

PHILOS/GENDERST 773: Feminist Philosophy
Bodies: Beauty, Monstrosity, Food, and Fat
Term: Fall 2024

Instructor: Dr. Allaren Samantha Forbes
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Classroom: UH 312
Meetings: Tuesdays 11:30-2:30
Office: UH 307A
Office hours: By appointment only

Course Description

While philosophy may have the reputation of being merely theoretical, feminist philosophers have long theorized about bodies and how our understandings and valuations thereof are inflected by our socio-political and socio-epistemic locations and the power structures that shape them. As a theme for a feminist philosophy course, 'bodies' is a rich topic: there is no singular kind of body – no body which is merely gendered, or merely raced, or merely disabled. And yet, what kinds of bodies are considered 'good,' 'normal,' or 'desirable' is not an accident of history, nor are these matters merely academic. Understanding these hidden social norms or values at a deep level is both personally and professionally valuable. In order to promote such understanding, this course is divided into three modules: first, the metaphysics of socially-constructed bodies; second, an exploration of beauty, monstrosity, and desire; and third, a module on food and fat as these topics intersect with gender, race, disability, beauty, and desire. Please note that this course deals with some very personal and potentially painful subjects, and as such it is crucial that we approach them with empathy and care.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Critically analyze philosophical arguments in a variety of texts;
- Discuss these theories in a respectful, engaging, and constructive way;
- Reflect on one's own social location and knowledge practices;
- Construct clear and persuasive arguments;
- Produce a conference-length philosophy paper.

Textbooks, Materials, & Fees

All readings will be provided as pdf or url in keeping with McMaster's copyright policy.

Method of Assessment

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

- 1. Epistemic Community Membership (25%)**
 - a. Course citizenship via self-assessment (12.5%) – DUE: 4 December**

At the end of the semester, you will write a brief, 500-word self-assessment, structured loosely around some prompts, such as: Are you a charitable interpreter, engaging interlocutor, friendly participant? Do you bring questions to class, passages of interest, ideas and thoughts and reflections to share?

Please note that though this is akin to an attendance and participation grade, I am looking for you to show up in a literal *and* metaphorical sense; attendance is not sufficient. You must make an effort to engage, even if engagement sometimes means being very confused.

On the assumption that I agree with/am persuaded by your grade/justification, I will assign the grade you recommend for this portion of your final grade. Should there be some disagreement, I will provide a careful and reasoned explanation.

b. Presentation (12.5%) DUE: VARIOUS – SEE SIGN UP SHEET ON AVENUE

Each student will be responsible for presenting & leading discussion around one assigned reading. You will be assessed for the quality of explanation and discussion in this portion of the class. Please feel free to meet with me in advance to chat through how you're thinking about things, if you have any questions/concerns, etc.

This exercise is an important part of this class: it is a way to destabilize the traditional teacher-knower//student-learner hierarchy and a way to celebrate and benefit from the different experiential and theoretical knowledge all members of the class bring to the epistemic community. It also helps practice some of the skills you need for professional academic and for being an effective TA. That said, I acknowledge that some people do not feel that they are able to lead a discussion. If this seems descriptive of you, send me an email and I will re-allocate this portion of your grade to other assignments.

2. Podcast Assignment (15%) – DUE: 1 NOVEMBER

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 around the break.

3. Mini-paper (20%) – DUE: 8 OCTOBER

Transitioning from writing at an undergraduate to graduate level, or (if you are a PhD student) further refining your argumentative writing skills, can be challenging. One of the downsides of graduate school is that you are often in the position of having few opportunities to practice these skills, and indeed, in some ways the stakes are higher – perhaps you have a

term paper worth most or almost all of your final grade, or only a few courses until you are expected to write a thesis-level piece of scholarship. Thus, this assignment is intended to give you a chance to develop or further hone these skills, navigate new academic expectations, and accrue some course credit with somewhat lower stakes. It is also a chance to start working through your own views about some of the course content as a means of better preparing yourself for the podcast and term paper (and perhaps even presentation) assignments.

This assignment should advance a tightly articulated, graduate level argument which concerns materials and/or issues raised by one (and only one) of the assigned readings in weeks 1-4 of the course. Your paper is to be 2500-3000 words (**hard limit**). This is much harder than it sounds; expect to spend a fair amount of time on this assignment. Because this assignment is meant to be about skills development, I will be providing a great deal of feedback. This feedback is meant to be useful and constructive, but do not be alarmed if it is critical. This is an important part of learning how to write at a graduate level / improve your graduate-level writing. I am here to help and want you to succeed in the long run (and will do what I can to support you in so doing!).

4. Term Paper (40%) – DUE: 16 December

You will write a conference-length paper (approx. 4500 words) offering an interesting and sophisticated argument. Hopefully, you will also submit this to a conference (and be accepted as a presenter). 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. When you've settled on a broad topic, please contact me to set a meeting so that we can refine your question and discuss next steps.

The last day of class is devoted to a small, informal workshop of presentations of your term paper idea, plans, and concerns. The class will work together to help you think through your project and set you up for maximal success in writing the paper itself.

Policy on Missed Work, Extensions, and Late Penalties

If you need an extension, request one from Dr. Forbes (via email) at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline.

Late penalties:

Everyone receives a 24-hour flexible deadline on all assignments without needing to email for an extension.

Otherwise – that is, when no extension has been obtained in writing – every 24 hrs after the flexible deadline you will lose 10% off the top of the final grade of the paper. So, if you turn in a paper that scores an 83% two days late, it becomes a 63% paper. There is no upper limit on this penalty.

