

PHL 208 PHILOSOPHY OF FEMINISM UDM Winter 2004 Dr. Gail Presbey
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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 1:30- 4 p.m. Fridays 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

Purpose of the Course/ Overview:

The course will introduce students of Women's Studies to the particularly philosophical approach to women's issues. And it will introduce the student of philosophy to the uniquely feminist approach within the field. First we will realize that before we can unproblematically apply philosophy to the topic of feminism, we must first interrogate what is meant by "philosophy." Feminist philosophers have challenged our idea of what philosophy is and should be. We will briefly look at some of the key feminist critiques of the male philosophical canon, paying close attention to the tension posited between "reason" and "emotion" or even "love." We will then pay attention to key themes in philosophy of feminism such as the conceptions of gender, the body, sexual orientation, justice and care. We'll then apply feminist philosophy to current problems such as racism, environmental destruction, war and violence, and human rights violations. Next, we'll discuss feminism in an international context, raising issues of whether there can be universal, or only culture-specific, ideas and practices of treating women fairly and with dignity. We'll do a series of one-week surveys of India, Islamic societies, Latin America, and then follow with an extended study of Africa.

Required Texts:

Alison Jaggar and Iris Young, *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (CFP) in UDM bookstore

Various articles below

One book on African women, selected from the list below:

Bessie Head, *Maru* (a novel, artistically written, a bit mystical, set in Botswana)

Joseph Situma, *Mpuonzi's Dream* (a novel, about a young woman in Kenya)

Mpho 'M' Atsepo Nthunya, *Singing Away the Hunger* (autobio., South Africa)

Judith Abwunza, *Women's Voices, Women's Power* (sociological study based on interviews with 400 women from Maragoli, Kenya)

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (novel about 2 teen girls in Zimbabwe)

Edith Kohrs-Amissah, *Aspects of Feminism and Gender in the Novels of Three West African Women Writers (Aidoo, Emecheta, Darko)*. (Literary criticism)

Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (novel about female circumcision)

Schedule of Readings, broken into four parts

1/5: Introduction to the course, review of syllabus.

THEME ONE: Feminist critique of Philosophy

1/7: Aristotle. Photocopy; Kotzin, CFP pp. 18-20.

1/9: *The Life and Maxims of Skendes* (Anonymous, Ethiopia), photocopy.

1/12: excerpt from video, "Yentl"; Adler, CFP pp. 245 - bottom of 248.

1/14: Gatens, "Descartes," CFP pp. 21- 26. Ruddick, "Love's Reason," photocopy.

1/16: Code, "Epistemology" CFP pp. 173- 184.

HAPPY MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY (no class 1/19).

1/21: Hill Collins, "Afrocentrist Feminist Epistemology," photocopy.

1/23: Seigfried, "Pragmatism," CFP pp. 49-57.

THEME TWO: Feminist Topics in Philosophy

1/26: Nicholson - "Gender" CFP pp. 289-297.

1/28: Bartky - "Body politics," CFP pp. 321- 329.

1/30: Paula Gunn Allen, "The Sacred Hoop," photocopy.

2/2: Alcoff - "Racism," CFP pp. 475- 484.

2/4: Plumwood, "The Environment" (ecofeminism) CFP pp. 213 - 222.

2/6: Ruddick, "War and peace," CFP pp. 581- 590.

2/9: Kiss, "Justice," (includes care) CFP pp. 487- 499.

THEME THREE: International feminist issues

2/11: Dandekar, "International justice," CFP pp. 550- 558.

2/13: Charlotte Bunch, "Woman's human rights," photocopy.

2/16: Susan Moller Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" photocopy.

2/18: Martha Nussbaum, "Women and Cultural Universals," photocopy.

2/20: Responses to Okin (photocopy). Midterm essays due.

2/23: Islam: Tayab, CFP pp. 236-244.

2/25: Islam: al-Hibri, CFP pp. 541- 549.

