**PHILOS 3I03: Philosophy & Feminism**

*Fall 2020*

**Instructor:** Allauren Samantha Forbes, forbeas@mcmaster.ca

**Course Meetings:** Wednesdays 11:30am-12:20pm, Fridays 12:30pm-2:20pm

**Office Hours:** xxxxx, or by appointment

**Grader(s):** xxxxxxx and xxxxxxx

**Course Description**

This course is designed to familiarize you with some of the core methodological, metaphysical, and epistemological commitments and topics in feminist philosophy and thus to enable you to consider a series of contemporary issues which are helpfully illuminated by feminist philosophical perspectives. We will begin with some core concepts and a discussion of sex and gender in the context of metaphysics and epistemology. We will address topics in queer theory, medical ethics, colonial theory, objectification, labour, and the state of professional philosophy, among many others. This course asks us to reckon with some difficult questions. How can feminist analyses contribute to our conceptions of knowledge? How should we revise, reformulate, or rethink traditional answers to political and ethical issues in light of feminist theories? How is my own self-understanding and experience underwritten by larger systems of power and privilege?

**Course Learning Outcomes**:

Over the course of this semester, you will learn how to:

* Critically analyze and assess the arguments of feminist philosophers and their interlocutors;
* Discuss feminist philosophy in a respectful, engaging, and constructive way;
* Engage in substantial reflection of one’s role in society;
* Construct clear and persuasive arguments about topics in feminist philosophy

**Required Texts**

There are no required texts for this course. All readings will be provided via pdf on the course website.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

Your grade in this course will be determined by the following:

Participation: 10%

Mini-assignments: 40%

Reflection/Mini-assignment 1: 10%

Reflection/Mini-assignment 2: 10%

Reflection/Mini-assignment 3: 10%

Reflection/Mini-assignment 4: 10%

First paper: 15%

Second paper/final assignment: 30%\*

Meeting: 5%

Presentation: 2.5%

Peer feedback: 2.5%

Second paper/final assignment: 20%

Course reflection: 5%

*Participation*

Participation is very important. Philosophy is something that we do; it is an activity. You need to attend class and be an active participant – this means listening carefully to the content of the lecture and to your classmates’ questions and comments, as well as contributing your own thoughts or concerns. While it can be intimidating to speak in class, remember that your peers probably feel the same way, and that we will be careful to maintain a friendly and open-minded attitude in order that all contributions will be welcome and treated with the principle of charity – that is, we will all try our best to understand what others say in the spirit of how it is intended.

**Because of covid-19**, this class is going to be entirely online. Participation is still really important, but it may require some new and/or unconventional practices. We’re going to work together to find strategies that work for everyone. If you have concerns or are facing barriers to participation of any kind, please speak with me so that we can find a solution for you.

*Mini-assignments*

These assignments are designed to get you to engage with the material in a non-traditional way – that is, to think about how the material relates (or fails to relate) to your life, identities, and experiences. For each of the mini-assignments, **you have the option of either (a) writing a standard reflection paper** (see instructions below), **or (b) doing the corresponding non-traditional mini-assignment** (see instructions below).

1. *Reflection paper*

All of the reflection papers should be approximately 800 words. In these reflection papers, your task is to pick one of the recent readings/topics, give an exegesis of it – demonstrate understanding of some position it holds – and then briefly critically engage with it – provide an argument about it, or an application of it in other domains (e.g., in day-to-day life, in other academic fields, etc.). I will provide lots of feedback so that you will have some opportunity to practice your philosophical skills and get good, developmental feedback in preparation for your final paper.

1. *Mini-assignments – 600-800 words.*

**Mini-assignment 1**: What is a woman? What does it mean to be a woman? Write or otherwise create something (\*\**if you choose something creative, talk to me first*) that articulates what you took to be the meaning of ‘woman’ before **and** after the material from week 2. What changed, if anything? Why?

**Mini-assignment 2**: Have you ever experienced or engaged in epistemic injustice? What happened in that experience, and what are your thoughts on it now having read/discussed the material from week 3?

**Mini-assignment 3**: Think very carefully about your behaviour, self-presentation, physical movements, activities, etc. Identify **one** thing that you do not because you enjoy it, but because it is expected of you in virtue of your gender/other identity. Try to behave in a contrary way, and write a brief reflection on what this was, why you resisted it, and (most importantly) what effects it brought about (socially or personally). For example, if you find yourself always dodging out of the way of others on the sidewalk, just don’t and see what happens/how you feel about it. **However: please do not do anything that may potentially put yourself at risk.** If you have any doubts or concerns about how you might complete this assignment safely, please either speak to me or select a standard reflection paper in lieu of this mini-assignment.

