

PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS IN FEMINIST THEORY

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PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS IN FEMINIST THEORY

This course examines recent literature by feminist philosophers. Feminist philosophical work in ethics, political theory and theory of knowledge has two central aims: to reveal the gender bias encoded in conventional philosophical work, and to reconstruct theories of morality, political justice, and knowledge so that they more adequately address the experience of women and other disesteemed social groups.

TEXTS:

Margaret Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*
Annette Baier, *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics*
Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*
Linda Alcoff & Elizabeth Potter, eds., *Feminist Epistemologies* (FE)
312 Coursepak, available at Gray's bookstore

UNDERGRADUATE COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADE PERCENTAGES:

30% of your grade will be based on:

being a critic: three peer reviews of others' short essays, using the peer review form handed out in class

responding to critics: three revisions of your short essays. Here you will be graded on the extent to which you have taken seriously both your peer reviewer's and my suggestions for revisions and successfully incorporated them into the revised essay

50% of your grade will be based on:

short essays: four 4-5 page essays. You **MUST** phrase your thesis as a question and do so in the first paragraph. These essays will be turned in twice. The first draft will receive a provisional grade so that you can gauge how much revision you need to do. Both your peer reviewer and I will suggest ways that you can improve your essay. Your essay grade will be based solely on the revised draft.

20% of your grade will be based on:

final essay: due on the final exam date. In this 6-8-page essay, you will develop your view of what makes feminist ethics, political theory, and epistemology distinctively feminist.

GRADUATE REQUIREMENTS & PERCENTAGES

20% of your grade will be based on:

presentations: you will sign up to give two 30 minute presentations whose purpose is to generate class reflection on and discussion of the readings for the day. Your thoughts should be well organized for public presentation. Come prepared with an outline of the order of your presentation to hand out in class. Your presentation should cover a summary of the text that with a special focus on some portion that you think is important and that we need to be clear on. Your presentation should also include some critical, reflective approach to the text that will stimulate discussion.

10% of your grade will be based on

philosophical engagements: eight 1-2 page engagements (each due on the article's class date)

50% of your grade will be based on:

short essays: four 4-5 page essays.

20% of your grade will be based on:

final essay: due on the final exam date. In this 12 page essay, you will develop your view own thesis on some a topic of your choosing related to feminist ethics, political theory, and epistemology. You are expected to make use of some outside sources.

Attendance:

In this class, more than four unexcused absences will result in a half-letter grade penalty on your final grade. More than six unexcused absences will result in automatic failure.

SYLLABUS

I. FEMINISM AND MORAL THEORY

1-8 introduction to the course and to feminist ethics

1-10 feminist critiques of gender bias in ethical theory
read: Baier, "What do Women Want in a Moral Theory" and
Baier, "The Need for More than Justice and
Walker, pp. 18-27 of "The Subject of Moral Philosophy"

1-15 reclaiming Humean ethics of interpersonal relationships
read: Baier, "Hume, the Women's Moral Theorist?"

1-17 trust
read: Baier, "Trust and Anti-Trust"

recommended: Baier, "Trust and its Vulnerabilities"

1-22 ESSAY. an expressive-collaborative model of ethics
read: Walker, pp. 7-14 of "The Subject of Moral Philosophy" and "Authority and Transparency"

1-23 PEER REVIEW. the place of responsibility
read: Walker, "Charting Responsibilities"

1-29 moral epistemology
read: Addelson, "Knowers/Doers and their Moral Problems" (FE)

1-31 REVISION. caring and identity
read: Walker, "Picking Up Pieces: Lives, Stories, and Integrity"

2-5 socially situated moral knowledge
read: Walker, "Made a Slave, Born a Woman: Knowing Others' Places"

2-7 discredited identities
read: Young, "The Scaling of Bodies and the Politics of Identity" and Bartky, "Shame and Gender" in coursepak

II. FEMINISM & POLITICAL THEORY

2-12 ESSAY. Rawlsian liberalism
read: Rawls, "Justice as Rational Choice Behind a Veil of Ignorance" coursepak
Benhabib, "The Generalized and Concrete Other" coursepak

2-14 TBA

2-19 the failure of liberal individualism
read: Baier, "How Can Individualists Share Responsibility?"
recommended: Baier, "Claims, Rights, Responsibilities"

2-21 PEER REVIEW. rethinking the meaning of justice
read: Young, "Displacing the Distributive Paradigm"

2-26 welfare capitalism
read: Young, "Insurgency and the Welfare Capitalist Society"

2-28 REVISION. the politics of difference
read: Young, "Social Movements and the Politics of Difference"

3-5 the faces of oppression
read: Young, "Five Faces of Oppression"

3-7 multiculturalism & women's rights
read: Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" coursepak

SPRING BREAK

3-19 ESSAY. cultural relativism
read: Uma Narayan, "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism" coursepak

3-21 cultural relativism
read: Martha Nussbaum, ""Women and Cultural Universals" coursepak

III. FEMINISM & EPISTEMOLOGY

3-26 PEER REVIEW. the production of knowledge within human social practices
read: Kessler, "The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed infants and Hawkesworth, "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth" both articles in coursepak

3-28 the production of knowledge cont'd
read: Code, "Taking Subjectivity into Account," pp. 15-32 only (FE)

4-2 REVISION. standpoint epistemologies
read: Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: 'What is Strong Objectivity?'" (FE)

4-4 critiques of standpoint epistemology
read: Bar On, "Marginality as Epistemic Privilege" (FE) and
Helen Longino, "Subjects, Power, and Knowledge: Description and Prescription in Feminist Philosophies of Science" (FE)

4-9 anti-individualism in knowledge
read: Nelson, "Epistemological Communities" (FE)

4-11 the purpose of knowledge seeking
read: Haslanger, "What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and

Normative Epistemology in coursepak

4-16 "knowledge" of differences

read: Haslanger, "Gender & Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?"

4-18 ESSAY. Concluding discussion of the distinguishing features of feminist ethics, political theory, and epistemology

GUIDELINES

Philosophical Engagements.

Before you begin your own original reflections in your "philosophical engagement" essays, you should set yourself up by answering one or more of the questions below:

- 1) conceptual distinctions. What conceptual distinctions are central to the development of the author's view? (E.g., Gilligan will distinguish between an ethics of care and an ethics of justice, and between being responsible and taking responsibility.)
- 2) central claims. What are the central claims that the author takes herself to be defending?
- 3) rejected views. What alternative ways of thinking about an issue, problem, or concept does the author explicitly reject? (That is, who is she arguing against?)
- 4) posing a question. What question would you pose to the author if you had a chance to talk to her? Why should she (or anyone else for that matter) think that answering your question is crucial to maintaining the plausibility of her view?

Presentations.

Your thoughts should be well organized for public presentation. Come prepared with a simple outline of the order of your presentation. You can either write the outline on the board or hand it out in class. Your presentation should cover a summary of some portion of the text that you think is important and that we need to be clear on. Your presentation should also include some critical, reflective approach to the text that will stimulate discussion. (Most of us aren't naturally good public speakers. So practicing what you are going to say is often the key to a confident, "natural" presentation.)

You will be graded on

- organization and clarity of your presentation
- correctness of your re-presentation of the author's views
- use of visual outline (or other visual aid)
- intellectual engagement (e.g., using your own examples, offering your own criticisms, pointing out unclear passages in the text and providing your own interpretation, pointing out interesting connections between this text and other texts read in this class or in EN 178)
- ability to connect with the rest of us (e.g., by asking us questions or answering our

questions, or otherwise inviting us to participate)

Short Essays.

These are critical essays. "Critical" does not necessarily mean negative. It does mean that your job is to provide a persuasive, reasoned, well-illustrated argument for a thesis claim. In these essays, you should....

- Choose some original point that you want to make (you don't have to be super novel, but your essay should definitely not be a simply rehashing of articles or a report of factual information)
- In the first paragraph, pose your thesis as a question, and provide enough introductory set up to get your reader interested in the question and how you might answer it.
- Make sure your essay has a clear logical organization to it so that your reader can easily see how you got from one paragraph to the next.
- Focus on persuading