

## **Philosophy and Feminism**

Professor: Christia Mercer, [cm50@columbia.edu](mailto:cm50@columbia.edu)

Office Hours: 707 Philo Hall, Tues., 2:30-4; Fri. 4-6.

Philo V2110, Fall 2019

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### **TA Info:**

**Olivia Branscum** [olb2108@columbia.edu](mailto:olb2108@columbia.edu); Office hours, Tues. 5-7, place TBA

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### **Course Description**

Is there a natural or essential difference between women and men? If so, what is the source of this difference and what does the difference imply in moral, social, and political terms? If not, how are the apparent differences produced? If the “facts” about gender are social and cultural products, then what does this imply about other (apparent) facts about the world? Are there any brute, objective facts? Is there a “normal” way of being “queer”? How is gender self-determination controlled and limited? How does that control interact with racial categories? How do questions about race and gender conflict or overlap with questions about justice and violence? Why is misogyny so persistent and pernicious? How does the prison industrial complex “capture” and punish genders? This course introduces students to philosophy and feminism through a critical discussion of these and related questions. Assigned materials include historical and contemporary texts, documentaries, and New York City.

### **Course Goals**

Learn what philosophy is and how philosophy relates to problems in feminism and gender studies.

Develop critical and analytical reading and writing skills.

Explore fundamental philosophical questions about the construction of the human subject, society’s means of restricting that construction, the universality of moral concepts, the nature of bias, and the possibility of knowledge and/or objectivity in science.

Learn how to use the powerful tools of gender and philosophy to dissect contemporary and historical materials and even yourself!

### **Readings**

Because we will read and discuss particular passages in class, it is important that you have the assigned readings at hand. Hard copies are better than e-copies. Some assigned readings are ONLY available in Courseworks. Go to Files, then Resources section, listed alphabetically by author’s name. The following books are required and available at Book Culture (on 112<sup>th</sup> b/w Broadway and Amsterdam) and in the reserve room at Butler Library:

#### *Required:*

Miriam Schneir, ed., *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*

Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (Vintage)

Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I, Vintage

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*

*Recommended:* Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body, Gender...* (Harvard)

### Assignments

Your primary goal is to read and think about the assigned materials. This means coming to class prepared!

One in-class exam; two two-page papers; one 4-page paper

Final examination

Posts on Gender/Feminist Topics: 10 posts over the semester (at least 2 in September; 4 in October; 4 in November. Each post roughly 200 words.

### Grades

One in-class exam = 10%,

Two two-page papers, each = 15% for total of 30%

One four-page paper = 25%

Posts total = 15%

Final Exam = 20%

### Academic Honesty

The CC honor code is: “I affirm that I have not plagiarize, use unauthorized materials, or give or receive illegitimate help on assignments, papers, and examinations. I will also uphold equity and honesty in the evaluation of my work and the work of others. I do so to sustain a community built around this Code of Honor.” You are REQUIRED to write this on the back of all submitted work. We will not grade your work unless it includes this statement. Plagiarism or other forms of cheating will lead to failure of the course. Plagiarism includes using phrases copied from online sources without citation. We have zero-tolerance.

### Lecture Topics and Readings

#### **A. Essentialism: A Philosophical and Historical Perspective**

**Week 1:** *The Origins of Female-Male Essentialism.*

9/3: *Introduction, to the Course.* Begin to discuss, Plotinus, *Beauty*.

[courseworks]

9/5: Creating Essentialism

Reading: Mercer, “The Philosophical Roots of Western Misogyny” [courseworks]

Recommended: Mercer, “The Philosophical Origins of Patriarchy,” *The Nation*.

<https://www.thenation.com/article/patriarchy-sexism-philosophy-reproductive-rights/>

**Week 2:** *Reason, Nature, Agency in Early Christianity*

9/10: Reading: Pagels’ *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, ch. 1 (all), ch. 2 (pp. 32-43), ch. 3 ( 64-77).

9/12: Reading: Pagels’ *Adam, Eve*, ch. 4 (all), ch. 6 (all).

**Week 3** *Women’s Souls, Bodies, Virtue, and Power*

9/17: Reading in Schneir, *Feminism*: Wollstonecraft (pp. 5-16); Grimke (pp. 35-48); Sojourner Truth, pp. 92-98.

9/19: Reading: in Schneir, *Feminism*: Goldman (308-24); Engels (pp. 189-204).

#### **B. Essentialism: Construction, Discourse, Power, and Critique**

**Week 4:** *Desire, Discourse, and Power.*

9/24: In-class Exam

9/26: Reading: Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Parts 1, 2;

## TWO POSTS DUE AT END OF MONTH!

### Week 5 *Constructing Desire and Sexual Difference*.

10/1: Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Part 3

#### First Paper Assignment Distributed (schedule meeting with your TA?!)

10/3: Reading: Laqueur's *Making Sex*, ch. 1-2, 3 (quick read w/ special attention on pp. 69, 82, 88, 98-99). ch.5 (pp. 149-63), ch.6 (pp. 193-207; 243).

### Week 6 *Constructing Gender*

10/8: Reading: Butler, *Gender Trouble*, preface, ch. 1.

10/10: Reading: Butler, *Gender Trouble*, ch. 3 (Read from beginning of Concluding Unscientific Post script to end).

#### Metropolitan Museum Tour, Weekend – TREAT AS REVIEW

### Week 7: *The Normal and Shame*

10/15: Reading: Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, chs. 1, 2, 3, and pp. 142-54. Courseworks

10/17: Being Non-Binary, **Guest Speaker: Robin Dembroff!**

Reading: Robin Dembroff, "Why Be Non-Binary?" <https://aeon.co/essays/nonbinary-identity-is-a-radical-stance-against-gender-segregation>; "Real Talk on the Metaphysics of Gender," <https://philpapers.org/archive/DEMRT0-2.pdf>

**Friday, 10/18: FIRST PAPER DUE in your TA's Box by 5pm!!!**

## C. Misogyny, Race, and Gender

### Week 8 *Race, Gender, and Being Seen*

10/22: *Anita Hill Becomes Invisible*

Assignment: Documentary, Frontline: "Clarence Thomas, Anita Hill: Public Hearing, Private Pain" (1992). For instructions on how to view, see Courseworks, Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas file.

Reading: in Morrison, *Race-ing Justice*, articles by Higginbotham, Marable, Painter, Stansell, and Crenshaw (in Courseworks).

10/24: *Intersectionality*

Reading: Kimberlé Crenshaw "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>

Reading Sumi K. Cho, "Converging Stereotypes in Racialized Sexual Harassment: Where the Model Minority Meets Suzie Wong," in Courseworks.

#### Second Paper Assignment Distributed

### Week 9 *The Logic of Gender and Race*

10/29: *What is race? What is gender?*

Reading: Francois Bernier essay of 1684, "A New Division of Earth," in Courseworks;

Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, Chapter 7 (pp. 221-47)). In Clio,

<https://www-oxfordscholarship-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199892631.001.0001/acprof-9780199892631>

10/31: *Gender and Race*

Reading: Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, Chapter 8 (pp. 148-272). In Clio, see above.

## FOUR MORE POSTS DUE AT END OF November (FOR TOTAL OF 6)!

### Week 10 *The Logic of Misogyny*

11/5: NO CLASS (Election Day Holiday)

11/7: *The Logic of Misogyny*

Reading: Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, chapters 1-2 (pp. 31-77).

In Clio, <https://www-oxfordscholarship-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/view/10.1093/oso/9780190604981.001.0001/oso-9780190604981>

**Friday, 11/8: SECOND PAPER DUE in your TA's Box by 5pm!!!**

### D. Gender, Justice, and the Prison Industrial Complex

#### Week 11 *Punishment, Justice, Gender, and the Prison Industrial Complex*

11/12: *The Prison Industrial Complex: Punishment, Race, and Gender*

Due for Class. Watch on Netflix, *The 13<sup>th</sup>*, documentary by Ava DuVernay.

**Likely Guest: Susannah Karlsson (Special Litigation attorney in Brooklyn Defender Services and former Philo and Fem student!). There will be other guests!**

11/14: Discipline and Punish

Reading: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Part Three, Chapter 3, "Panopticism" (Courseworks)

**Likely Guest: Professor Emma Kaufman (NYU Law School and former Philo and Fem student!)**

RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED

C. Mercer's op-eds: "Never mind a second chance;" "Gender, Class, ...;" and "I teach Philosophy..." (Courseworks).

### Week 12 Justice, Gender, Power

11/19: *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Reading: Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* [https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Are\\_Prisons\\_Obsolete\\_Angela\\_Davis.pdf](https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Are_Prisons_Obsolete_Angela_Davis.pdf)

**Required parts, TBA.**

Reading: "What is Prison Abolition?" *The Nation*. <https://www.thenation.com/article/what-is-prison-abolition/>

### E. Gender, Knowledge, and Objectivity

11/21: *Gender and Objectivity*

Reading: Langton, "Feminism in epistemology" (Courseworks).

Lloyd, "Objectivity and the Double Standard" (pp. 352-58 and Conclusion (pp. 374-76)

### Week 13 *Gender, Objectivity, and Epistemic Power*

11/26 *Feminism and Epistemic Injustice*

Reading: In Miranda Fricker's book, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, read Chapter 7, "Hermeneutical Injustice." Electronic source in Clio. See link in Courseworks and here: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/7690901>. As an introduction to the chapter, the Précis (sum) of the book is helpful. See Courseworks.

**Final Paper Assignment Distributed**

## FOUR MORE POSTS DUE AT END OF November (FOR TOTAL OF 10)!

11/28: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving) YUM.

**Week 14** *From Epistemic Violence to Science*

12/3: Epistemic Violence

Reading: Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silence” (Courseworks).

12/5: Science, Good and Bad/ / Conclusion

Reading: Wylie, “Feminism in Philosophy of Science” (Courseworks).

Watch (and hold on to your chair!): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deJUY8CmdNQ>

**Thursday, 12/12: FINAL PAPER DUE in your TA's Box by 5pm!!!**

**Projected FINAL EXAM Time: Thursday, the 19<sup>th</sup>, 4:10- p.m.**

**THIS IS THE VERY Last Day of FINALS. EEK!! Plan accordingly!**