

## Phil XX: Gender, Politics, and Philosophy

Instructor: Joshua Kissel

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Office Hours: XXX

Class Meeting: XDAY and XTIMES.

Class Location: XXX

### Course Description:

This is an intermediate level philosophy course dealing with key questions relating to gender, sex, and power. It begins with brief overview of two concepts important to philosophy: 'validity' and 'soundness' and an introduction to normative philosophy and critical theory. In week 2 we dive right into the content of this course; feminist philosophy especially as it engages with social and political questions. We will spend three weeks trying to answer the question "What does it mean to be a woman" which will allow us to explore the concepts of sex and gender; the 'gender binary,' sexual orientation, and trans experience. In week 5 the class turns toward the critical. We will look at liberal feminist critiques of cultures that include sexist or openly misogynistic elements and we will explore the sort of near-term reforms of existing institutions that might protect the liberal human rights of women. In week 6 our critical theorizing becomes more radical as we consider the interaction and intersection of sexist or gendered oppression with oppressions arising from race and economic class. In particular we'll engage with Black feminism as well as socialist and Marxist feminism. In the final weeks of this course, we'll turn our attention to finding a way forward and away from oppression. Is the solution separatism (as advocated for by some radical lesbian feminists) or solidarity? We'll also ask about where men (and masculinity) fits with all of this.

This course deals with normative questions: rather than asking how the world *is* arranged, we will focus on asking how it *ought* to be arranged. Because these are normative or ethical questions this course fits into the wider field of moral philosophy or value theory.

This is an extensive *and* active field of scholarship. This means your fellow classmates and I – much less the brilliant thinkers we read – will not agree on where the truth lies. This means two things; first, we'll all be working as critical thinkers so as to get closer to such truths and secondly, we will each need to be charitable and cooperative thinkers as we try to find the best in all of the contributions we engage with here.

It is expected but not required that you will have some background in philosophy already. Please contact me directly if you are unsure if you are prepared for this course.

### Course Objectives: this course enables students to:

- (1) Evaluate the validity and soundness of arguments.
- (2) Contrast competing explanations of issues of gendered and intersecting oppression as offered by feminist theory (and other students).
- (3) Interrogate and identify the core claims underlying one's own answers to these questions.

(4) Assess the justifiability of the claims in (2) and (3)

In addition, students will acquire a background in important areas of feminist philosophy, including critical reasoning, critical theory, philosophy of race, socialist theory, philosophy of sex and gender, as well as substantive introductions to various feminist schools of thought and their application including – liberal feminism, socialist feminism, Marxist feminism, Black feminism, intersectional feminism, as well as suggestions about how to remedy gendered oppression.

#### Office Hours:

During my office hours I will be sitting quietly behind a desk, staring at a wall unless students come to meet with me. This time is meant for you to ask questions, discuss philosophy, or just hang out. It is *your* time, and you do not need an excuse or any clarity about what you want to do. I request, but do not require, that you send me an email alerting me to when you want to come, and if you happen to know, what you plan to discuss.

If for whatever reason you cannot make my regular office hours, please send me an email asap with a range of time that you could meet, and we will try to work something out!

#### Absences:

I trust all of you to make rational decisions with respect to attendance in accord with your own best reasons. You are each **permitted 2 totally unexcused absences** without any requirement to email or in any other way alert me to your absences. You can use these absences to miss class for any reason (e.g., your being sick, tired, wanting to binge a new show or play your favorite video games, to attend some internship or work-related activity, or whatever else.)

Absences beyond this number will amount to a 1/20<sup>th</sup> reduction in your participation grade for this class.

I try not to allow any extra excused absences beyond your freebies. However, I encourage all students to reach out if you run out of freebies but believe you have some special excuse (like a health issue) that might warrant extra accommodation or special exemption without requiring me to disadvantage your peers in this class. These *can and do* sometimes happen.

#### Screen Policy:

This class is a screen-free environment. This means no computers, tablets, phones, or other such devices. This is because I have found students participation and discussion is best when they are undistracted by their own screens or those of their peers. I share all my PowerPoints to make note-taking less laborious. If you violate the policy, you may be marked absent for the day. Special accommodations are exempted. [E.g., medical exemptions.]

#### Students with Disabilities:

Any student needing accommodations should speak directly to AccessibleNU ((847) 467-5530 or [accessiblenu@northwestern.edu](mailto:accessiblenu@northwestern.edu)) and to me as early as possible in the quarter. Be aware that

AccessibleNU will help arrange reasonable accommodations for both physical and mental health concerns. Barring unforeseen circumstances, any necessary arrangements should be made within in the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.

General Grading Schema:

1. Participation and Attendance      15 % of total. Pass/Fail
2. 10 Reading Responses:              10% of total. Check + (100)/Check (92)/Check - (85)
3. Three Scaffolding Paper Outlines: 35% of total. A-F
  - a. First 5%
  - b. Second 15%
  - c. Third 15%
4. Final Paper (1500-1750 words)    40% of total. 'A'-'F'

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|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| A      | A-    | B+    | B     | B-    | C+    | C     | C-    | D     | F    |
| 94-100 | 90-93 | 87-89 | 84-86 | 80-83 | 77-79 | 74-76 | 70-73 | 60-69 | 60-0 |

Assignment Due Dates [Details for Particular Assignments to Come]

| Assignment           | (Some) Details   | Due Date [Examples] |
|----------------------|--|---------------------|
| Reading Responses:   | Each response is due on Canvas 2 hours before the relevant class takes places. And each must be on a different week.<br>EX: Responses to Linda Zagzebski must be submitted <i>before</i> our discussion of that paper on XXX | Through-out         |
| First Paper Outline  | This outline must be on a topic from class 2 or 3.   | Early               |
| Second Paper Outline | This outline must be on a topic from class 4 or 5  | Mid                 |
| Third Paper Outline  | This outline must be on a topic from class 6 or 7  | Mid-Late            |
| Final Paper          | Paper of 1500-1750 words on any topic in this course. You may choose to use any paper outline or to start from scratch   | End                 |

General Course Outline:

Based on a course of 10 weeks, meeting twice weekly for 1 hour and 20 minutes.

| Class                        | Topic  | Readings  | Assignments           |
|------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------|
| 1 – Week 1                   | Introduction to Course<br><br>Validity and Soundness | Kwame Anthony Appiah – What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For? (3 Pages)   | Icebreaker Discussion |
| 2 – Week 1:                  | Oppression   | Iris Marion Young – Five Faces of Oppression [tool for thinking about this stuff. (20 pages)  |                       |
| 3 – Week 2<br>Sex and Gender | What is 'Women'? –<br>What is Shared                 | Simone de Beauvoir – <a href="#">Introduction to the Second Sex</a> (16 pages)<br><br>Sojourner Truth – <a href="#">Ain't I a Women?</a> (1 page) |                       |

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| 4 – Week 2<br>Sex and Gender                   | What is ‘Women’ – What Isn’t Shared?            | Elizabeth V. Spelman – Excerpts Simone de Beauvoir and Women: Just Who Does she Think “We” is? from <i>Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought</i> (21 pages)  |  |
| 5 – Week 3:<br>Sex and Gender                  | Gender vs Sex                                   | Alison Stone – Sex from <i>An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy</i> (25 pages)  |  |
| 6 – Week 3:<br>Sex and Gender                  | What Makes Gender ‘Socially Constructed’        | Sally Haslanger – <a href="#">Social Construction: Gender and other Social Categories</a> (20 Pages)  | 1 <sup>st</sup> Paper Outline Due          |
| 7 – Week 4:<br>Sex and Gender                  | What About Sexual Orientation?                  | Robin A. Dembroff – What is Sexual Orientation? (27 pages)  |  |
| 8 – Week 4:<br>Sex and Gender                  | Feminist Theory and the Trans Experience        | Talia Mae Bettcher – Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance  |  |
| 9 – Week 5:<br>‘Liberal’ Feminism              | Women and Culture; Liberal Feminism and Tension | Martha Nussbaum – Judging Other Cultures (12 pages)<br><br>Susan Moller Okin – Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women (20 pages)   | Early-Term Teaching Evaluations Circulated |
| 10 – Week 5:<br>‘Liberal’ Feminism             | Feminism and Applied Political Philosophy       | Paula McAvoy – “There Are No Housewives on Star Trek”: A Reexamination of Exit Rights for the Children of Insular Fundamentalist Parents (17 pages)<br><br>Harry Brighouse and Erik Olin-Wright ‘strong gender egalitarianism’ (12 pages) | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Paper Outline Due          |
| 11- Week 6:<br>Intersections of Gender and...  | Race and Gender (Day 1)                         | Sally Haslanger – Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be? (25 pages)<br><br>Patrica Hill Collins – <a href="#">The Politics of Black Feminist Thought</a> (19 pages)  |  |
| 12 – Week 6:<br>Intersections of Gender and... | Race and Gender (Day 2)                         | Robin Zheng “Why Yellow Fever isn’t Flattering” (20 pages)  |  |
| 13 – Week 7:<br>Intersections of Gender and... | Marxism, Socialism, and Feminism                | Iris Marion Young – Socialist Feminism and the Limits of Dual Systems Theory (16 pages)<br><br>Angela Davis – The Approaching   | Midterm Teaching Evaluations Circulated    |

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|  |   | Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective in <i>Women, Race, and Class</i> (12 pages)  |   |
| 14 – Week 7:<br>Intersections of Gender and... | A Critique of Marxist Feminism          | Heidi Hartmann – The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism (33 pages)  |   |
| 15 – Week 8:<br>Intersections of Gender and... | Capitalism and Feminism                 | Nancy Fraser – After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought experiment (27 pages)<br><br>Nancy Fraser – <a href="#">How Feminism Became Capitalism’s Handmaiden – and How to Reclaim It</a> (1000 words) | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Paper Outline Due           |
| 16 – Week 8:<br>Intersections of Gender and... | Men and Masculinity                     | Michael S. Kimmel – Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity (7 pages)<br><br>bell hooks – Men: Comrades in Struggle (16 Pages)                           |   |
| 17 – Week 9:<br>Beyond Oppression              | Separatism and Radical Lesbian Feminism | Claudia Card – Against Marriage and motherhood (23 pages)<br><br>Marilyn Frye – Reflections on Separatism and Power (16 pages)  |   |
| 18 – Week 9:<br>Beyond Oppression              | Solidarity and Intersectionality        | bell hooks – Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Among Women (25 pages)<br><br><a href="#">Statement of the Combahee River Collective</a> (~3800 words)  |   |
| 19 – Week 10:                                  | Make Up                                 | Make Up Session   | End of Term Teaching Evaluations Circulated |
| 20 – Week 10:                                  | Wrap Up                                 | Course Recap and Final Paper Workshops  | Final Paper Due                             |