

Philosophy and Feminism  
Philosophy V2110, Spring 2010

Christia Mercer, Philosophy Hall 707  
854-3190, [cm50@columbia.edu](mailto:cm50@columbia.edu)

## Assistants

Each student will be assigned a TA.

Graduate TA's are: Alex Madva ([alexmadva@gmail.com](mailto:alexmadva@gmail.com)) and David Blancha ([db2586@columbia.edu](mailto:db2586@columbia.edu)).  
Anna Couturier ([amc2209@columbia.edu](mailto:amc2209@columbia.edu)), a senior Gender Studies major, will also be assisting me.

## Course Description

Is there an essential difference between women and men? If so, what is the source of this difference (e.g., the body or the soul?) 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? How do questions about race and ethnicity conflict or overlap with those about gender? Is there a "normal" way of being "queer"? Should these questions be applied globally? If not, why not? If so, how? This course introduces students to philosophy and feminism through a critical discussion of these and related questions. Assigned materials include historical and contemporary texts, the arts, and lectures on Columbia campus.

## 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 nature of humanity, the construction of the human subject, 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.

Reconsider basic assumptions about who you are and what you want to be.

## Readings

Because we will read and discuss particular passages in class, it is important that you have HARD COPIES OF REQUIRED READINGS with you. Some assigned readings are ONLY available in Courseworks. Find them in the Assignments section, listed alphabetically by author's name. The following books are required and available at Book Culture (on 112<sup>th</sup> b/w Brdwy and Amsterdam) and in the reserve room at Butler Library:

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

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates* (Penguin) [or another version of Plato's *Phaedo* will do]

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

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

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

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

Toni Morrison, *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power* (Pantheon)

Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal* (Free Press)

Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby, *Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*

## Assignments

Your primary goal is to read and think about the assigned materials, and to discuss them in class. This means coming to class prepared! We will take role and expect students to be in class and prepared.

Three one-page, single-spaced papers

One 5-page double-spaced paper

Final examination

Two lecture analyses: Attend a lecture at Columbia (Barnard/Columbia/Law/anywhere on campus) and write a 300-400 word account and analysis.

## Grades

Three one-page papers 36%; one five-page paper 25%

Lecture analyses combined with class attendance and participation 14%

Final Exam 25%

## Lecture Topics and Readings

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

**Week 1** *Introduction to Course // The Origins of Essentialism.*

1/19-21: Introduction//Mind-Body Dualism.

Reading: Plato's *Phaedo* in *The Last Days of Socrates* (another edition of the *Phaedo* is fine).

**Week 2:** *Mind, Body, Nature, and Truth*

1/26: Reading: Pagels' *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, ch. 1 (all), ch. 2 (pp. 32-43), ch. 3( 64-77).

1/28: Reading: Pagels' *Adam, Eve, ...*, ch. 4 (all), ch. 6 (all); New Testament, Paul *Romans*, 1-8.

Trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art

**First Paper Assignment Distributed.**

**Week 3** *Women's Souls and Virtue// Bodies and Property*

2/2: Reading in Schneir: Wollstonecraft (pp. 5-16); Grimke (pp. 35-48); Sojourner Truth, pp. 92-98.

2/4: Reading: in Schneir, Goldman (308-24); Engels (pp. 189-204).

**FIRST PAPER DUE by 5:00, Friday**

### **B. Essentialism: Construction and Critique**

**Week 4** *Foucault, the Discourse of the Normal and the Perverse.*

2/9 and 2/11: Reading: Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Parts 1, 2, 3.

**Week 5** Constructing Sexual Difference.

2/16: Reading: Laqueur's *Making Sex*, ch. 1-2, 3 (quick read though focus a bit on pp. 69, 82, 88, 98-99).

2/18: Reading: Laqueur, ch.5 (pp. 149-63), ch.6 (pp. 193-207; 243).

**First Lecture Analysis Due Friday, 4:00.**

**Week 6** *Constructing Gender*

2/23-25: Reading: Butler, *Gender Trouble*, preface, ch. 1, ch. 3, § Concluding Unscientific Postscript to end.

**Second Paper Assignment Distributed.**

**Week 7** *The Normal*

3/2-4: Reading: Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, chs. 1, 2, 3, and pp. 142-54, 192-3.

**SECOND PAPER DUE by 5:00 Friday**

### **C. Ethnicity, Gender, and Truth**

**Week 8** *Race, Gender, and Power.*

3/9-11: Assignment: Frontline documentary, "Clarence Thomas, Anita Hill: Public Hearing, Private Pain"(view in Butler or Barnard lib). Reading: Morrison, *Race-ing Justice*, articles by Higginbotham, Marable, Painter.

**Week 9 Spring Break: March 15-21**

**Week 10** *Race-ing Objectivity*

3/23 Reading: Morrison, *Race-ing Justice*, articles by Stansell, Lubiano, Crenshaw.

3/25 Reading: TBA, Lecture by Alex Madva

**Third Paper Assignment Distributed**

### **D. Feminism, Gender, and the Global Context**

**Week 11** *Constructing the Global Subject and Re-orienting Desire*

3/30 Readings: Abu-Lughod, "Modern Subjects;" Franke, "Sexual Tensions," in Courseworks

4/1 Readings: Abu-Lughod, "Rethinking;" Massad in Courseworks [readings may be reordered]

**THIRD PAPER DUE by 5:00 Friday**

**Week 12** *Globalizing Desire*

4/6-8 Readings: Long, Puar, Franke, "Ahmadinejad," in Courseworks. Discussion led by Anna Couturier.

**Second Lecture Analysis Due Friday, 4:00.**

### **E. Feminism, Objectivity, and Science**

**Week 13** *Feminism, Objectivity, and Knowledge.*

4/13: Reading: In *Cambridge Companion*/Courseworks, Langton (ch. 7).

4/15: Fricker (ch.8), and Wylie (ch. 9)

**Final Paper Assignment Distributed**

**Week 14** *Feminism and Nature.*

4/20-22: Haslanger (ch.6 of *Cambridge Companion*/Courseworks); Lloyd, "Objectivity and the Double Standard"(Pay special attention to the first two sections and the last section, Courseworks).

**Week 15** *The Abuses of Essentialism Reconsidered // Conclusions.*

4/27-29: Reading: Thornhill, Palmer, "Why Men Rape;" Time Magazine, "The Most Impt Sex Organ" in Courseworks.

**Final PAPER DUE at 3:00, Thursday, May 6.**

REMEMBER: 3-hour EXAM during exam period.