Missed work:

Any work which does not have an extension or accommodation obtained in writing (via email)/SAS-approved accommodation, and which remains unsubmitted more than 5 calendar days after the deadline, will receive a zero.

Other Course Information

Absences

If you are sick, **do not come to class**. Email me saying that you are ill and cannot attend. There is no need to provide details or documentation on this matter. If your absence impedes your ability to turn work in on time, please email me to discuss an alternate timeline or submit an MSAF for an automatic seven-day extension.

Behaviour

It is deeply important that we maintain an attitude of respect for one another and for the subjects we cover in this class, especially because many of them are quite personal/sensitive/important. 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 – especially – when we disagree with the views at hand. We will discuss specific practices of class conduct in the first class.

Email

I will communicate with you via email and Avenue Announcement, particularly if something changes in the course. Please ensure that you are receiving these notifications. My general policy is to respond to emails within 48 hours of receiving them, not including weekends; 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. Normally, I would ask students to submit assignments without names or other identifying information (aside from student numbers). Unfortunately, this isn't a reasonable thing to do in a graduate class which is, by its very nature, small enough (and sufficiently discussion-based) that such anonymity measures are largely moot. 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 every single comment – how you think the grade/comments are inappropriate for your assignment. I promise to consider these appeals and, if the appeal is accepted, to re-examine your assignment. Please note, however, that a successful request for regrading can result in your mark going up or down.

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 or relevant diagnoses are strongly encouraged to make use of services here at the University. If you require any accommodations in light of any diagnoses or disabilities, please contact Student Accessibility Services. You do not need to disclose any details of any of these matters with me; once you've been in contact with SAS, we will only discuss how to accommodate your needs given practical details of the class.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-Line Element

Some courses use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names,

user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lockdown their browser during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca e-mail to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities policy.

Email correspondence policy

It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from each student's own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. Instructors will delete emails that do not originate from a McMaster email account.

Modification of course outlines

The University reserves the right to change dates and/or deadlines etc. for any or all courses in the case of an emergency situation or labour disruption or civil unrest/disobedience, etc. If a

modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with an explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. Any significant changes should be made in consultation with the Department Chair.

Request for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF)

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, including lectures by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

Schedule and Readings

Week 1: 3 Sept – Sexed/Gendered Bodies I

- Ásta, “What are Sex and Gender and What Do We Want Them to Be?”
- Madhavi Mohan, “WOMAN: An Essentially Contested Concept”
- Florence Ashley, “What is It Like to Have a Gender Identity?”

Week 2: 10 Sept – Sexed/Gendered Bodies II

- Robin Dembroff, “Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind”
- Marie Draz, “Retro-Sex, Anti-Trans Legislation, and the Colonial/Modern Gender System”

Week 3: 17 Sept – Raced Bodies

- Sally Haslanger, “Tracing the Sociopolitical Reality of Race”
- Chike Jeffers, “Cultural Constructionism”

Week 4: 24 Sept – Disabled Bodies

- Katharine Jenkins and Aness Kim Webster, “Disability, Impairment, and Marginalised Functioning”
- Julie E. Maybee, “Em(Body)ment and Disability: Taking the (Biological) Body out of Em(Body)Ment”
- OPTIONAL: Shelley Lynn Tremain, “Field Notes on the Naturalization and Denaturalization of Disability in (Feminist) Philosophy”

Week 5: 1 Oct – **Beauty**, Monstrosity, Desire I

- Tressie McMillan Cottom, “In the Name of Beauty”
- Sara Protasi, “The Perfect Bikini Body: Can We All Really Have It? Loving Gaze as an Antioppressive Beauty Ideal”

Week 6: 8 Oct – **Beauty**, Monstrosity, Desire II

- Anton Leist, “What Makes Bodies Beautiful”
- Sherri Irvin, “Resisting Body Oppression: An Aesthetic Approach”

Week 7: 22 Oct – Beauty, **Monstrosity**, Desire III

- Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture: Seven Theses”
- Luciano Nuzzo, “Foucault and the Engima of the Monster”
- OPTIONAL: Andrew Sharpe, “Structured Like a Monster: Understanding Human Difference Through a Legal Category”

Week 8: 29 Oct – Beauty, **Monstrosity**, Desire IV

- Rosemay Betterton, “Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination”
- Susan James, “Hermaphroditical Mixtures: Margaret Cavendish on Nature and Art”

Week 9: 5 Nov – Beauty, **Monstrosity**, Desire V

- Jordan Peele, *Get Out* (2017)
- Richard Godden and Asa Simon Mittman, “Embodied Difference: Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman”

- OPTIONAL: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Week 10: 12 Nov – Beauty, Monstrosity, **Desire VI**

- Nikki Sullivan, “Dis-Orienting Paraphilias? Disability, Desire, and the Question of (Bio)Ethics”
- OPTIONAL: Nancy J. Hirschmann, “Queer/Fear: Disability, Sexuality, and The Other”
- Robin Zheng, “Why Yellow Fever isn’t Flattering: A Case Against Racial Fetishes”

Week 11: 19 Nov – Food & Fat I

- Céline Leboeuf, “Anatomy of the Thigh Gap”
- Emma Atherton, “Moralizing Hunger”

Week 12: 26 Nov – Food & Fat II

- Alison Suen, “The Construction of a Consumable Body”
- Sabrina Strings, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* (selections)

Week 13: 3 Dec - PRESENTATIONS