments.
  - d. The final grading schedule makes it very difficult for me to allow extensions for the final paper and still have time to complete my grading. That being said, I may have some flexibility to offer some extensions – so please do contact me if you need an extension and we can try to work something out.
4. Extra Credit: Extra credit will not be granted, as this can create the opportunity for unfair, ad hoc grade adjustments.
5. Grading Appeals: If you believe an assignment you submitted deserves a different grade than it received, please come talk to me in office hours or an appointment to explain why.

After we talk, you may ask in writing for reconsideration. Your request must be submitted within one week, but no sooner than three days after the assignment is returned. Your written request must explain why you believe the assignment deserves a different grade. The opportunity to appeal is important to ensure that students have a voice; the procedure for appeal ensures thoughtfulness in a decision to appeal and consistency across appeals.

6. General Grading Questions: If you have any questions about grading, just ask!

### **Other Important Information:**

Accommodations. Please talk to or email me if we can make accommodations that will make class more accessible for you. I also encourage you to talk with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities ([ssd.umich.edu](https://ssd.umich.edu); 734-763-3000), who can help secure accommodations without disclosing medical information to course instructors. But I know that it can be hard to work with SSD if you have undiagnosed conditions. I'm happy to talk with you (if you're comfortable talking with me) about providing accommodations even if you can't go through the formal channels with SSD.

Sexual Misconduct. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. I understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success and I encourage anyone dealing with sexual misconduct to talk to someone about your experience, so that you can get the support you need. Confidential support and academic advocacy can be found with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) on their 24-hour crisis line, 734.936.3333 and at [sapac.umich.edu](https://sapac.umich.edu).

Academic Misconduct. Plagiarism and other academic misconduct take the intellectual property of others and/or produce unfair academic advantages. That's why I ask students to follow LSA's academic integrity standards (<https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity.html>). Instances of academic misconduct will be referred to the Office of the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education.

### **Reading Schedule (ALL READINGS WILL BE POSTED ON CANVAS):**

#### **WEEK 1: Intro and Background**

8/29: Course intro (no reading)

8/31: The Early Modern European Philosophical Canon and Feminist Canon Revision

- This syllabus!
- How to Read Philosophy
- Shapiro, *The Routledge Handbook of Women and Early Modern European Philosophy*, Chapter 3: "Canon, Gender, and Historiography"

#### **WEEK 2: Princess Elisabeth**

9/5: Princess Elisabeth's Objection to Cartesian Dualism (Reading guide!)

- Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, "Elisabeth of Bohemia" pp. 13-29
- Bobro, 1000-Word Philosophy: Summary of Descartes' Meditations (especially 6)
- Elisabeth's correspondence with Descartes, p. 61-73
- **Optional:** Descartes' Sixth Meditation

9/7: Princess Elisabeth on the Passions (Reading guide!)

- Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, "Elisabeth of Bohemia" pp. 29-34
- Elisabeth's correspondence with Descartes, p. 85-111

### Week 3: Elisabeth and Cavendish

9/12: Princess Elisabeth on Freedom (Reading guide!)

- Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, Sections 39-41
- Elisabeth's correspondence with Descartes, p. 111-132

9/14: Cavendish on Experimental Philosophy (Reading guide!)

- Marshall, IEP Article on Cavendish, **just sections 1 and 2**
- Selections from Hooke, *Micrographia*
- Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, Chapters 1-3
- Cavendish, *Further Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, Chapter 2

### WEEK 4: Cavendish

9/19: Cavendish on Vital Materialism (Reading guide!)

- Excerpt from Schmaltz on the Descartes-More correspondence
- Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters*, Section I, Letter XXX
- Cavendish, *Observations*, Chapters 16-17, 31
- Cavendish, *Further Observations*, Chapters 3, 6, 7, 11, and 14

9/21: Cavendish on Mind and Mentality (Reading guide!)

- Philosophical Letters, XXXV-XXXVII, XLII
- Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, Chapters 35-36
- Cavendish, *Further Observations*, Chapter 15
- **Optional but recommended:** Cavendish, *Observations*, Chapter 37, Q1-12

### WEEK 5: Conway

9/26 Conway on God (Reading guide!)

