

# FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 3920-71696  
Oklahoma State University  
Fall 2021

**PROFESSOR:** Dr. Heather Stewart (she/they)

**OFFICE LOCATION:** This term, office hours will be held via Zoom. Email for Zoom info.

**OFFICE HOURS:** T, Th 2:30-4:00 or by appointment arranged over email

**EMAIL:** heather.stewart@okstate.edu

**CLASS MEETING TIMES:** T/Th, 12:00-1:15

**CLASS MEETING LOCATION:** NRC 107

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

As philosopher Carol Hay notes in the first chapter of her book *Think Like a Feminist*, feminism has a PR problem. Many people accept basic tenets of feminist thought, or take up feminist ends in activism, politics, and so on, but reject the label “feminist” for themselves. Hay contends that this is because there are lots of misconceptions, misbeliefs, and problematic stereotypes and tropes about feminism – and feminists. This course tries to get clear on what feminism really is and what insights feminist thinking can bring to the study and practice of philosophy.

To that end, this course introduces students to various concepts, insights, and methodological tools within feminist philosophy. Questions to be addressed are the following: How should we understand feminism? What makes a philosophical approach feminist? What is intersectionality and what does an intersectional lens offer to feminist thinking? How should we understand concepts such as power, privilege, and oppression, and how do we identify them in our social systems and structures? How should we think about sex and gender? What is sexism and misogyny and how do they operate in our society? How can other lenses, e.g., critical race theory, disability studies, queer theory, and fat studies better inform feminist thinking? What insights can feminist thinking bring to bear on questions of health care, sport, and sexuality? What does ethical response to injustice require?

By addressing these questions, students will gain a better sense of the ways in which various social and political forces inform our daily lives. Students will develop their skills in critical thinking and analysis, written and oral communication, and argumentative reasoning about issues of broad social relevance. Moreover, students will learn how to apply various theories, concepts, and theoretical lenses to important contemporary issues.

## COURSE GOALS:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have developed skills in the following:

- Close reading of philosophical texts
- Analyzing complex arguments
- Thinking critically about the forces that shape our social lives
- Understanding main concepts, ideas, and arguments that frame feminist philosophical thinking
- Formulating logical arguments and articulating them clearly, both verbally and in writing
- Engaging charitably with others about difficult and deeply personal issues

## **A NOTE ON COURSE MATERIALS:**

You do not need to purchase a textbook for this course. All required and optional materials will be made available to you on our course site and/or you can access them online, via the University library or via open access web resources.

\*Note: In the course schedule below, you will see both required and optional or recommended materials (e.g., books, videos, podcasts beyond those which are formally required). The materials indicated as “optional” are available to you to aid in your further exploration of our course topics and/or to enhance your understanding of course concepts, methods, and issues. You are welcome to draw on these optional materials as secondary sources as you complete your course assignments.

## **EVALUATION:**

The work for this course comes in four different assignment types:

**Short Response Papers (2 x 10%):** Twice during the semester you will write a short response to one of our readings. These responses will be 600 words maximum.

**Mid-Term Take Home Exam (30%):** At the midpoint of the term, you will have an essay-based, take home examination covering the material from the first half of the course.

**Op-Ed Assignment (15%):** You will be writing an Op-Ed style essay for this course. The goal of the Op-Ed assignment is to take a position on one of the issues that we are covering and write about it in a creative and interesting way, geared toward a non-academic audience. The Op-Ed will be 1000 words maximum.

**Final Paper (35%):** This course requires a final paper ranging 6-8 pages in length.

Note: You will receive detailed explanations of each assignment and specific requirements via our course site.

Note: There is no final exam for the course. Your final paper is due during finals week.

## **NOTES ON LATE WORK:**

Please try your absolute best to submit all of your assignments on time. Late work will only be accepted if you have prior approval from me or in the event of a documented emergency. All other work will be penalized at a rate of 5% per day. If you know that you won't be able to complete an assignment on time, I strongly encourage you to communicate that with me in advance so we can agree upon an extension.

## **GRADE BREAKDOWN:**

A: 90-100 (4.0)

B: 80-89 (3.0)

C: 70-79 (2.0)

D: 60-69 (1.0)

F: 59 or below (0.0)

Note: Extra credit will not be offered. All students are expected to meet the same evaluative standards required for each grade assignment.

### **EXPECTATIONS:**

- You are expected to come to all classes prepared and ready to participate in discussion. Adequate preparation requires reading all required course materials at least once, but more ideally, twice. It also helps to mark up the text and make note of any questions you have about it while you are reading. Finally, you are to bring a copy of the text to class with you to refer back to you as we discuss together.
- Email etiquette: Please keep all email correspondence professional! Include a greeting (e.g., “Hi Heather” or “Dear Professor”) and make clear that you are a student in this course in the subject line (e.g., in the subject line include the course number). Write your emails in complete sentences – this isn’t Twitter! ☺
- I aim to treat each student with upmost respect. This includes respect for all dimensions of identity (e.g., ethnicity, religious identity, gender identity, and so on), as well as personal belief systems (e.g., religious, political). Should I fall short in any way, I ask that you bring it to my attention and to hold me accountable (also in a respectful manner). I am learning and growing, too. That said, I expect the same degree of respect and humility from each student in the course.
- It is not expected – or required – that you will agree with every argument you encounter in this course. However, it is both expected and required that you take the ideas and arguments presented in this course seriously and approach them openly and respectfully. Disrespectful, demeaning, or insulting language – whether toward your classmates or course materials – will not be tolerated.
- Relatedly, some of the content of this course might challenge your previously held views or ask you to consider things outside of your own lived experience. At times, stepping outside of one’s comfort zone can make one feel defensive, resistant, angry, or even fearful. I ask that you acknowledge these feelings when they arise and understand that they are part of the process of growing and learning. Changing your mind on something can be uncomfortable but can be the epistemically and socially responsible thing to do in light of new evidence. If anything in the course ever inspires discomfort or dysphoria that goes beyond this, please do seek out resources with psychological services, or bring this to my attention so I can assist in pointing you toward the appropriate services.
- On that last point, if upon viewing the course reading list you anticipate that anything will be particularly difficult or triggering to you, please bring this to my attention privately. We can work through that together and make accommodations where feasible and necessary.

### **HOW TO SUCCEED IN THE COURSE:**

- It is my top priority and my sincerest hope that each student is able to succeed in this course. Should any circumstances arise that might hinder your success in this course, I ask you to please bring them to me in a prompt manner. Doing so allows us to think together about strategies we might enact to help ensure your success.

- As noted above, it is imperative that you stay engaged with the course material as we progress through the course. Though each student likely has a sense of how they learn best, some general recommendations include the following: read each reading twice, take notes and mark up the text while you read, and ask yourself reflective questions while reading (e.g., “what is the main thesis here?” and “how is the author defending it?”). If reading philosophy is new to you, and you find yourself struggling, please reach out to me! We can strategize ways for you to get the most out of the readings.
- Use me as a resource. Come to office hours. Ask questions. The goal is for you to learn as much as possible *and* to enjoy this course as much as possible!

### **COVID-19:**

We are still in the midst of an ongoing global pandemic and public health crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, and still poses a serious threat to all, and especially to the unvaccinated (including children under 12) and the immunocompromised. As such, we have a collective responsibility to try to reduce viral transmission, and consequently, the risk of harms to others. To this end, **it is an expectation** that you will wear a mask in the classroom and that you will do your best to maintain a safe social distance from your classmates (i.e., try your best to stay 6 feet apart). In the classroom, I request that anyone who is approaching me (e.g., to chat before or after class) to do so only when masked, and to ensure that I am masked before you approach. Establishing this boundary is for my safety and yours. Let me clarify here – though I cannot **require** masking in the classroom, **I do strongly encourage mask compliance in the classroom.**

As per the University’s statement on masking: “OSU encourages the use of masks indoors in public, especially in situations in which social distancing is not possible and for activities with close contact with others. Masking is recommended by the CDC even if you are fully vaccinated.” (<https://go.okstate.edu/coronavirus/latest-announcements/new-cdc-mask-guidance.html>).

When it comes to my office hours, I am requiring masks for in-person meetings that take place in my office. That said, if anyone is unwilling or unable to attend my office masked, I will offer alternative arrangements for meeting (e.g., we can meet virtually over Zoom).

In recognizing that the pandemic still poses serious health risks, I recognize that there might be times when students are unable to attend class in person (e.g., if one is exposed and needs to quarantine). When this is the case, please communicate with me about alternative arrangements for staying up with course material. It is my promise to you to be maximally flexible and understanding, and to help ensure your success at this time. All COVID-19 exposures need to be reported to the university to facilitate contact tracing. Please use the University contact tracing form available at the following link: <https://uhs.okstate.edu/covid-reporting.html>.

### **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

In our class, we collectively acknowledge the original inhabitants of the land of present-day Stillwater, upon which Oklahoma State University presently sits. The original and rightful peoples of these lands speak languages from the Caddoan, Kiowa-Tanoan, and Siouan language families. We respectfully acknowledge these peoples and their histories, and create space for reflection on the harmful past and ongoing treatment which results from colonial and genocidal projects. We engage in this reflection so

we can be thoughtful about how to heal and repair damaged relationships and promote Indigenous sovereignty and justice for Indigenous peoples moving forward.

## **UNIVERSITY RESOURCES:**

**Basic Needs Support:** It is difficult – if not impossible – to succeed in your classes when your basic human needs are not being adequately met. If you are experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, or any other personal or financial hardship that might impeded your success in the course (or, more importantly, your health, safety, or wellbeing), please see the University’s Basic Needs Supports at the following link: <https://lcl.okstate.edu/basicneeds/index.html>. You can also reach out to me and I will help put you in touch with available resources.

**Academic Supports:** As an OK State student, there are many resources available to you to help you thrive as a student and get as much as possible out of your courses. Available resources can help you improve upon your study habits, master course content, improve your writing skills, and more. I recommend taking advantage of these resources – and not only if/when you find yourself struggling or falling behind. They can be great resources for staying ahead and developing as a student. See available resources at the following link: [https://ssc.okstate.edu/academic\\_support.html](https://ssc.okstate.edu/academic_support.html).

## **OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES:**

There are innumerable resources online, but they vary greatly in terms of their quality. If you are looking for supplementary resources on any of our topics, or want to explore topics in philosophy more generally, there are some reliable sites you should look to first:

- **SEP (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy):** <http://plato.stanford.edu/>
- **IEP (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy):** <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>
- **The UnMute Podcast**

If there is a particular topic in feminist philosophy (or philosophy more generally!) that you are interested in learning more about, and you would like recommended resources, please feel free to ask! I would be happy to point you in the direction of good source materials for any topic you might be interested in pursuing.

## **OTHER IMPORTANT NOTES AND INFORMATION:**

### **Accessibility and Accommodation:**

If you require accommodations in order to succeed in the course, I request that you register those with Accessibility Services as soon as possible. The relevant information can be found here: <https://accessibility.okstate.edu/>.

### **Title IX:**

Oklahoma State University, as a public educational institution, must abide by Title IX regulations because it receives federal funding through federal financial aid programs used by students. Specifically, Title IX states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or

activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” If you have any questions about what that all means, please see the following site for detailed information: <https://hr.okstate.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix.html>.

### **Diversity:**

The following is OK State’s Diversity Statement: “Oklahoma State University is a land-grant institution committed to excellence in diversity and inclusion. We strive to maintain a welcoming and inclusive environment that appreciates and values all members of the University community. We define diversity as engagement in meaningful actions, behaviors, and conversations that reflect a commitment to recognizing, understanding, and respecting the differences among students, faculty, staff, and visitors throughout the OSU system. We do not condone acts, behavior, language or symbols that represent or reflect intolerance or discrimination. OSU is dedicated to cultivating and enriching the competitive advantages that diversity and inclusion provides all members of the University community. We identify diversity as a quality of life issue, as well as an important economic driver for the prosperity and well-being of the state, nation, and world.

The Division of Institutional Diversity focuses on the development of a more inclusive community of learners and leaders while striving to address the complexities that emerge. We value all voices in our community. We strive to serve every member of the OSU family. Our goal is to maintain campus communities throughout the University system that are socially, culturally, and globally competent.”

If you have any questions about issues pertaining to diversity and the University’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus, please see the following site: <http://catalog.okstate.edu/about/institutional-diversity/>. Let me reiterate that we will observe maximal respect for diversity in this classroom.

### **Academic Integrity:**

OSU is committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct. This level of ethical behavior and integrity will be maintained in this course. Participating in a behavior that violates academic integrity (e.g., unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, multiple submissions, cheating on examinations, fabricating information, helping another person cheat, unauthorized advance access to examinations, altering or destroying the work of others, and altering academic records) will result in an official academic sanction. Violations may subject you to disciplinary action including the following: receiving a failing grade on an assignment, examination or course, receiving a notation of a violation of academic integrity on your transcript, and being suspended from the University. You have the right to appeal the charge.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

\*Note: I reserve the right to make edits to this schedule as necessary. Though I will make every effort to follow the schedule as it appears below, I recognize that things come up and we may need to switch gears or move things around in response. I appreciate your flexibility should changes become necessary. Should this be the case, you will be notified via announcement on the course site.

\*Some materials are listed as optional. Any materials indicated as such **are not formal requirements for the course**. Rather, they are made available to you to further your exploration of course topics, or to deepen your understanding of the issues at hand. You can, of course, bring the optional materials into your written assignments!

\* A final note. There are **many** more topics that I would include in this course if we had infinite time. Alas, we are limited by time, and thus I am limited in what I can include here. If you have any interest in issues that relate to those being covered here, let's chat about them.

## I. INTRODUCTION: SYLLABUS + LOGISTICS, PHILOSOPHICAL BASICS

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- Aug 17 Introduction to the course + syllabus overview.
- Philosophical basics: What is philosophy? Why study it?
- \*Optional (though strongly recommended if you are new to philosophy): David Concepcion, "How to Read Philosophy," pp. 358-368.
- Aug 19 Carol Hay, "The F-Word" (chapter 1 of *Think Like a Feminist*)
- \*Optional: "Feminist Philosophy with Carol Hay" (Talk Nerdy podcast)

## II. CORE CONCEPTS: POWER, OPPRESSION, PRIVILEGE, INTERSECTIONALITY

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- Aug 24: Amy Allen, "Rethinking Power"
- \*Optional: Eric Liu, "How to Understand Power" (TED Talk)
- Aug 26: Marilyn Frye, "Oppression"
- Iris Marion Young, "The Five Faces of Oppression," pp. 48-65
- Aug 31: Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege"
- Alison Bailey, "Privilege: Expanding on Marilyn Frye's 'Oppression'"
- Sept 2: Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics"

\*Optional: Kimberlé Crenshaw, “The Urgency of Intersectionality” (TED Talk)

### III. SEX, GENDER, + SEXUAL ORIENTATION

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Sept 7: Simone de Beauvoir, excerpts, *The Second Sex*

Sept 9: Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They and (What) Do We Want Them to Be?”

\*Optional: Katherine Jenkins, “Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of *Woman*”

Sept 14: Robin Dembroff, “Why Be Nonbinary?”

Suzannah Weiss, “9 Things People Get Wrong About Being Non-Binary”

Sept 16: Robin Dembroff and Daniel Wodak, “He/She/They/Ze”

Sept 21: Matthew Andler, “Sexual Orientation Categories”

\*Optional: John Corvino, “Is Gay Marriage a Threat to Traditional Marriage?” (Video)

\*Optional: John Corvino, “LGBTQrstuv: Bisexuality and Transgender” (Video)

### IV. INTERSECTING IDENTITIES: RACE, CLASS, DISABILITY, FATNESS

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Sept 23: Elizabeth Spelman, “Gender & Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought”

**\*\*\*RESPONSE PAPER 1 DUE SEPTEMBER 26 AT 11:59 PM**

Sept 28: Joe Pinsker, “The Cost of Ascending America’s Class Ladder”

Sept 30: Elizabeth Barnes, “Valuing Disability, