

Feminist Philosophy

2023/2024 Semester 1



Course Organiser: Dr Quân Nguyen, anguyen2@ed.ac.uk
Office Hours: Thursday, 3pm to 5pm

Course Secretary: Veronica Vivi, philinfo@ed.ac.uk

Course Description

Feminism is a movement aiming to end all sexist oppression. Feminist philosophy, while also offering deep theoretical insights into topics underexplored by “traditional” philosophy, is part of that movement, committed to the same ends. To do this, feminist philosophy critically interrogates and re-evaluates philosophical concepts, questions and theories from a feminist perspective .

This course provides a contemporary introduction to feminist philosophy, covering some of the most important questions: What is Gender? What is Sex? How are women objectified? What does consenting mean? What’s bad about pornography? What does feminism have to say about race and class? How do we move to end oppression based on gender and sex?

The course covers feminist approaches to ethics, epistemology, metaphysics and philosophy of language. This provides you with the ability to engage critically in each of these disciplines and their feminist approaches to them, but will also enable you to see the intersections between these fields, showing you philosophy as a unified discipline, striving to make the world a better, less oppressive place.

Times

Lecture: Wednesday, 16:00-18:00

Tutorials will take place week 1-10.

Tutorial 1: Thursday, 13:00-14:00

Tutorial 2: Friday, 13:00-14:00

Tutorial 3: Friday, 15:00-16:00

Assessments

Assignment	Description of Assignment	%	Due
1st Essay	Written essay of max 1500 words (excl. Bibliography)	40%	Monday, 23 October by 12pm
2nd Essay	Written essay of max 2500 words (excl. Bibliography)	60%	Thursday, 7th December by 12pm

Some readings and content in this course include topics that some students may find upsetting and/or traumatizing. I will warn students about potentially disturbing content and I ask all students to help to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and sensitivity.

Essay Questions

Essay 1:

- (1) What's the problem with moral impartiality according to feminist ethics? Can traditional moral theories come up with a convincing reply?
- (2) Critically discuss the feminist ethics of care.
- (3) Critically explain the concept of 'othering' and whether it captures how men view women.

Essay 2:

- (1) What, if any, is the best or most useful explanation of the claim that 'gender is the social meaning of sex'?
- (2) Critically discuss feminist standpoint theory and its uses for women, racial minorities and/or working class people.
- (3) Critically discuss intersectionality and its uses for women, racial minorities and/or working class people.
- (4) Does pornography objectify women?
- (5) Does pornography silence women?

When picking a topic, do not attempt to solve everything. Try to focus on one philosophical aspect or argument that you want to explore, critique or expand on. Feel free to adapt the essay questions, and to go beyond what this course covers, but also don't feel obliged that you have to include everything discussed in class in your essay.

While there is no universal method for how to write a good philosophy paper, you can find some helpful writing guidelines [here](#) and [here](#). Also, [George Orwell's notes on politics and the english language](#) are worth reading.

Course Overview

Week 1: Feminist Ethics 1: Failures of Moral Philosophy

We will kick off by a short overview of the fundamental aim of feminist philosophy: ending sexist oppression. We'll discuss why traditional moral and political philosophy have not been very helpful, or actively contributed to the subordination of women.

Required Reading:

- Benhabib, S. (1985). The generalized and the concrete other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan controversy and feminist theory. *Praxis international*, 5(4), 402-424. (17 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Mills, Charles W., 2005, "'Ideal theory' as Ideology," *Hypatia*, 20 (3): 165–183.
- Blum, Lawrence A., 1988, "Gilligan and Kohlberg: Implications for Moral Theory," *Ethics*, 98 (3): 472–491.
- Friedman, M. (1989). The impracticality of impartiality. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86(11), 645-656.
- Gilligan, Carol, 1982, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Baier, A. C. (1985). What do women want in a moral theory?. *Nous*, 53-63.
- Driver, Julia, 2005, "Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics," *Hypatia*, 20 (4): 183–199.

Week 2: Feminist Ethics 2: Care

Moving on from the problems with impartiality, we will discuss an alternative proposed by feminist moral philosophy: an ethics of care. We will also shortly discuss the relationship between care and virtue ethics, as well as potential shortcomings of an ethics only built on caring.

Required Reading:

- Tronto, Joan C., 1995, "Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments," *Hypatia*, 10 (2): pp. 141–149. (6 Pages)
- Sander-Staudt, M. (2006). The unhappy marriage of care ethics and virtue ethics. *Hypatia*, 21(4), 21-39. (17 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Gilligan, Carol, 1982, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Noddings, Nel, 1984, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Halwani, Raja, 2003, "Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics," *Hypatia*, 18 (3): 161–192.

