

## PHIL 338: Philosophy, Sex and Gender Syllabus Fall 2013

**Where?** Robinson A105

**When?** T R 3pm – 4.15pm

**Instructor:** Prof. Rachel Jones

**Office:** Robinson B462

**Open Office Hours:** Tuesday 1.00-2.00pm Thursday 1.00-2.00pm

\*Office Hours are times for students to come and see me without an appointment. If you cannot attend during one of these weekly times, please email me to make an alternative time to meet.\*

**e-mail:** [rjones23@gmu.edu](mailto:rjones23@gmu.edu)

**Department webpage:** <http://philosophy.gmu.edu/>

**Guide for Writing in Philosophy:** <http://classweb.gmu.edu/WAC/philosophy/>

**Where to find information about this course:** all course information including the syllabus, assignments, and any additional announcements or changes to the schedule will be posted on the Blackboard site for this course. You should also check your GMU email regularly for class announcements.

### Course Outline

***This course explores how concepts of sex and gender structure key philosophical ideas and put such ideas into question.*** A key aim of the course is to show how issues of sex and gender were not 'added in' to philosophy by feminist thinkers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rather, philosophy's key ideas have always been structured by ideas about sex, gender, and sexual difference: sometimes obviously and explicitly, such as in the gendering of Rousseau's political philosophy, and sometimes in more implicit but no less powerful ways, such as in Descartes' method of doubt and mind/body dualism.

On this course, we will examine both Descartes and Rousseau. We will look at the role of sex and gender in their work, and at how feminist philosophers have responded to that work. We will ask how successful feminist thinkers have been at (a) *challenging* the way ideas of sex and gender have informed philosophical thought, and (b) *transforming* philosophical thought by changing how we think about sex and gender. To what extent have feminist ideas about sex and gender repeated aspects of the very tradition they are criticizing? Which ways of thinking about sex and gender have been most successful in escaping or transforming this tradition?

The course will begin with Plato, who has been hailed as both a thorough-going misogynist *and* a proto-feminist. As we will see, ideas about men and women and the differences between them are central to Plato's vision of the ideal political state as well as to his defence of philosophy itself. But it is not clear that our modern ideas of 'sex' and 'gender' actually fit how Plato is thinking about these issues: in fact, his philosophy might be most useful to us where it *doesn't* fit with our ideas about sex and gender, and so challenges some of our core assumptions about men and women. ***So, we will start with the Plato of 'Symposium', where the highest forms of relation are homosexual not heterosexual, where we find a myth of three types of human beings (male, female and androgyne), where Socrates is taught by a woman (Diotima), and where male bodies are pregnant and give birth.***

The approach to the course will be primarily text based. Along the way, we will confront core issues in metaphysics (Plato, Descartes), epistemology (Descartes), and political philosophy (Rousseau) as well as feminist philosophy.

## Book Requirements

As we will be looking at a range of contemporary feminist work on this course, many of the key texts will be provided in electronic format via Blackboard. You will still need to bring copies of these texts to class with you: either in electronic format or as print offs. *I strongly recommend printing off texts you are working with closely (eg a text on which you are giving a presentation or using for an essay) and not just reading on-screen.* There will therefore be some printing costs associated with the course.

**Books to Buy:** you should also have your own copy of the following books for this course (they are available in the GMU bookstore, but I recommend checking Amazon for cheap second hand copies too):

**1. Alison Stone, *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy*, Polity Press, 2007 [paperback]**

**ISBN-10:** 074563883X; **ISBN-13:** 978-0745638836

This text is an excellent general introduction to feminist philosophy. We will use it as a general background reader to accompany the course and as a basis for some of the discussion board questions. I will point out sections that are relevant to particular weeks as we go through the course.

**2. William Cobb, trans. and commentary, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, State University of New York Press, 1993 [paperback]**

**ISBN-10:** 0791416186; **ISBN-13:** 978-0791416181

Plato's *Symposium* is a text we will be looking at in some depth: please make sure you get hold of this particular translation by Cobb, which also has excellent notes and commentary.

