

PHILOSOPHY 129
SPECIAL TOPICS IN ETHICAL THEORY: FEMINISM

MW 2:15 – 4:00

Hilde Lindemann

hlinde@msu.edu

Kenna Hall 200D

Office hours: 9:00-noon, Mondays and Wednesdays

This course is an upper-division examination of two key areas in feminist philosophy: feminist ethics and feminist epistemology. We start from two interrelated assumptions: (1) the oppression of women is ubiquitous and wrong; and (2) the experiences of women are as important and interesting as the experiences of men. Throughout, we'll pay attention to how gender, conceptualized as a power system that requires the practices and institutions of society to favor the interests of men over those of women, gives rise to pressing philosophical issues.

We'll be exploring a number of questions, such as: How is women's conception of self affected by the care giving responsibilities traditionally assigned to them and by the personal vulnerabilities imposed on them? If institutions of male dominance profoundly influence women's lives and minds, how can women form judgments about their own best interests and overcome oppression? Can feminist politics survive in face of the diversity of women's experience, which is shaped by race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, as well as by gender? Through careful reflection on these and similar questions, students can come to better understand how their society works and what their place in it might be.

Texts



Diana Tietjens Meyers, ed. *Feminists Rethink the Self*. Westview Press, 1996.



Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Grades

Class participation: 20%

Weekly quizzes or reflection papers: 20%

Poster presentation: 30%

Final paper: 30%

Class participation includes coming to class faithfully, armed with the day's reading and prepared to discuss it. It also includes participating actively in the discussion and group work.

The **quizzes and reflection papers** are meant to help you keep up with the reading. They can't be made up, but I'll drop the lowest grade.

The **poster presentation** takes the place of a midterm. You'll be working with about 4 other team mates, to do research on specific groups of women of your choosing (example: women in Nigeria, women in Iran, orthodox Jewish women, African American women in the U.S., British lesbian women, women with disabilities). You'll then get creative about

putting together a poster on your findings, and presenting the poster in class on Monday, February 7.

The **final paper** offers you an opportunity to think philosophically about any topic in feminism that interests you. Possible topics are affirmative action, the morality of war, ecofeminism, euthanasia, prostitution, large signs in bars telling pregnant women not to drink, reparations for slavery, or just about anything involving gender. I do advise you to stay away from abortion, as that is an extremely complicated issue with lots of distinct aspects, but if you must, you can give it a try. In the paper, you'll take a position on your topic, give good reasons in support of your view, consider a valid objection to your own argument, and respond to the objection. You should be able to do this well in about 8-10 pages.

Ordinary forms of politeness will be observed. you are expected to arrive on time, not to slip out early, not to text, surf the Web, check Facebook, or look at your emails in class. Cheating is, of course, not tolerated in any form. Please let me know via email if you will not be in class on a given day.

Calendar

M Jan 3	“Trifles”: Sheriff Peters, Mrs. Peters, County Attorney Henderson, Mr. Hale, Mrs. Hale, Narrator
W Jan 5	What is feminist ethics?
M Jan 10	Brison, “Outliving Oneself”; Friedman, “Autonomy and Social Relationships”
W Jan 12	Walker, “Picking Up Pieces”
M Jan 17	MLK day. Class does not meet
W Jan 19	Poster planning day
M Jan 24	Scheman, “Queering the Center”; Allen, “Forgetting Yourself”
W Jan 26	Bartky, “Sympathy and Solidarity”; Meyers, “Emotion and Heterodox Moral Perception”
M Jan 31	Kittay, “Human Dependency and Rawlsian Equality”
W Feb 2	Little, “Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate”; Lyerly et al., “Risk and the Pregnant Body”
M Feb 7	Poster session
W Feb 9	Fricker, Chap. 1

M Feb 14 Fricker, Chap. 2
W Feb 16 Fricker, Chap. 3
M Feb 21 President's Day. Class does not meet
W Feb 23 Fricker, Chap. 4
M Feb 28 Fricker, Chap. 5
W Mar 2 Fricker, Chap. 6
M Mar 7 Fricker, Chap. 7
W Mar 9 Last day of class. FINAL PAPERS DUE.