

COURSE OVERVIEW

Adopting a pluralist perspective, this advanced course in feminist philosophy takes up the question of the impact of social constructivist accounts of sex and gender on theories of knowledge. The course will proceed in three parts. Beginning with a general picture of the relationship of gender and reason in the history of philosophy, we will start by considering both analytic and continental accounts of social constructivism; then, turning directly to the problem of knowledge, we will raise the question, Is knowledge gendered? Is the meaning of what we know shaped in an important way by who we are and how we understand ourselves? The second part of the course will focus on the implication of our answers for the practices of science. Is objective knowledge possible if knowledge is shaped by the particularity of the subject? Do socially constructed categories affect how we read the data of natural science? The course ends by considering the intersection of epistemology and ethics, with special attention to relations of knowledge and power.

COURSE GOALS AND METHODS

Though this course does not emphasize any one specific methodology, it is intended to call attention to the value of feminist critique for destabilizing traditional categories. It is not intended as an introduction to feminist theory. However, certain basic concepts will be defined and defended, including: the sex/gender distinction; essentialism and anti-essentialism, standpoint theory, objectification, and intersectionality.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All students are required to purchase the course reader. In addition, students should purchase the following:

1. Michel Foucault (1990). *A History of Sexuality: Vol. 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.

ASSIGNMENTS AND CLASS POLICIES

Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to do a series of written assignments. In each of these assignments, you will be asked, in two (2) to three (3) pages, *first* to identify the central problem (or *a* central problem) of the assigned text, and *second* to explain how the author addresses or attempts to resolve that problem. The purpose of these assignments is to identify and reconstruct arguments, not to respond to those arguments. Students are encouraged to submit these assignments every week, although the relevant portion of your grade will be calculated using only your six (6) highest marks.

In addition to the short assignments, you will be asked to respond critically to an argument in your midterm paper (4–5 pages). That is, your midterm paper should *first* identify and *second* evaluate a central argument of the text of your choosing. You are welcome and encouraged to build off of your earlier assignments in completing the midterm paper.

Your final paper (7–8 pages) should engage critically with two or more texts, focusing on a core problem addressed over the course of the semester. You should be sure to identify any important differences between the texts you choose and evaluate the importance of those differences for your thesis.

GRADING SCHEMA

Attendance and participation: 15%

Short written assignments: 40%

Midterm paper: 20%

Final paper: 25%

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week 1: Introduction

Weeks 1–2: Perspectives on Gender, Reason, and Knowing

Readings:

- Robin Marie Schott, “The Gender of Enlightenment,” in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt, pp. 471–87.
- Rae Langton, “Feminism in Epistemology: Exclusion and Objectification,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby, pp. 127–45.

Weeks 2–4: Gender, Power/Knowledge, and Constructivism, or Two Ways the Social Looks Natural

Readings:

- Michel Foucault, pts. 1–4 of *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1: An Introduction*.
- Sally Haslanger, “Ontology and Social Construction,” *Philosophical Topics* 23:2 (1995), pp. 95–125.

Weeks 4–5: Is Knowledge Gendered?

Readings:

- Lorraine Code, “Is the Subject of Knowing Epistemologically Significant?” chap. 1 of *What Can She Know?*, pp. 1–26.
- Cora Diamond, “Knowing Tornadoes and Other Things,” *New Literary History* 22 (1991), pp. 1001–15.
- Elizabeth Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and Defense,” *Hypatia* 10 (1995), pp. 50–84

Weeks 6–8: Gender, Science, and Knowledge: The Fate of Objectivity

Readings:

- Jennifer Saul, “Feminism, Science, and Bias,” chap. 8 of *Feminism: Issues and Arguments*, pp. 232–60.
- Lorraine Code, “Knowledge and Subjectivity,” chap. 2 of *What Can She Know?*, pp. 27–70.
- Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminist Epistemology,” chap. 11 of *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, pp. 251–71.

- Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1998), pp. 575–99.

Weeks 8–10: Gender, Science, and Nature: The Fate of Constructivism

Readings:

- Judith Butler, “The Compulsory Order of Sex/Gender/Desire,” in chap. 1 of *Gender Trouble*, pp. 9–11.
- Evelyn Fox Keller, “The Gender/Science System: Or, Is Sex to Gender as Nature is to Science?” *Hypatia* 2:3 (1987), pp. 37–49.
- Elisabeth Lloyd, “Pre-theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality,” *Philosophical Studies* 69:2/3 (1995), pp. 139–53.
- Rebecca Jordan-Young, “Trading Essence for Potential,” chap. 10 of *Brain Storm*, pp. 269–92.

Week 11: Case Study: Neurosexism

Readings:

- Rebecca Jordan-Young, “Sexual Brains and Body Politics,” chap. 1 of *Brain Storm*, pp. 1–20.
- Cordelia Fine, “Unraveling Hardwiring,” chap. 9 of *Delusions of Gender*, pp. 176–88.
- Ian Sample, “Male and female brains wired differently, scans reveal,” *The Guardian* 12/2/2013
 - Rae Langton and John Dupré, “Gender differences all in the mind,” *The Guardian* 12/5/2013
 - Cordelia Fine, “New insights into gendered brain wiring, or a perfect case study in neurosexism?” *The Conversation*, 12/4/2013

Weeks 12–14: Knowing, Politics, and Power: On Epistemology and Ethics

Readings:

- Miranda Fricker, introduction and “Hermeneutical Injustice,” chap. 7 of *Epistemic Injustice*, pp. 1–9, 147–75.
- Laura Beeby, “A Critique of Hermeneutical Injustice,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11:3 (2011), pp. 479–86.
- Bat-Ami Bar on, “Marginality and Epistemic Privilege,” in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. Linda Martín Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, pp. 83–100.
- Linda Martín Alcoff, “Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types,” *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, pp. 39–57.