**3. Stella Sandford, *Plato and Sex*, Polity, 2010 [paperback].**

**ISBN-10:** 0745626416; **ISBN-13:** 978-0745626413

The most radical contemporary feminist interpretation of Plato! Sandford also gives very helpful accounts of existing interpretations, by both feminist and non-feminist philosophers.

**4. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, Hackett 1993 [paperback]**

**ISBN-10:** 0872201929; **ISBN-13:** 978-0872201927

If you've done Philosophy courses before, you've probably already got a copy of Descartes' *Meditations*: you don't need to buy the Hackett version if you already have another translation/ edition of this text. But it *is* a text every Philosophy student should have (and you will need to read key sections of it for this course), so if you don't already own it, this is a good, reliable (and fairly cheap) edition to get hold of.

Another book that is an excellent guide to many of the issues we will be addressing is **Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (Routledge, 1993)**. This book is available as an **electronic resource** via GMU library.

## Reading

The schedule of readings is given below. I will expect you to have done the set reading before the relevant class. This means reading through the set text or texts at least once; going back and re-reading either the whole text, or the passages that seem especially important/difficult/puzzling/interesting to you; and writing down your thoughts and questions on the text (I recommend keeping a notebook/ electronic file just for your reading notes for this course that you can bring to class, as a reminder of what you want to ask or comment on).

If you don't have questions, you're not reading properly! If you do the reading in advance, you will get a lot more out of classes – because you will have a lot more to put in.

## Commitment to Diversity

In keeping with the general ethos of the University, this class seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across differences. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

NB This does not mean not being critical: respecting others' views means taking them seriously, and taking them seriously means thinking about their strengths and weaknesses, asking questions, and offering constructive criticisms or alternative viewpoints where appropriate. It also means thinking about where the views of others challenge our own, and being open to what they have to teach us. Valuing diversity is not just an attitude – it is a matter of developing an active practice. Amongst other things, this practice involves:

- learning to listen to other perspectives;
- being open to criticism of one's own views;
- being willing to evaluate different positions while being unsure where one stands;
- having good reasons for one's views, but being willing to change one's mind;
- not rushing to judgment;
- basing critical comments or questions on as good an understanding of another person (or text or theory) as one can manage;
- *and* being willing to accept that there will always be things one cannot see or understand;
- learning to express criticisms and differences of opinion in ways that are not personal or hurtful and that leave space for other voices.

Never be afraid to ask a question or to risk saying something that might be wrong – that is how we learn. But equally, never be afraid to listen to the questions and answers of others, and to let their views challenge and change how you think.

## Questions and Problems

If you have a question about the course, or a problem with a class or assignment, please feel free to do one or more of the following:

- ask in class (often others will have the same problem!)
- come and see me in my open office hours (see p.1 for details)
- email me with a question or query: [rjones23@gmu.edu](mailto:rjones23@gmu.edu)
- email me for an appointment

I am always happy to meet with and help students who are engaged with the course but who have questions or difficulties. I will respond to emails as soon as I reasonably can, though as a general rule I will not answer emails in late evening or at weekends. This means you should not panic if you email me on Saturday morning (for example) and have not heard back by Sunday afternoon! It also means you need to plan ahead – *don't leave questions about assignments or reading until the last minute.*

## Assignments and Grading

### Basic breakdown

1. Attendance & Participation	10%
2. Papers	60% (3 x 20%)
3. Worksheets	15% (3 x 5%)
4. Final Reflective Paper	15%

**1. Attendance & Participation:** There are no points for showing up. However, showing up has value for all other aspects of assessment and you should not expect to do well on the course if you miss classes. Also, **you will automatically lose 50% of your participation grade if you have more than 3 unexplained absences**: you cannot participate if you are not there!

Your participation grade will be based on three elements:

a) **Class discussion:** this is an essential feature of the course and I will regularly invite participation, both from individuals and through small group discussion. Please come prepared to discuss the set reading and be ready to take part in classroom activities. This means both reading and thinking about the texts in advance of the class meeting, and having something useful to contribute in class.

b) **Blackboard Discussion:** I will use Blackboard to set regular reading/discussion questions. You will be expected to participate in Blackboard discussions. To get the participation mark, you need to **post a *serious and meaningful comment for at least 10 of the 15 weeks of classes***.