**Mini-assignment 4**: One of the insights from the material in weeks 9 and 10 is that we have many preconceived notions about the ‘normal’ operation of the human body. Look around at your environment (physical, social, political): is there something that functions as a barrier to certain folks’ full enjoyment of something? To their flourishing? Identify at least one such barrier, explain how it is a barrier, and why this matters. Consider also suggesting ways in which we might remedy it.

*First paper*

For this assignment, you will write a standard philosophical paper (approx. 1500 words) that sets out a formal argument about material from the course. I will circulate some prompts but you are encouraged to select a topic that speaks to you (please confirm your topic with me via email beforehand). This assignment is worth 15% of your grade. If you are concerned about writing a philosophy paper, I suggest you use the reflection paper assignments as lower-stakes practice for this paper.

*Second paper/Final assignment\**

Again, you have a choice in your assessment. You can write a formal philosophical paper (approx. 2000 words), in which I will expect you to develop a substantial point in service of some critical assessment of a topic, theme, or argument that we examine in the course selected by you. Or, you can offer some kind of creative engagement with the material – spoken word, art, music, a short film, etc. – that explores a theme from the course in some detail. Both options require meeting with me ahead of time (for 5% of your grade) to confirm the suitability of your project, discuss the question you’ve selected to discuss, etc.

**If you elect to write a standard philosophical paper**, you are also required to participate in a presentation and peer feedback process that will take place in the last week of class. The presentation is 2.5% of your grade, and so too is the constructive peer feedback worth 2.5% of your grade.

**If you elect to offer a creative engagement project instead**, we should meet to discuss how you will present your work to the rest of the class, if that is suitable, and how we will re-allocate the 2.5% + 2.5% for the presentation/feedback component of the final assignment.

The final product, either paper or alternative output, will be 20% of your grade. It will be due the last day of the exam period (Dec. 23).

*Course reflection*

When you turn in your final assignment, you will also turn in a brief reflection on the course. The content of this assignment is up to you – tell me what topics and readings you enjoyed, which you didn’t, what assignments you found most interesting / helpful / fun, etc. Submitting this reflection – minimum 200 words – is an automatic 5% of your grade and is very helpful for me in subsequent versions of the class, so please complete it with the thought of future students and what would be useful to them in mind.

**Course Expectations**

*Behaviour*

It is deeply important that we maintain an attitude of respect for one another and for the subjects we cover in this class. Philosophy is, at its core, a practice of critical thinking. This often consists in making arguments and responding to one’s interlocutors in ways that interrogate their positions and claims; we will consider reasons for and against views in a way that incorporates an underlying commitment to trust, empathy, and cooperative inquiry. Throughout our discussions of some sensitive issues and concerns, we will maintain an attitude of respect even – and perhaps especially – when we disagree with the views at hand. We will discuss specific practices of class conduct in the first class meeting.

*Electronic Devices*

I would usually include a section here on the evidence that suggests that distractions via one’s devices undermine academic success through interference with attention, learning, participation, etc. Since we are meeting exclusively online, there are fewer ways for me to notice if you are distracted. Ultimately, it is up to you whether you TikTok or send memes or whatever else in class, but I hope that you focus on the work at hand. These are strange times and we are all still acclimating to a new learning environment. Let’s work together.

*Email*

I will sometimes communicate with you via email, particularly if something changes in the course – unexpected cancellation, new or additional readings, etc. Please ensure that you are receiving these notifications. My general policy is to respond to emails within 24 hours of receiving them; however, I will not discuss grades over email, and would prefer that longer questions about assignments are addressed in office hours. Please check the syllabus and the (forthcoming) detailed instructions on assignments, etc. before emailing me about them.

*Grades*

I am committed to a fair and unbiased grading process. As such, all assignments must be submitted with no identifying information other than your student number. This allows me to grade anonymously. If you have concerns about this process, please contact me and we will discuss possible solutions. If you are unsatisfied with your grade and would like to appeal it, the process is as follows. Between 24 and 72 hours after the grades are posted, explain in writing – in a way that responds to each of my comments – how you think the grade/comments are inappropriate for your assignment. I promise to consider these appeals and to re-examine your assignment. Please note, however, that a request for regrading can result in your mark going up or down.

