

PHIL338 / WMST300-002
Philosophy, Sex and Gender
Syllabus Fall 2018

When? T/R 12noon - 1.15pm

Where? Innovation Hall 207

Instructor: Dr. Rachel Jones

Office: Robinson B465

Open Office Hours: T/R 2pm - 3pm; or email me to make an alternative time to meet.

e-mail: rjones23@gmu.edu

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

Guide for Writing in Philosophy: <http://philosophy.gmu.edu/undergraduate/writing-standards>

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 how philosophical ideas have shaped our concepts of sex and gender. 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 20th century. Rather, philosophy’s key ideas have always been structured by ideas about (what we moderns call) sex, gender, and sexuality: sometimes obviously and explicitly, such as in the gendering of Rousseau’s political philosophy, and sometimes in more implicit but no less significant ways, such as in Descartes’ account of knowledge or his version of substance (mind/body) dualism.

During the course of the semester, we will read several of the most influential thinkers in the western philosophical tradition, focusing on Plato, Descartes, and Rousseau. We will examine the role of sex and gender in their own work and in the philosophical approaches that their work inspired (e.g. Cartesianism), and ask to what extent their ideas still inform our thinking today. At the same time, we will use work by contemporary feminist philosophers and queer theorists such as Judith Butler, Iris Marion Young, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to put these ideas into question and explore other ways of thinking about sex, gender, bodies, selves, knowledge, the public sphere, and the body politic.

Throughout the course, we will pay close attention to the intersections of gender and race by drawing on the work of black, decolonial and Latina feminist thinkers, such as bell hooks, Uma Narayan, Maria Lugones. and Sylvia Wynter. Together these thinkers will help us to interrogate concepts of knowledge and scientific objectivity inherited from Descartes; the relation between gendered, racial and colonial power structures; the role of a sexual and racial contract in the formation of the modern public sphere; and the very image of ‘the human’ that has informed modern western thought and culture.

Modern ideas about sex and gender are often described as conforming to a “gender binary”. But not all cultures think about bodies, identities and desires on a binary or oppositional model. We will start the course by challenging (our own) modern assumptions about sex and gender by looking out to non-western traditions, and back to the philosopher who is usually seen as the father of Western philosophy. In Plato’s dialogue about erotic love, *Symposium*, we find a myth of three types of human beings (male, female and androgyne), images of male bodies as pregnant and giving birth, and that the highest forms of human relations are (what we would now call) homosexual (not heterosexual). But even more importantly, we will find that our own modern categories - sex, gender, hetero-/homo-sexual - are not really in play in Plato’s thinking at all...

Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, students who participate fully and complete all of the set readings and assignments will:

1. have an understanding of the role of concepts of sex, gender, sexuality and sexual difference in the formation, articulation and implications of key philosophical theories in the western tradition, with particular reference to Plato, Descartes and Rousseau;
2. have an understanding of some of the ways in which feminist thinkers, queer theorists, and black and Latina feminist philosophers have questioned and critiqued the role of sex, gender, sexuality and sexual difference in the western philosophical tradition;
3. have an understanding of how concepts of sex and gender intersect with concepts of race in the Western philosophical tradition, via the work of black and Latina feminists and selected philosophers of race;
4. be familiar with a wide range of approaches drawn from contemporary feminist philosophy;
5. be familiar with a range of original concepts produced by feminist philosophers, queer theorists, black and Latina feminist philosophers, and philosophers of race, and have an understanding of how these concepts help us to re-think sex, gender, race, and the relations between them;
6. have a better understanding of the ways in which ideas about sex, gender, sexuality and sexual difference are built into ways of thinking about political, metaphysical and epistemological questions in the western philosophical tradition, and hence a better understanding of why western ideas about sex, gender, sexuality and sexual difference can be difficult to change without changing the surrounding fabric of our thought;
7. have an improved ability to engage with complex texts and issues, and to explain complex theories in their own words and with clarity and precision;
8. have an improved capacity to develop an analysis of their own, in extended philosophically informed prose, and to use textual evidence to come to well supported conclusions.

Book Requirements

As we will be looking at a wide range of texts on this course, all set readings will be provided via Blackboard.

At the first class, I will supply you with photocopies of the readings for classes 1-3. **You will be responsible for printing off each of the key readings from class 4 (Sept 6th, week 2) onwards, so that you have a paper copy to work with in class.**

Please note: this is a course requirement. We will be doing close work with the texts both in class and for assignments. In addition, ***all laptops, phones and other electronic devices must be turned off during class time***, so you must have a paper copy of the relevant reading with you for each class meeting.

