

Feminist Philosophy of Science

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Course Description

What is it to be a woman or a man? Is there masculine bias in science? Where do babies come from? To answer these and related questions, this course will touch on epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of science from the perspective of feminist philosophy. Readings will draw on authors like bell hooks, Sally Haslanger, Sarah Hrdy, and Kristie Dotson, as well as their critics. After an introduction to our methodology, we will begin with the metaphysics and science of the sex/gender distinction. Then, the bulk of the course will cover topics in feminist epistemology, like: Is reason gendered? Is all bias bad? Does social position afford any special knowledge? What can Quinean naturalism do for feminists? Along the way, we will encounter various case studies. Finally, we will close with an investigation into *epistemic injustice*, the injustice of being wronged as a knower, and apply the concept to medicine.

Learning Outcomes

1. Produce philosophical writing that meets the field of philosophy's expectations regarding structure, argumentation, and evidence.
2. Gain a strong understanding of the considerations in favor of different accounts of the sex/gender distinction.
3. Gain a strong understanding of the role of bias and human values in science.
4. Identify areas to apply feminist criticism in your own discipline(s).

Evaluation

Assignment	Description	Value
Email	A short assignment written like an email	10%
Participation	Weekly discussion questions, in-class work	20%
Paper 1	4–5 pages	30%.
Paper 2	6–7 pages	40%.

Grading Policies

1. Extensions can be granted on papers, but you need to talk to me a few days in advance. If you do not make arrangements beforehand, late papers will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade per day.
2. To pass this class, you must complete all five major writing assignments.
3. Missing class without an excuse (e.g., a doctor's note) will lower your participation grade.

Notes on Academic Integrity

1. Each student in this course is required to adhere to Cornell's Academic Integrity Code: <http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Code, and what constitutes a violation of it. All work submitted must be the student's own, and all sources must be properly cited.
2. Each of the five major assignments will be submitted to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Further, all papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com service is subject to the usage policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.
3. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials, online or otherwise. This includes handouts, paper topics, homework questions, etc. Such behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

Gender-Inclusive Language Guidelines

The Cornell Office of Diversity and Inclusion and LGBTQ Resource Center each provide helpful guidelines for how to be more inclusive in our speech and writing:

<https://dos.cornell.edu/lgbt-resource-center/trans-inclusion-cornell>

<https://diversity.cornell.edu/networks-and-orgs/lgbt-staff-faculty/gender-inclusive-pronouns>

Following these guidelines is essential to fostering an inclusive environment at Cornell. Our language is gender-inclusive when we use words that recognize and affirm how people describe, express, and experience their gender. Gender-inclusive language avoids assuming a male speaker ('freshman', 'upperclassman', 'mankind', etc.), erasing non-binary gender identifications, and conflating biological sex with gender expression.

Students with a Disability

Students with Disabilities: Your access in this course is important. Please give me your Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation letter early in the semester so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations. If you need an immediate accommodation for equal access, please speak with me after class or send an email message to me and/or SDS at sds_cu@cornell.edu. If the need arises for additional accommodations during the semester, please contact SDS.

SDS is located on level 5 of Cornell Health, 110 Ho Plaza, 607-254-4545, sds.cornell.edu.

Course Materials

All readings will be available through the Blackboard site.

Tentative Schedule of Readings

1 Background

Week 1: The Second Sex

Introduction to Course
Simone de Beauvoir, Excerpt from *The Second Sex*
Iris Young, "Five Faces of Oppression"

Week 2: Theorizing About Gender and Race

This week's readings pose several problems: how do we theorize about gender and race, if we are talking about other people's experiences? How can theorizing about gender and race address sexist and racist oppression? We will return to the lessons of these readings frequently throughout the course.

Readings:
Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others"
Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"
Trina Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House"

2 Metaphysics of Gender

Week 3: What is gender? Gender essentialism

This week's readings discuss what it means to say that gender is "natural" or "essential" to someone.

Readings:
Charlotte Witt, "What is Gender Essentialism?"
Louise Antony, "Natures and Norms"

Week 4: What is gender? Sex, Gender, and Science

It is common nowadays to distinguish sex from gender. But what is the difference? And how do they relate? Finally, what does it mean to say that gender is "socially constructed"?

Readings:
Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* Chapters 1 and 2
Sarah Richardson, "When Gender Criticism Becomes Standard Scientific Practice: The Case of Sex Determination Genetics"
Sally Haslanger, "Gender and race: (What) are they? (What) do we want them to be?"