Week 3: Feminist Ethics 3: Othering

Not leaving feminist ethics entirely, but starting to wrap our heads around social construction of gender, we will discuss one of the classical philosophical attempts by Beauvoir to capture women's experience of agency and how they are shaped by being made into the other by men.

Required Reading:

- Filipa Melo Lopes: What do Incels Want? Explaining Incel Violence Using Beauvoirian Otherness (20 Pages)

Additional Reading:

- Introduction - Beauvoir, Simone de, [1949] 1989, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Young, Iris Marion, 1990, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Mill, J. S. (2018). *The subjection of women*. Routledge.

Week 4: Feminist Metaphysics 1: Gender vs Sex

As feminist ethics have shown us, our identity and embeddedness into society is fundamental to understanding oppression. We continue this debate by turning to feminist metaphysics, looking at the meaning of Beauvoir's expression that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman", and Judith Butler's critique of her.

Required Reading:

- Chapter 1, Sections I-V from: Butler, Judith, 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge. (20 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Butler, Judith, 1993, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge.
- Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir, 2011, "The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender", in Witt 2011a: 47–65. doi:10.1007/978-90-481-3783-1_4
- Beauvoir, Simone de, [1949] 1989, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Week 5: Feminist Metaphysics 2: Reclaiming Concepts

Again quoting Beauvoir, this week we will look at what she meant by "Gender is the social meaning of Sex". We will look at recent debates in feminist philosophy on how we should spell out the concept of woman in a way that is most useful for the feminist movement.

Required Reading:

- Jenkins, Katharine, 2016, "Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of Woman", *Ethics*, 126(2): 394–421. doi:10.1086/683535 (28 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Mikkola, M. (2011). Ontological commitments, sex and gender. In *Feminist metaphysics* (pp. 67–83). Springer, Dordrecht. (16 pages)
- Haslanger, Sally, 2000b, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" *Noûs*, 34(1): 31–55. doi:10.1111/0029-4624.00201
- Mills, Charles, 2014, "Notes from the Resistance: Some Comments on Sally Haslanger's *Resisting Reality*", *Philosophical Studies*, 171(1): 85–97. doi:10.1007/s11098-013-0249-9
- Haslanger, Sally, 2014, "Race, Intersectionality, and Method: A Reply to Critics", *Philosophical Studies*, 171(1): 109–119. doi:10.1007/s11098-013-0244-1

Week 6: Feminist Metaphysics 3: Transfeminism

Continuing our journey through feminist metaphysics, but also starting to look at epistemology, we will look at a topic that has been controversial both in feminist philosophy, the feminist movement, and wider society. While some feminist philosophers have been hostile to transwomen, transfeminism is also one of the most interesting developments in feminist philosophy, bringing together fundamental issues of personal identity.

Required Reading:

- Koyama, Emi. 2003, "The transfeminist manifesto", in *Catching a wave: Reclaiming feminism for the 21st century*, Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (eds.), Boston: Northeastern University Press, pp. 244–259. (10 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Bettcher, T. M. (2009). Trans identities and first-person authority. *You've changed: sex reassignment and personal identity*, 1, 98-120.
- Heyes, Cressida, 2006, "Changing race, changing sex: The ethics of self-transformation", *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 37 (2): 266–282.
- Sophie Grace Chappell, 2020: "How (Not) to Talk about and with Trans Women", *Feminism, Trans Identities and Race*
- Heyes, Cressida, 2003, "Feminist solidarity after queer theory: The case of transgender", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28 (4): 1093–1120.

Week 7: Feminist Epistemology 1: Standpoint Theory

As we've seen last week, sometimes it is important to see things through a first-person perspective. This week, we'll dig deeper by turning to one of the fundamental contributions from feminist epistemology: Standpoint theory has been controversial but also incredibly productive in articulating different ways of knowledge.

Required Reading:

- Harding, Sandra, 2009. "Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic and Scientific Debate". *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*, 55. (14 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Harding, Sandra, 2009. "Standpoint Theories: Productively Controversial," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 24(4): 192–200.
- Jaggar, A. M. (2004). Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women. *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*, 55.
- Hekman, S. (1997). Truth and method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 22(2), 341-365.
- Daukas, Nancy, 2006. "Epistemic Trust and Social Location," *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology*, 3(1): 109–124.
- Crasnow, Sharon. (2009). Is standpoint theory a resource for feminist epistemology? An introduction. *Hypatia*, 24(4), 189-192. (4 Pages)
- Fricker, M. (2006). Powerlessness and social interpretation. *Episteme*, 3(1-2), 96-108.
- Anderson, E. (1995). Feminist epistemology: An interpretation and a defense. *Hypatia*, 10(3), 50-84.