*Late Work*

My policy on late work is for every 24 hours after the deadline, you will lose one third of a letter grade. So, if you turn in a B+ assignment, after one day it is a B, after another it is a B-, etc. That said, I know that extenuating circumstances do occur. Should you find yourself in such a situation, please contact me as soon as possible, but keep in mind that this is no guarantee of an extension.

*Academic Integrity*

It is very important that you are graded on your own contributions rather than those of others. If you are drawing from other work, please be sure to cite it appropriately. Familiarize yourself with the University’s Academic Integrity Policy – see [here](https://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/students/whatis.html) for a definition – because this determines how cases of plagiarism or other academic misconduct will be handled. Since philosophy is an activity that we do together, feel free to discuss things with your peers, friends, etc. Just be sure that what you hand in for grading is reflective of your position on things.

**Accessibility and Support Services**

I want all of you to succeed and flourish philosophically. There are, of course, many ways to learn; I will strive to adapt to your needs, but this means that you must tell me how you learn best. Please feel free to contact me via email or in office hours to let me know what works for you. Students with disabilities are strongly encouraged to make use of services here at the University, and, if you feel comfortable with it, to let me know how I can make the course more accessible to you.

**Schedule and Readings**

I may change the readings, depending on student interest, and if so I will email you in advance. Further, I have included extra readings with an asterisk (\*). These are not required, but may be helpful if you are puzzled or find yourself curious about the topic.

**Schedule of Readings and Assignments**

\* *indicates a suggested though not required reading. These readings are subject to change in light of student interests.*

*I have set this up to reflect 3 weekly course meetings, even though two ‘meetings’ are back-to-back. This is to reflect the different activities we will engage in per the course material.*

**Week 1, Sept. 9 & 11: Introduction to Philosophy & Feminism**

First meeting (M1): *What is philosophy? What is feminism?*

* No required reading, but watch [this video](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality) on intersectionality.

\* Samantha Brennan, “Feminist Ethics and Everyday Inequalities”

\* Anna Carastathis, “The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory”

\* Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins”

\* ContraPoints, “[Men](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1xxcKCGljY)”

Second meeting (M2): Privilege

* Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”
* A brief explainer on cisprivilege can be found here (<https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2011/11/list-of-cisgender-privileges/>) and here (<https://www.pride.com/tv/2019/1/28/what-cisgender-privilege-billie-lee-schools-vanderpump-rules>).

Third meeting (M3): Oppression

* Marilyn Frye, “Oppression”

\* Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression”

\* Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”

**Week 2, Sept. 16 & 18: Feminist metaphysics: Sex, gender, and social construction**

M1: *Essentialism*

No required reading.

\* Alison Stone, “Essentialism” in *Introduction to Feminist Philosophy*

M2: *Social constructivism*

* Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?”

\* Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction” in *The Second Sex*

M3: *Cisprivilege in* *social constructivism*

* Katherine Jenkins, “Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of *Woman*”  
  \* Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman’”

**Sept. 18: First reflection paper OR mini-assignment due.**

**Week 3, Sept. 23 & 25: Feminist epistemology**

M1: *Standpoint theory*

* Alison Wylie, “Why Standpoint Matters”

\* Linda Martìn Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others”

M2: *Epistemic injustice*

* Rachel McKinnon, “Epistemic Injustice”

\* Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*

\* Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”

M3: *Discussion:* *The problem of gaslighting*

No required reading.

\* Rachel McKinnon, “Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice”

**Week 4, Sept. 30 & Oct. 2: Queer feminisms**

M1: Queer feminism and allyship

* Mimi Marinucci, excerpts from “Ch. 8: Notes toward a queer feminism” and “Ch. 9: Questionably queer? From straight allies to queer solidarity” in *Feminism is Queer* (2010).

M2: *Trans\* epistemologies*

* Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trans Identities and First Person Authority”

\* Rachel McKinnon, “Trans\*formative Experiences”

\* Emi Koyama, “The Transfeminist Manifesto”

\* “5 Transgender Tropes that Need to STOP ft. Patti Harrison” ([YouTube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_kPSWB5HCA&feature=youtu.be&list=PLLreUsexUtEO-afC42WdPtaBMQDYUEOOM))

\* ContraPoints, “[Gender Critical](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pTPuoGjQsI)”

M3: *Discussion: trans\*- and homophobia and solidarity*

**Oct. 2: Second reflection paper OR mini-assignment due.**

**Week 5, Oct. 7 & 9: Feminism and race**

M1: *On whiteness*

* Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness”

\* Charles Mills, “White Ignorance”

\* George Yancy, *Look, a White*

M2: *Black feminist thought*

* Kristie Dotson, “Introducing Black Feminist Philosophy”
* Sojourner Truth’s ‘Ain’t I a Woman’ ([YouTube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq3AYiRT4no%20%20%20https://youtu.be/4vr_vKsk_h8))

\* Patricia Hill Collins, “The Politics of Black Feminist Thought”

\* Audre Lorde, excerpts from “Age Race Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”

\* bell hooks, “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory”

M3: *Race and credibility*

* Tamar Szabó Gendler, “On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias”

\* Emmalon Davis, “Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokespersons: A Case for Credibility Excess as Testimonial Injustice”

**[Fall break Oct. 12-16]**

**Week 6, Oct. 21 & 23: Feminism and colonial theory**

M1: *Colonialism*

* Catherine Lu, “Colonialism as Structural Injustice”

\* Margaret Moore, “Justice and Colonialism”

\* Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”

M2: *Universalism*

* Serene J. Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism* (excerpt)

M3: *Discussion section*

No required reading.

**Week 7, Oct. 28 & 30: Medical ethics & reproductive justice**

M1: *Epistemic injustice and reproductive injustice*

* Havi Carel and Ian Kidd, “Epistemic Injustice in Healthcare: A philosophical analysis”
* https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/05/10/722143121/why-racial-gaps-in-maternal-mortality-persist

M2: *Surrogacy*

* Suze Berkhout, “Buns in the Oven: Objectification, Surrogacy, and Autonomy”

\* Alison Bailey, “Reconceiving Surrogacy: Toward a Reproductive Justice Account of Indian Surrogacy”

M3: *Discussion: reproductive justice*

**Oct. 28: Third reflection paper OR mini-assignment due.**

**Week 8, Nov. 4 & 6: Objectification**

M1: *Racial* *Fetishization*

* Robin Zheng, “Why Yellow Fever Isn’t Flattering: A Case Against Racial Fetish”

\* Alia Al-Saji, “Glued to the Image: A Critical Phenomenology of Racialization through Works of Art”

M2: *Pornography*

* Karen Boyle, “Feminism and Pornography”

\* Jennifer Saul, “On Treating Things as People: Objectification, Pornography, and the History of the Vibrator”

\* Lori Watson, “Pornography and Public Reason”

M3: *Discussion activity: sex work, sex toys, and/or sex robots.*

No required reading.

**Week 9, Nov. 11 & 13: Ability**

M1: *Feminist (dis)ability*

* Susan Wendell, “Toward a Theory of Feminist Disability”

\* Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory”

M2: *Feminist (dis)ability: the capabilities approach*

* Serene J. Khader, “Cognitive Disability, Capabilities, and Justice”

\* Martha Nussbaum, Amartya Sen, and Ingrid Robeyns on capability theory

M3: *Discussion*

**Nov. 13: Fourth reflection paper OR mini-assignment due.**

**Week 10, Nov. 18 & 20: Labour**

M1: *Care ethics*

* Virginia Held, “Ch. 1: The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory” in *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*

\* Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*

M2: *Marxist feminism*

* Catherine MacKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence”

\* Amanda Frankel, “Kept Down by the Man, Damn the Man: The Figurative and Literal Alienation of Women”

M3: *Discussion: remuneration for the second shift?*

No required reading, but it would be helpful to briefly look at these articles on gender and housework: see [here](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/01/06/gender_and_housework_even_men_who_don_t_work_do_less_than_women.html) and [here](http://time.com/money/4561314/women-work-home-gender-gap/)

**Week 11, Nov. 25 & 27: The state of the profession and TBD by student interests**

M1: *On the problem(s) with philosophy*

* A. E. Kings, “Philosophy’s Diversity Problem”

\* Susan Dodds, “Not Just a Pipeline Problem”

M2: *TBD by student interests*

M3: *TBD by student interests*

**Nov. 27: Deadline for student meetings with instructor re: final assignment & presentations**

**Week 12 Dec. 2 & 4: Student presentations**

M1: *Student presentations*

M2: *Student presentations*

M3: *Student presentations*