2/27: Islam: Tohidi, photocopy.

HAPPY SPRING BREAK

3/8: India: Dalmiya, CFP pp. 118 - 127.

3/10: India: Narayan, "Dowry murders," photocopy.

3/12: India: Narayan cont., "Sati,"(photocopy) or video.

3/15:Latin America: Schutte, CFP pp. 87- 95.

3/17: Latin America: Elvia Alvarado, photocopy.

3/19: Latin America: Guest speaker, or discussion, video, "Maria"

THEME FOUR: In-depth study of Africa

3/22: Proverbs and Oral Tradition: Amba Odyuoye, Adeofe Oyesakin, and Mineke Schipper, photocopies.

3/24: Sandra Harding, "The Curious Coincidence between Feminist and African Epistemologies." Photocopy.

3/26: Video, "Maasai women"

3/29: opportunity for small group discussions of books

3/31: discussion of Maasai women. Viewing of Woodabe beauty contest, "Geerwol." Excerpts, video: *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*.

4/2: Nkiru Nzegwu, "In My Mother's House," photocopy.

4/5: Safro Kwame, "Feminism and African Philosophy," photocopy.

4/7: article from "Gender Gaps in Constitutions," photocopy.

4/9: HAPPY EASTER BREAK

4/12: my presentation of sage philosophy research on women

4/14: presentations of book discussions

4/16: NO CLASS (due to my conference attendance)

FINAL EXAM PERIOD: Thursday April 22, 2-3:50 p.m. Concluding book presentations.

Note: Film viewed on your own: make up for missed final class (4/16). African film, with discussion by Dr. Tom Ebong. Films: “Neria” (Zimbabwe) and “Fat Kinne” (Nigeria). (must attend one; others are extra credit)

Grading:

Based on a possible total of 100 points.

60 - 30 reading quizzes, 2 pts. each

15 - midterm take-home essay, 5 pp. typed, double spaced

15 - book presentation (or, service learning)

10 - class participation

Grading Scale:

A 100- 93

C+ 79.5-77

C 76.5-73

A- 92.5- 90

C- 72.5-70

B+ 89.5- 87

D 69.5-63

B 86.5- 83

D- 62.5- 60

B- 82.5- 80

F: 59.5 and lower.

Further descriptions of the above assignments:

Thirty Reading Quizzes:

Each day as we begin a new author, there will be a reading quiz. You will be given reading review questions ahead of time to help you prepare for the quiz. The quiz will take a variety of formats, from true/false, matching, multiple choice, identify the passage, fill in the blank or short answer. Five of the twenty quizzes can be taken at the end when we finish an author. At the beginning of class I will ask for a vote; if more than half of the class present votes to delay the quiz to the end of class, it will be done, but not more than five times during the semester. Students are therefore encouraged to save their votes for the authors which seem particularly challenging.

Students who missed the quiz for whatever reason, or who are unhappy with their quiz grade, have a time limit of one week in which to complete a make-up assignment. The assignment consists of a full one-page, typed and double spaced paper on the author who was covered by the quiz. The first half of the paper should be a summary of that author’s main claim, and your explanation of how the author tries to justify the claim. The second half of the paper should be your personal evaluation of the author’s main claim. Give reasons for your view. Make-up assignments will not be accepted later than one week from when the quiz was assigned. An upper limit of eight make-up papers per student will be allowed. This paper is worth a maximum of two points, but may not receive the full two points if it is inaccurate or poorly written. In the case of those who took the quiz, the paper grade will take the place of the quiz grade whether it is better or worse.

Note: If for some reason we fall behind schedule in the quizzes, we may need to have some days on which there will be two quiz questions on one author.

Take-home midterm assignment:

This assignment will test your ability to make links, synthesize, and/or critically evaluate the course material. A handout explaining this assignment will be given to you later in the semester.