Printing your portfolio of readings will count for 20% of your participation grade (you can't participate without the readings!). See 'Assignments and Grading', below.

Printing costs should not exceed c.\$24 (in total), based on the JC print costs of 10c per page.

Recommended general background reading: if you have not done any feminist philosophy before, here are a few texts which are excellent background reading. Any of these would be good to read alongside the course - I would be happy to recommend particular chapters if that would be helpful:

Alison Stone, *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007. An excellent introduction to feminist philosophy and its key terms and debates.

Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*, London: Routledge, 1993 [available as an electronic resource via GMU library] A classic and one every philosopher should read, as well as anyone interested in the gendering of western thought and culture.

Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Equality and Difference*, Cambridge: Polity, 1991. An older but excellent introduction.

Course Reading Expectations

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 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.

Questions and Problems

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

- ask in class (often others will have the same question/concern, so this will help everyone)
- email me with a question or query: rjones23@gmu.edu
- come and see me in my open office hours (see p.1 for details) or email me for an appointment

I will respond to emails as soon as I reasonably can, though as a general rule I will not answer emails in the late evening or between Saturday morning and Sunday evening. This means you need to plan ahead – *please don't leave questions about assignments or reading until the last minute!*

Assignments and Grading

Basic breakdown

1. Attendance & Participation	10%
2. Response Paper	10%
3. Worksheets (three)	25% (1 x 5%, 2 x 10%)
4. Essay	30%
5. Final Exam	25%

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. ***After the first week, you will lose one grade on your participation grade for each unexplained absence (you cannot participate if you are not there),*** unless you let me know of some good reason why you were not able to attend (by email is fine; in advance wherever possible).

Please note: this is not a distance learning course, and so to pass the course you must attend at least 15 of our class sessions.

Your participation grade (10% of final overall grade) will be based on two elements:

- a) Portfolio of readings (20%):** as noted above, from class 4 onwards you are responsible for printing off the set readings for each class (all readings will be available on BB). A checklist of the required readings will be provided in class 1. As having a paper copy of the text to work with in class is essential, 20% of your participation grade will be allocated to producing your own portfolio of course readings. I will supply the readings for the first 3 classes - once you have printed off the remaining readings for the course, you should ask another member of the class to check your portfolio is complete, sign off the check list for you, and hand it to me. **This must be completed by the end of class on Thursday September 13th (week 3).**
- b) Class participation (80%):**
 - This is an essential feature of the course. I will regularly invite participation, both from individuals and through small group discussion. Please come prepared to discuss the set text and be ready to take part in classroom activities. This means both reading and thinking about the texts in advance of

the class meeting (see section on Reading Expectations above), and having something useful to contribute to discussion: remember that a good question is one of the most valuable contributions you can make.

- Participation may also include reading quizzes, the BB discussion board, informal worksheets, or other informal writings. These activities will be announced in class as we go - if you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and whether you can undertake a make-up activity. There are no make-up activities for in-class reading quizzes.

2. Response Paper (10%): You will write a short response paper (c. 2-3 pages) on 'Aristophanes' Myth' from Plato's *Symposium*. Instructions will be distributed in class 3. For submission date, see schedule below.

3. Worksheets: You will complete 3 worksheets, one on Plato (5%), one on Butler and Young (10%), and one on the Sexual/Racial Contract and responses to it by Okin and Ruddick (10%). Worksheets should be completed before the relevant classes and you should bring your answers to class as a basis for discussion. You should then revise your answers after class, before submitting the final version on BB. The worksheets will also help you to prepare for the essay and the final exam. See schedule below for submission dates.

4. Essay: You will write one course essays of c.8 pages (double spaced) on a theme or question related to Part Two of the course. 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 deadline.

5. Final Exam: There will be a final exam which will include an essay question on part three of the course (Social Contract theory, Rousseau, and responses) as well as shorter questions on the course as a whole. Further advice and a sample paper for revision purposes will be distributed in advance. The exam is worth 25% of the final grade and will be held at the allocated exam time for this class: **Thursday 13th December, 10.30am - 1.15pm (please note the time!!)**

Submission of Written Work

All graded written work should be uploaded on Blackboard by the designated deadline (a link will be provided for each assignment). For [the response paper](#) and [the essay](#), you should also bring a **paper copy** to the next scheduled class (or submit to my mail box in the Philosophy Department Office, Robinson B465, during normal office hours, 9am - 4pm weekdays).

In general, deadlines are non-negotiable. Extensions can be given where there is a good reason for submitting the work late. **Wherever possible, extensions should be arranged with me in advance (by email is fine).** Extensions cannot be given beyond the last day of the exam period.

I will take the **date of submission** from when the assignment is uploaded on BB, NOT from when a paper copy is submitted. If there is a problem with BB that means you cannot upload the paper on time, please email me it instead and let me know about the problem.

Lateness penalties: unless you arrange an extension with me, or there is a general BB problem that affects all students, **graded work will normally lose one letter grade for each day it is late.** This includes weekends (Saturday and Sunday count as two days). This is to ensure fairness in the grading of the course (i.e. everyone has the same amount of time for the same assignment).

Lateness penalties can be waived if you have a good reason for submitting the work late and let me know about it, in advance whenever possible. 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 showing that you had clashing work/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.

Commitment to Diversity

The Philosophy Department 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.

Each course offers an opportunity for us to develop this commitment together, not just as an attitude but a mode of critical practice that can involve, amongst other things:

- being willing to listen to other perspectives and to hear criticism of one's own views;
- expressing criticisms and differences of opinion in ways that are not personal or hurtful and that leave space for other voices (and the possibility that one is wrong);
- not rushing to judgment: being willing to evaluate different positions while being unsure where one stands;
- having good reasons for one's views, but being willing to be unsettled and change one's mind;
- 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 at any particular time, there will always be things one cannot see or understand (we all have blindspots).

An important aspect of the commitment to diversity is that it does not mean not being critical. Respecting others' views means taking them seriously, i.e., treating them as worthy of critical interrogation and evaluation themselves, *and* as having critical and transformative potential in relation to your own existing views and commitments.

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/>

You are expected to be familiar with and to abide by this code; any violation will be reported to the Honor Committee for adjudication.

As members of the academic community, you are expected to be attentive to issues of academic integrity, particularly as they relate to the acknowledgement of sources and appropriate citation practices. The key issue is that you act in ways that respect both your own work and that of others.

Passive plagiarism (e.g. failing to cite properly or give proper references for sources) is as bad as active plagiarism (e.g. downloading an essay off the internet). Always appropriately cite and reference your sources. **For acceptable citation models, see Purdue University Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL), “Research and Citation”:** <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>

If you have questions about referencing practices, please do not hesitate to ask me, consult the Purdue OWL site, and/or consult the resources housed on the Writing Center webpage: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

Student Support & Further Resources

Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu/>

Office of Disability Services: If you are a student with a disability and you require academic accommodations, please see me within the first 2 weeks of the semester and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to ensure you receive the appropriate support: 703-993-2472. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS: <http://ods.gmu.edu/>

University Libraries: <http://library.gmu.edu/>

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

For further resources and support for students, please see the following site: <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus/>

Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence

George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination, and we are committed to a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. [University Policy 1202 Sexual Harassment and Misconduct](http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/sexual-harassment-policy/) (<http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/sexual-harassment-policy/>) speaks to the specifics of our process, our resources, and the options available to you.

Confidential student resources are available on campus at the Student Support and Advocacy Center (<http://ssac.gmu.edu/>), Counseling and Psychological Services (<http://caps.gmu.edu/>), and Student Health Services (<http://shs.gmu.edu/>).

All other members of the University community (including faculty, except those noted above) are **not** considered confidential resources and are **required** to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator. For a full list of resources, support opportunities, and reporting options, contact Dr. Jennifer Hammat, Title IX Coordinator, at <http://diversity.gmu.edu/title-ix>, at 703-993-8730, or in the Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics office in the Aquia Building, Suite 373.

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: you are also responsible for printing off all readings on BB as paper copies to work with in class and for assignment purposes (from class 4 on).

WEEK ONE

Reading: Alison Stone, *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy* (extracts) p/c and BB

Watch: Youtube video: "what it's like to be intersex"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAUDKEI4QKI>

Tues August 28: introduction to the course

Thurs August 30: introduction to key terms; introduction to Plato

PART ONE: Non-binary Approaches

WEEK TWO

Reading: Plato, Aristophanes' Myth from *Symposium*

Sandford, extract from chapter 2, *Plato and Sex*, pp.41-50

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

Tues Sept 4: Introduction to Symposium and Aristophanes' Myth

Thurs Sept 6: Aristophanes' Myth; how many sexes?