**2. Papers:** You will write three course essays of 6-8 pages each (double spaced, including references), one on each section of the course. Each essay is worth 20% of the final grade. See schedule below for submission dates. Questions to choose from and further information will be distributed in class and posted on Blackboard c.3 weeks before the submission deadlines. Further reading lists will also be posted on Blackboard.

For guidance on writing philosophy essays, see the Department's Writing Guide for Philosophy:  
<http://classweb.gmu.edu/WAC/philosophy/>

**3. Worksheets:** You will complete 3 worksheets (one on each section of the course), each worth 5% of the final grade. See schedule below for submission dates. Each worksheet will be released on Blackboard 1 week before the submission deadline.

**4. Final Reflective Paper:** You will write a final reflective paper of 4-5 pages (double spaced, including references). The brief for the final reflective paper will be distributed in the final class before Thanksgiving. For submission date, see schedule below.

### Submitting Written Work

All papers and worksheets must be submitted on the Blackboard site for this course by the relevant deadline (see course schedule below). There will be a clearly marked section on Blackboard for each assignment.

One paper copy must also be brought to class on the relevant day or handed in to my course essay box in the Philosophy Office (Robinson B465) during office hours (9am-4pm, weekdays). NB *the course essay box is in the general Philosophy Office, not my individual office!*

Please note:

- The **date of submission will be taken from when you upload the work on Blackboard**. If there is a system problem that means you can't upload the work, email me and let me know.
- I won't **grade** the work (or provide you with feedback) until I have the paper copy. If no paper copy is submitted, no grade will be entered.

### **Late submissions & Extensions**

Any assignment that is submitted late will normally lose one grade per day late (so an essay that is graded at B will become B- if it is one day late, C+ if two days late, etc), down to a D grade, and up to 9 days late. Work that is more than 9 days late will normally get an F grade. NB weekends count as two days (because the work can always be uploaded on Blackboard).

**Extensions can be arranged if you have a good reason for submitting work late but whenever possible please let me know and arrange the extension in advance (by email is fine)**. Extensions cannot be given beyond the last day of the exam period (Dec 18<sup>th</sup> 2013).

Lateness penalties can be waived if you have a good reason for submitting the work late and let me know about it. Please provide me with some evidence to support your case if you can (e.g. a doctor's note or emergency room receipt; an official document/email from another course/instructor showing you had a field trip that clashed with a deadline; a document from work or school showing you had clashing work or child care responsibilities, etc).

### **Incomplete (IN)**

Requests for a grade of incomplete must be made to me in writing (preferably by email), and must normally be submitted 24 hours before the last course assignment at the very latest.

### **Accommodations for Disabilities**

If you require academic accommodations for a disability, please let me know and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2472. All academic accommodations (e.g. arrangements for note-takes, modified assignments, etc) are made through that office.

## **Class Schedule**

NB: The reading schedule is subject to change; please check Blackboard and your GMU email regularly!

**All readings will be available on Blackboard unless listed as a 'Book to Buy' in the 'Book Requirements' section on page 2 above.**

### **WEEK ONE**

Tues August 27<sup>th</sup>: INTRODUCTION

Background Reading, week 1: pp.1-29 Introduction, Alison Stone, *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy*

### **SECTION ONE: Plato - Troubling Sex and Gender**

Thurs August 29<sup>th</sup>: Irigaray on Plato's Cave & Introduction to *Symposium*

Reading: Plato/Irigaray handout (distributed at class 1)

## WEEK TWO

Tues Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>: Aristophanes on the origins of love

Reading: Plato, *Symposium*, 189c-193e, pp.28-32 in *Plato's Erotic Dialogues* (trans. Cobb)

Group 1: Halperin, pp.15-21, 24-29, from 'One Hundred Years of Homosexuality' (extract)

Group 2: Sandford, pp.41-50 in *Plato and Sex*

Thurs Sept 5th: Queering Aristophanes

Reading: Group 1: Adrienne Rich, pp.11-13 and 17-20 from 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (extract), from *Journal of Women's History*, vol 15 no. 3, Autumn 2003.

