

PHILOS 753
Early Modern European Philosophy
Early Modern Women Philosophers – Education, Marriage, Community
McMaster University – Fall 2021

Meeting time: TBD

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Course Description:

In this course, we will explore some of the works of historically overlooked European women philosophers. While much of the recent scholarship that has occurred on these figures has focused on their metaphysics and epistemology, in this course we will focus on the interpersonal social and moral arguments surrounding the fight for women's equality – these often center around education and marriage as socio-political institutions – as well as broader patterns of interpersonal relations within communities as a means of furthering subversive feminist projects. How can folks create communities of support, resistance, and change? How are some communities inoculated against a shift in epistemic practices and moral values? Some folks we will read include Mary Astell, Margaret Cavendish, and Marie de Gournay.

Course Objectives:

- Critically read and analyze philosophical texts;
- Interpret 'non-traditional' philosophical texts and figures;
- Discuss early feminist philosophy in a respectful, thoughtful, engaging way;
- Construct clear and persuasive original arguments about these texts/figures;
- Produce a conference paper on at least one of these texts/figures.

Required Texts:

- Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, ed. Patricia Springborg (2002), Broadview
- Astell, *Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (1996), Cambridge
- Gournay, *Apology for the Woman Writing*, ed./trans. Richard Hillman and Colette Quesnel (2002), University of Chicago
- Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – free version:
<https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/wollstonecraft>

Assignments and Evaluation Scheme:

- Participation – **ongoing** – 15%
- Podcast – **week 7** – 20%
- Presentations – **week 12** – 15%
 - Present your plan: 5%
 - Offer substantive peer feedback to assigned peers: 10%
- Seminar paper – **18 December** – 50%

Participation

Participation consists in being a present, respectful, and engaged member of this intellectual community: we are engaged in a practice of collective inquiry into these understudied figures and texts. You will ask questions, offer your views, and be engaged participants in other ways, too. This course is something we are doing together – you need not be an expert to be a fully engaged contributor. We will co-construct our understandings as a collective. An important part of this will be publicly submitting interpretive questions (etc.) ahead of class to develop our conversations.

Podcast assignment

In the spirit of cooperative inquiry, and with the knowledge that conversations are often some of the most interesting and intellectually productive tools at our disposal, you will work in groups to produce a podcast (which is really just a record of a conversation you've had) about some topic, theme, etc. related to the course material. This is much less structured than a paper, but that is precisely the point: there are many ways to make a point, and many ways to engage in collaborative inquiry. This is but one. We will talk more about the mechanics of this assignment in class.

Presentation & peer feedback

In the last class meeting, you will present your plan for your seminar paper, along with any interpretive/argumentative questions or concerns you might have. You will be assessed based on your level of preparation and philosophical engagement demonstrated. You will also be assigned as a peer respondent (a TBD number based on class size); your obligation here is to offer thoughtful, meaningful support and constructive feedback to others based on their presentations. This is meant to foster intellectual development and connection and to help you prepare for the paper.

Seminar paper

You will write a conference-length paper offering an interesting and sophisticated argument and/or analysis. Hopefully, you will also submit this to a conference (and be accepted as a presenter). These papers are usually about 4000 words, which sounds a lot easier than it is. Conferences and writing conference papers is a crucially important skill in academia, and even if this isn't your main interest, conferences offer a wonderful social and intellectual experience (well, not quite the same in the time of covid, but still fun!). When you've settled on a broad topic, please contact me to set a meeting so that we can refine your question and source any further secondary literature relevant.

Preliminary syllabus – May 2021

Schedule:

Week 1: Gournay – *Promenade, Equality*

Week 2: Gournay – *Complaint, Apology*

Week 3: Poulain de la Barre – *Discourse*

Week 4: Cavendish – *The Convent of Pleasure*

Week 5: Astell – *Proposal*

Week 6: Astell – *Proposal*

Week 7: Astell – *Reflections*

Week 8: Astell – *Reflections*

Week 9: Wollstonecraft – *Vindication*

Week 10: Wollstonecraft – *Vindication*

Week 11: Wollstonecraft – *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*

Week 12: Presentations and peer feedback