WEEK THREE

Reading: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer and Now,' pp. 3-9

Zevallos, "Rethinking Gender and Sexuality: Case Study of the Native American 'Two Spirit' People"

Plato, Diotima's Myth from *Symposium*

Online version of Zevallos (with links): <https://othersociologist.com/2013/09/09/two-spirit-people/>

Tues Sept 11: Queering Aristophanes; Two Spirit People

Wed Sept 12th: submit response paper on BB by 11.59pm, bring a paper copy to class next day

Thurs Sept 13: Diotima's Speech 1: pregnant men

WEEK FOUR

Reading: Sandford, *Plato and Sex*, chapter 4: pp.98-122.
Descartes, Meditations 1 and 2

Tues Sept 18: Diotima's Speech 2: the emergence of a gender binary?

PART TWO: Descartes - Minds and Bodies, Nature and Knowledge

Thurs Sept 20: Lecture: Introduction to Descartes

Submit Plato worksheet on BB by 11.59pm on Thursday 20th Sept.

WEEK FIVE

Reading: Descartes, Meditation 6 (extracts); letters, Descartes and Elizabeth (distributed in class)
Butler, *Gender Trouble* (extracts)

Tues Sept 25: Descartes and substance dualism: mind vs body

Thurs Sept 27: Judith Butler: challenging substance metaphysics

WEEK SIX

Reading: Iris Marion Young, 'Lived Body vs Gender', pp.12-26, chapter 1 in *On Female Body Experience*

Tues Oct 2: Mind and Body, Gender and Sex: from essence to performativity

Thurs Oct 4: The Lived Body

WEEK SEVEN

Reading: Iris Marion Young, 'Throwing Like a Girl', chapter 2 in *On Female Body Experience*
Gayle Salamon, 'Comportment', from *The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology*

Tues October 9: no class (Fall break - Monday classes meet Tuesday this week)

Thurs Oct 11: beyond dualism: theorizing the lived body with Young and Salamon

Thursday October 11th: submit Butler/Young worksheet on BB by 11.59pm.

WEEK EIGHT

Reading: Maria Lugones, "The Coloniality of Gender"

Tues Oct 16: the need for gender as an analytical category: the modern/colonial gender system

Thurs Oct 18 - no class

WEEK NINE

Reading: Susan Bordo, selections from *The Flight to Objectivity*
Sandra Harding, 'Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: "What is Strong Objectivity"?'

Tues Oct 23: The Gendering of Nature and Knowledge

Thurs Oct 25: Feminist Standpoint Theory - rethinking objectivity

WEEK TEN

Reading: bell hooks, extract from 'Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory' (distributed in class)
Uma Narayan, 'The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist' (extract)
Charles Mills, "White Ignorance"
Linda Alcoff, "Three Types of Ignorance" (extract)

Tues Oct 30th: Whose Standpoint?

Thurs Nov 1: From standpoint theory to epistemologies of ignorance

PART THREE: Social Contract, Sexual Contract, Racial Contract

WEEK ELEVEN

Reading: Rousseau, *The Social Contract* and *Second Discourse on Inequality* (extracts)
Rousseau, *Emile*, Book V: Sophie (extracts)

Submit Course Essay on BB by 11.59pm on Monday Nov. 5th; bring paper copy to class next day

Tues Nov. 6: Lecture: The Social Contract tradition (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau)

Thurs Nov 8: Rousseau, Public and Private

WEEK TWELVE

Reading: Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (extracts)
Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (extracts)

Tues Nov 13: Pateman on the Sexual Contract

Thurs Nov 15: Mills on the Racial Contract

WEEK THIRTEEN

Reading: Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (extract provided as p/c)
Sylvia Wynter, extracts from 'The Re-enchantment of Humanism' and "Unsettling the Coloniality of being/
power/truth/freedom"

Tues Nov. 20: Man and Man 2

THANKSGIVING BREAK (Wed 21 - Sun 25 November)

WEEK FOURTEEN

Reading: Susan Moller Okin, chapter 8 (extract), in *Justice, Gender and the Family*
Sara Ruddick, 'From Maternal Thinking to Peace Politics' in *Explorations in Feminist Ethics*

Tues Nov 28th: Feminist Alternatives to Rousseau 1: Abolishing Gender?

Thurs Nov 30th: Feminist Alternatives to Rousseau 2: Re-valuing Gender

Thursday November 30th: submit Sexual/Racial contract worksheet on BB by 11.59pm

WEEK FIFTEEN

Reading: Iris Marion Young, 'Impartiality and the Civic Public', in *Feminism, the Public and the Private*

Tues Dec 5th: Whose body is the body politic?

Thurs Dec 7th: Course Review & Exam Preparation

FINAL EXAM: Thursday 13th December, 10.30am - 1.15pm (usual class room but PLEASE NOTE DIFFERENT TIME)