- Hutton, SEP Article on Anne Conway, **just sections 1 and 2**
- Conway, *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, Chapters 1-4

9/28 Conway on Substance, Creatures, and Perfectability (Reading guide!)

- Hutton, SEP Article on Anne Conway, **just sections 3-5**

- Conway, *Principles*, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, **just sections 1-6 and 11** (Sections 7-10 of Chapter 6 are optional)

**Philosophical Letter #1 due @ 11:59 pm on 9/29**

### **WEEK 6: Conway and Du Chatelet**

10/3: Conway vs Descartes (and others) (Reading guide!)

- Conway, *Principles*, Chapter 7, **just the introductory paragraph before reason 1, and section 4 (starting on p. 33)**; Chapter 8, **just section 1 and section 2**; Chapter 9 (all of it!)

10/5: Du Chatelet on Scientific Methodology (Reading guide!)

- Detlefsen, SEP article on Émilie du Châtelet, **just the introduction, section 5, and section 6**
- Du Chatelet, *Foundations of Physics*, Chapter 4 and Chapter 16

### **WEEK 7: Du Chatelet and Student Choice**

10/10: Du Chatelet on Freedom and Happiness (Reading guide!)

- Du Chatelet, *On Freedom*
- Du Chatelet, *Discourse on Happiness*

10/12: Review Day (no reading)

### **WEEK 8: Student Choice**

10/17: Fall Break

10/19: Student Choice Day: Tullia D'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*

**Philosophical Letter #2 due @ 11:59 pm on 10/20**

### **WEEK 9: Gournay and Van Schurman**

10/24: Gournay on Equality (Reading guide!)

- Selections from Clarke, *The Equality of the Sexes: Three Feminist Texts of the Seventeenth Century*
- Gournay, *Equality of Men and Women* and *Ladies Complaint*

10/26: Van Schurman on Education Equality (Reading guide!)

- Selections from Clarke, *The Equality of the Sexes: Three Feminist Texts of the Seventeenth Century*
- Selections from Van Schurman, *Natural Capacity of Women* and *Eukleria*

### **WEEK 10: Astell**

10/31: Astell: Day 1 (Reading guide!)

- Broad, IEP Article on Astell (just read the intro and sections 1 and 6a)
- Selections from Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part I*

11/2: Astell: Day 2 (Reading guide!)

- **Read:** Astell, Introduction to *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II*
- **Skim:** Astell, Chapter III of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II*

## WEEK 11: Astell and Wollstonecraft

11/7: Astell: Day 3 (Reading guide!)

- Broad, IEP Article on Astell (just read section 6b)
- Astell, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*

11/9: Wollstonecraft: Day 1 (Reading guide!)

- Tomaselli, SEP Article on Wollstonecraft, sections 1 and 3 (2 and 4 are optional)
- Talleyrand, *Report*: VRW eBook, pp. 184-187
- Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, "To Talleyrand" and chs I-III: VRW eBook, pp. 37-69

**Philosophical Letter #3 due @ 11:59 pm on 11/10**

## WEEK 12: Wollstonecraft

11/14: Wollstonecraft: Day 2 (Reading guide!)

- Selections from Rousseau: VRW eBook, pp. 171-176
- Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, chs IV-VIII: VRW eBook, pp. 70-100

11/16: Wollstonecraft: Day 3 (Reading guide!)

- Burke, *Reflections*: VRW eBook, pp. 142-148
- Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, chs IX-XIII, and *Historical and Moral View*: VRW eBook, pp. 101-121, 163-170

**Paper proposal discussions in office hours and by appointment this week and next week**

## WEEK 13: No class

~~11/21: Review Day—Class Canceled! Enjoy your longer break!~~

11/23: Thanksgiving Break

## WEEK 14: Student Choice and Methodological Reflections

**Paper Outlines due @ 11:59 pm on 11/27**

11/28: Student Choice Day

- Selection from bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* (see Canvas for readings)
- Please also watch the short video linked on Canvas about hooks as a person



11/30: Methodological Reflections

- O'Neill, "Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History"

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### **WEEK 15: Course Wrap-Up**

***Peer Review Assignments due @ 11:59 pm on 12/4***

12/5: In-class peer review of paper outlines; course wrap-up

***Final Papers due @ 11:59 pm on 12/12***