Book presentation on Africa

Choose a book from the list at the beginning of the syllabus. Read this book on your own, taking notes and writing down your reflections.. You will have a chance to get together with others in the class who may be reading your same book. Look up at least one scholarly article that analyzes your book. At the end of the semester you and others who have read the same book will have a chance to give a presentation on the book, drawing upon the secondary articles you've read as well as integrating what you've read into the other authors we've read during the semester. You will hand in an outline of your talk as well as a bibliography.

Service Learning Project

This involves 12 hours of service. You will choose a site (through collaboration with the LDI office) which involves your working with women. You will keep a journal to write down your reflections, so as to be able to share your ideas with the class at the end of the semester. Try to make connections between our course material and your experiences. The grade is based on making regular entries into your journal, the oral presentation at the end, as well as the completion of the 12 hours.

Class Participation

There are many opportunities for class participation. As we go over each author, I do not expect to just lecture on material while the class just copies what I said. Since I expect you have read the authors, I will be asking the class to tell me what the author said. Your participation at this point by volunteering answers will help the class in learning the material. Again, your volunteering of interesting reflections on the author's ideas will help the class and improve your grade.

The class participation grade can be adversely affected by absences, repeated tardiness, silence, sleeping in class, or distracting side conversations. Also, dominating class discussion so that others do not have a chance to speak is a grave shortcoming. Speak your ideas and then give the teacher a chance to solicit answers and views from others as well. Your grade can also be harmed by showing disrespect to other students or the teacher. In philosophy class, very different views will be presented, and you are encouraged to put forward whatever position you hold on the topic. But if you disagree with others, do not turn it into personal animosity. Just state your counter-argument in a way that the debate in class can continue productively.

Your estimated class participation grade will be handed back to you with your midterm essay. It can still go up or down depending on whether your participation improves or gets worse for the second half of the semester. If you are dissatisfied with your grade, you have a choice to work on improving it.

Extra Credit Policy:

If there is a public event on campus that is related to our course material, you can attend the event, and write a one page typed double spaced paper on it (within one week of the event). Events must be approved by me as extra credit and announced in class so that other students know that it is an extra credit opportunity. You can receive up to 3 points for your paper, depending on the quality of the entry. NOTE: Do not EXPECT 3 points for your paper if you only recount incidentals while avoiding the philosophical importance of the presentation.

General Classroom and University Policies:

Timeliness: Students should arrive to class on time. Those who, on rare occasion because of difficulties, must come in late to class, must do so quietly, using a back entrance if possible, and take the closest seat available. Repeated and/or noisy tardy entry to the classroom is bound to disrupt students' attention and will attract the attention of the teacher, and is therefore discouraged.

Leaving the Classroom During Class: This is to be done only due to crisis or illness. If you leave the class and return, let me know the cause of the emergency at the end of class. If you leave and don't return, let me know what happened at the beginning of the next class. **Talking during class:** Talking to others while classroom lecture or discussion is going on is disruptive to the teacher and other students. You will be reprimanded by the teacher and asked to discontinue your conversation.

Attendance: Attendance at all classes except in illness or other emergency is expected. Those who miss a midterm essay final presentation deadline due to emergency, and wish to hand in the assignment late, will need written documentation for their absence (doctor's note, tow truck receipt etc) in order to be given a brief deadline extension. The instructor has the right to follow up and check on the veracity of written documentation.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Cheating on quizzes and assignments is wrong and can result in a failing grade for the course. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism entails "submitting the words or style of another author or source without acknowledgment or formal documentation. Plagiarism occurs when specific phrases or entire passages, whether a sentence, paragraph, or longer excerpt, are incorporated into one's own writing without quotation marks or documentation." (UDM Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty). Be careful when creating your essays, journals entries, and paper assignments, to use your own words to express ideas, and to use quotation marks and references when using the words of others. At the same time, do not overdepend on quotes; show me that you understand what you're writing about, by translating the ideas into your own words.

Accommodation for Handicapped Students:

Any handicapped student in need of special accommodation due to his or her handicap should see me so as to arrange for alternatives that will work for us both.