Week 8: Feminist Epistemology 2: Intersectionality

As we have seen, standpoint theory is important to understand oppression that may not be visible from an "objective" perspective. But how many standpoints are there, and what happens if they merge, or even clash? This week, we will look at how standpoints of gender, race and class may intersect, and what this means for feminist theory.

Required Reading:

- Carastathis, A. (2014). The concept of intersectionality in feminist theory. *Philosophy compass*, 9(5), 304-314. (9 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Crenshaw, K. (2018). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics [1989]. In *Feminist legal theory* (pp. 57-80). Routledge.
- Davis, Angela (1981): *Women, Race and Class*

Week 9: Feminist Epistemology 3: Objectification & Pornography

This week we will look at a different section of feminist epistemology as well as another controversial topic in feminism. Pornography has been described by feminists as harmful objectification of women since the 1970s. Recently, feminist philosophers (building on work on epistemic injustice) have provided an account on what objectification means and how it harms women.

Required Reading:

- Chapter 5 of Mikkola, Mari (2019): *Pornography: A Philosophical Introduction*. Oxford University Press (19 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Langton, Rae. Exclusion and Objectification in: Fricker/Hornsby, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 2000
- McGlynn, A. (2021). Epistemic objectification as the primary harm of testimonial injustice. *Episteme*, 18(2), 160-176.
- Haslanger, S. (2017). Objectivity, Epistemic Objectification, and Oppression 1. In *The Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice* (pp. 279-290). Routledge.
- Saul, J. M. (2006). On treating things as people: Objectification, pornography, and the history of the vibrator. *Hypatia*, 21(2), 45-61.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1995). Objectification. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 24(4), 249-291.
- Papadaki, E. L. (2007). Sexual objectification: From Kant to contemporary feminism. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6(3), 330-348.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Week 10: Feminist Philosophy of Language 1: Silencing & Pornography

Catherine MacKinnon famously claimed that pornography silences women. This week, turning to feminist philosophy of language which heavily draws from speech act theory, we will look at recent attempts to spell out what MacKinnon meant, and whether this is the right way of making sense of pornography's harm to women.

Required Reading:

- Chapter 2 of Mikkola, Mari (2019): *Pornography: A Philosophical Introduction*. Oxford University Press (19 Pages)

Additional Readings:

- Langton, Rae, 1993, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 22(4): 293–330.
- Saul, Jennifer, 2006a, "Pornography, Speech Acts and Context", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 106(2): 61–80. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9264.2006.00146.x (19 Pages)
- Finlayson, Lorna, 2014, "How to Screw Things with Words", *Hypatia*, 29(4): 774–789. doi:10.1111/hypa.12109
- Mikkola, Mari, 2008, "Contexts and Pornography", *Analysis*, 68(4): 316–320. doi:10.1093/analys/68.4.316

- Mikkola, M. (2011). Illocution, silencing and the act of refusal. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 92(3), 415-437.

Week 11: Feminist Philosophy of Language 2: Consent & Beyond

In our last week, we continue our journey through philosophy of language while also returning back to ethics. Consent is not only interesting as an act of speech that can take different forms and dimensions, it is also one of the fundamental grounds for many political theories. Some feminist philosophers however, have pointed out that when it comes to sex, consent not only can be ambiguous - it might not be sufficient as a criterion for ending sexual oppression of women.

Required reading:

- Chapter 3 of Srinivasan, Amia (2021): *The Right to Sex* (17 Pages)
- [Rebecca Kukla: Sex Talks](#)

Additional Readings:

- Ellie Anderson (2019): Women in Philosophy: The limits of Consent in Sexual Ethics. URL: <https://blog.apaonline.org/2019/04/24/women-in-philosophy-the-limits-of-consent-in-sexual-ethics/>
- MacKinnon, Catherine. "Rape: On Coercion and Consent."
- Hurd, Heidi: The Moral Magic of Consent
- Baron, M., 2001, "I Thought She Consented", *Philosophical Issues*, 11: 1–32.
- Whisnant, Rebecca, "Feminist Perspectives on Rape", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/feminism-rape/>