Group 2: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, pp.3-9 from 'Queer and Now' (extract), in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*

## WEEK THREE

Tues Sept 10<sup>th</sup>: Diotima's Speech **(Do Worksheet 1 and bring to class)**

Reading: Plato, *Symposium*, 201d-212c, pp.39-49 in *Plato's Erotic Dialogues* (trans. Cobb)

Thurs Sept 12<sup>th</sup>: Feminist Readings of Diotima **(Submit Worksheet 1)**

Reading: Group 1: Arlene Saxonhouse, 'Eros and the Female in Greek Political Thought: An Interpretation of Plato's *Symposium*', from *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Feb. 1984.

Group 2: Adriana Cavarero, pp. 91-107 from 'Diotima' in *In Spite of Plato* (extract)

## WEEK FOUR

Tues Sept 17<sup>th</sup>: Pregnant Men and Transvestite Philosophers

Reading: Group 1: Sandford, chapter 4 in *Plato and Sex*

Group 2: Halperin, pp. 113-114 and 129-147 in 'Why is Diotima a Woman?' (extract)

Thurs Sept 19<sup>th</sup>: Women in Plato's *Republic* (extracts from *Republic* will be provided in the previous class)

Reading: Elizabeth Spelman, 'Hairy Cobblers and Philosopher-Queens', in *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*

## WEEK FIVE

Tues Sept 24<sup>th</sup>: Questioning sex and gender in Plato's *Republic*

Reading: Sandford, chapter 1 in *Plato and Sex*

## SECTION TWO: Descartes - Mind and Body, Gender and Sex

Thurs Sept 26<sup>th</sup>: Descartes: Introduction to *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Reading: Descartes, *Meditations* 1, 2 and 6.

## WEEK SIX

Tues Oct 1<sup>st</sup>: Subjectivity and Objectivity **(Submit Paper 1)**

Reading: Bordo, selections from *The Flight to Objectivity*, pp. 48-69 in *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes*

Thurs Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>: Rethinking Objectivity: Standpoint Theory

Reading: Sandra Harding, 'Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: "What is Strong Objectivity"?', in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*

## WEEK SEVEN

Tues Oct 8<sup>th</sup>: Whose Standpoint? **(Do worksheet 2 and bring to class)**

Reading: Uma Narayan, 'The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist', in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*

Group 1: Chandra Mohanty, pp. 228-236 in *Feminism Without Borders* (extract)

Group 2: bell hooks, 'Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory', in *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center*

Thurs Oct 10<sup>th</sup>: Mind and Body, Gender and Sex (**Submit worksheet 2**)  
Reading: Elizabeth Grosz, Chapter 1 'Refiguring Bodies' (extract), in *Volatile Bodies*

## WEEK EIGHT

### Columbus Day / No Tuesday Classes (Monday classes on Tuesday)

Thurs Oct 17<sup>th</sup>: Irigaray, Birth and Bodies  
Reading: pp. 180-185 from Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (extract)  
'On the Maternal Order', in Irigaray, *je, tu nous: toward a culture of difference*  
'When Our Lips Speak Together' from Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*

## WEEK NINE

Tues Oct 22<sup>nd</sup>: Irigaray, Sexuate Difference and a Culture of Two  
Reading: 'Sexual Difference', in Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*  
'Human Nature is Two' & 'Sexual Difference as Universal', in Irigaray, *i love to you*

Thurs Oct 24<sup>th</sup>: no class; reading and essay preparation.

## WEEK TEN

Tues Oct 29<sup>th</sup>: Butler: Sex, Gender and Performativity  
Reading: Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Subordination', in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*

Thurs Oct 31<sup>st</sup>: Butler's challenge to Cartesianism  
Reading: Butler, chapter 1 and pp. 171-180 from chapter 3, in *Gender Trouble*

## WEEK ELEVEN

### SECTION THREE: Rousseau - Gendering the Political

Tues Nov 5<sup>th</sup>: Introduction to Rousseau's Political Philosophy  
Reading: Rousseau, *The Social Contract* and *Second Discourse on Inequality* (extracts on Blackboard)

Thurs Nov 7<sup>th</sup>: The Social Contract and the Sexual Contract: Emile and Sophie (**Submit Paper 2**)  
Reading: Rousseau, *Emile*, Book V: Sophie (extracts on Blackboard)  
Jean Bethke Elshtain, pp. 148-170, chapter 4: Rousseau, from *Public Man, Private Woman* (extract)

## WEEK TWELVE

Tues Nov 12<sup>th</sup>: Feminist Responses to Rousseau 1: Getting rid of Sex and Gender  
Reading: Group 1: Susan Moller Okin, chapter 8 (extract), in *Justice, Gender and the Family*  
Group 2: Shulamith Firestone, chapters 1 & 10 (extracts), in *The Dialectic of Sex*

Thurs Nov 14<sup>th</sup>: Feminist Responses to Rousseau 2: Reclaiming Care  
Reading: Carol Gilligan, pp.1-9, 24-39 (extracts) from *In a Different Voice*

## WEEK THIRTEEN

Tues Nov 19<sup>th</sup>: Assessing the 'Ethics of Care' Approach (**Do worksheet 3 and bring to class**)  
Reading: Group 1: Annette Baier, 'The Need for More than Justice', from *Feminist Theory: A Philosophical Anthology*  
Group 2: Joan Tronto, 'Women and Caring: What can feminists learn about morality from caring?', in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

Thurs Nov 21<sup>st</sup>: The Political Potential of an Ethics of Care (**Submit Worksheet 3**)

Reading: Sara Ruddick, 'From Maternal Thinking to Peace Politics' in *Explorations in Feminist Ethics*

#### WEEK FOURTEEN

Tues Nov 26<sup>th</sup>: Rethinking Public and Private

Reading: Iris Marion Young, 'Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory', in *Feminism, the Public and the Private*

#### THANKSGIVING BREAK

#### WEEK FIFTEEN

Tues Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>: Discussion: Are there really (only) 2 sexes?

Reading: revise Butler, Irigaray and Sandford

Listen to Sandford's lecture: <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2013/03/stella-sandford-a-critical-theory-of-sex/>

Thurs Dec 5<sup>th</sup>: Course Review & Final Discussion (**Submit Paper 3**)

**Submission Date: Reflective Paper Monday December 16th**

## Academic Integrity and the Honor Code

This course is conducted in accordance with the GMU Honor Code as set out on the University website:

*Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.*

<http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>

It is your responsibility as students, and mine as instructor, to be aware of the Honor code and to act in accordance with it. ***The key issue here is that you act in ways that respect both your own work and that of others.***

In teaching this course, I am interested in your ideas and your work: no matter how tired, panicked or under pressure you feel, do not give in to the temptation to pass off the work of others as your own. This is a major violation of trust and academic integrity. Passive Plagiarism (e.g. failing to cite properly or give proper references for your sources) is as bad as Active Plagiarism (e.g. downloading an essay off the internet). Part of your task as students and scholars is to learn how to appropriately cite and reference sources. If in doubt, ask for advice – as your instructor, I will be happy to help. You can also consult the section on 'Citation and Documentation' in the Writing Guide for Philosophy:

<http://classweb.gmu.edu/WAC/philosophy/>

or the Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

Where there is evidence of plagiarism (or any other form of cheating), I will refer the case to the University Honor committee, in keeping with the Honor Code (NB: I reserve the right to conduct an oral examination on any piece of work, including where I have doubts about its authorship). As the course instructor, I will always recommend that a piece of work subject to plagiarism should incur an appropriate sanction; this may include failing the relevant assignment or failing the course, along with a requirement to take an academic integrity seminar or Writing Center course; a second Honor Code violation will result in a very serious penalty. For further guidance, see the Honor Code website:

<http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>