Week 5: What is gender? Sex and gender, Cont.

These readings challenge Haslanger's account of gender from several different perspectives. They ask questions like: Can Haslanger's account accommodate trans women? Is her account the most practical route to ending gender-based oppression?

Readings:

Katharine Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of Woman"

Talia Mae Bettcher, critical précis of Jenkins for *PEA Soup*.

Mari Mikkola, "Ontological Commitments, Sex and Gender"

Optional:

Talia Mae Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of "Woman""

3 Feminist Epistemology

Week 6: Is Reason Gendered?

Is reason itself gendered? Genevieve Lloyd and Phyllis Rooney argue that it is. Martha Nussbaum offers a dissenting view, and Linda Alcoff Responds.

Readings:

Genevieve Lloyd, "The Man of Reason"

Phyllis Rooney, "Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conception of Reason"

Martha Nussbaum, "Feminists and Philosophy"

Linda Alcoff, "Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?" Excerpt

Week 7: Holism, Objectivity, and Values

This week we will tackle two related ideas: holism and objectivity. Duhem's chapter argues that theories have to be evaluated as packages (holism). This evaluation relies on our "good sense." So, is science not objective? Nagel provides one model for how to think it might be. Okruhlik contextualizes the issue within biology, and warns us of the risks of bias. Emily Martin's paper presents a useful case study.

Readings:

Pierre Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, Ch. 6, "Physical Theory and Experiment"

Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Excerpt from Ch. 1 and 2

Kathleen Okruhlik, "Gender and the Biological Sciences", Section 3

Emily Martin, "The Egg and the Sperm"

Week 8: Epistemic Communities

Traditionally, epistemology has centered on the concept of the individual knower. But is this assumption correct? The following readings argue that a feminist approach to epistemology should be community, not individual, oriented. As we will see, this idea is connected to Nagel's approach to objectivity.

Readings:

Lynn Hankinson Nelson, "Epistemological Communities"

Helen Longino, "Subjects, Power and Knowledge"

Deborah Tollefsen, "Challenging Epistemic Individualism"

Week 9: Standpoint Theory

Are our perspectives shaped by our social positions? In the first reading, bell hooks gives us reason to believe that they are. This position is further explored and defended by Donna

Haraway and Sandra Harding.

Readings:

bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Chapter 1

Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges"

Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Theory"

Sarah Hrdy, "Empathy, Polyandry, and the Myth of the Coy Female"

Week 10: Communities, Bias, and Objectivity

The readings this week raise a challenge for the community-oriented view: is all diversity of epistemic value? Louise Antony and Elizabeth Anderson both argue that bias is an important, and inevitable, part of human reasoning.

Readings:

Louise Antony, "Bias: Friend or Foe?"

Elizabeth Anderson, "Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology"

Week 11: Feminist Naturalism

Naturalized epistemology studies how we actually form knowledge, rather than what we should believe. Feminist naturalists offer this account as a diagnosis of how science has gone wrong—and what can be done to correct it.

Readings:

W. v. O. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized"

Elizabeth Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense"

Louise Antony, "Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology"

4 Epistemic Injustice

Week 12: Testimonial Injustice

In this unit we will explore Miranda Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice, focusing on testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when one receives less credibility because of prejudice. Elizabeth Anderson adds that this loss of credibility may not always have an obvious perpetrator. Finally, we will connect Fricker's ideas to the case studies from week 6.

Readings:

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapters 1 and 2

Elizabeth Anderson, "Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions"

Week 13: Testimonial Injustice and Medicine

This week we will explore the application of testimonial injustice to medicine.

Readings:

Diane Hoffman and Anita Tarzian, "The Girl Who Cried Pain"

Mari Mikkola, "Sex in Medicine: What Stands in the Way of Credibility?"

Week 14: Hermeneutical Injustice and the (Social) Sciences

Hermeneutical Injustice occurs when unequal participation in the epistemic practices results in some people lacking important concepts for understanding their own experience. This week we will read about this concept, and then apply it to the (social) sciences. We will think through our past case studies (e.g., Martin and Hrdy), and read a new study on development policy.

Readings:

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapter 7

James McCollum, "Hermeneutical Injustice and the Social Sciences: Development Policy and Positional Objectivity"

Week 15: Further Explorations

Final week! We will read Kristie Dotson's response to Fricker, and then wrap up the course by looking back on what we have covered.

Readings:

Kristie Dotson, "A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression"

Wrap up