PHILOSOPHY OF FEMINISM READING REVIEW QUESTIONS

First few weeks

Kotzin, on Aristotle

How does Aristotle describe women's reasoning ability? What is women's relationship to men? What has been the feminist critique of Aristotle's description?

"The Life and Maxims of Skendes"

What is Skendes' stated reason for his experiment? Was the experiment a success? Explain. What do we learn about masculine virtue and feminine vice in the encounter between Skendes and his mother? According to the parable of the milk-bearer, is Skendes responsible for the ill effects of his experiment? Explain. Why does the Emperor admire Skendes? What does Skendes say (during his question-and-answer period) about male and female nature?

Adler, "Judaism"

In Judaism as practiced prior to 1960, in what ways were women hindered from participation in worship and religious education? What are examples of legal discrimination against women in Jewish law? What changes began to take place regarding women's equal access in the 1970s and 1980s among some branches of Judaism? Why is Judaism of all kinds tempted to reinforce gender essentialism?

Film, "Yentl"

What is Yentl's frustration at the beginning of the film? What is her relationship with her father like? What kind of wisdom does she want to pursue? What are the reasons she decides to take on the name/identity of her brother, Anshel? What opportunities open up to her as a man? What are the difficulties of her new situation? What sexist beliefs are exhibited by Avigdor? What is Hadass's role in the film, and how does she change due to her having met Anshel/Yentl?

Note: film summary on the internet, <http://bjsmusic.com/Yentl15>

Gatens, "Descartes"

How did Descartes understand nature in general, and the human body more particularly? What was the relationship between the body and the mind? What part of oneself is the true self? What is the role of a disciplined mind and will? According to Lloyd, how has Descartes' association of the irrational with the body affected the perception of whether women could be rational? According to Bordo and Chodorow, how is Descartes's emphasis on the autonomous individual due to early childhood experiences of boys? According to LeDoeuf, how is Descartes' longing for a complete system of absolute

knowledge harmful? According to Irigaray, how could the rift between the sexes be healed?

Ruddick, "Love's Reason"

What were some of the reasons Ruddick loved reason in her childhood, teen and early college years? Why did she later develop ambivalent feelings about reason? How did she learn to "stay with men on the right side of power?" How did love, child-raising, and political action challenge her notion of reason? Rather than discard reason, how did she change reason's focus for herself?

Code, "Epistemology"

How have feminist philosophers argued that the sex of the knower is indeed important? How are certain conceptions of rationality and objectivity actually written from a masculine point of view? How do epistemologies sustain patriarchal social structures? How have feminists criticized empiricism and revised it to be more accurate? What is the critique of "objectivity" and the role of "value-laden assumptions?" What is the role of community (rather than the individual) in determining evidence? What is standpoint theory? What is situated knowledge?

Plumwood, "The Environment" (eco-feminism)

How are women stereotyped as "natural"? How is eco-feminism different than other environmental philosophies? How is the oppression of women and nature similar? What is anthropocentrism? What is an eco-feminist position regarding animal rights and vegetarianism (ex: Carol Adams)?

Kiss

Is women's subordination natural? If not, what are its causes?

What is the debate between "equal treatment" and "special" or "differential treatment"? What could be wrong with gender neutral laws? Explain the examples of: minimum height laws; protections against discrimination of pregnant women.

What is problematic about using the standard of a "reasonable woman" in deciding cases about sex discrimination?

Should gender differences be abolished, or valorized? What are the arguments in favor of and against each of these approaches?

How does the ethics of care provide what is missing in a narrower ethics of justice? Give one example of "inappropriate abstraction" in an ethics of justice approach.

What justice issues are important other than distribution issues?

Bunch

How is the usual way of picturing human rights violations actually a male bias? In what ways are the violent acts suffered by women human rights abuses, akin to slavery, torture, and imprisonment without charges or trial? What is the level of adequacy of resources given to women's issues in the UN?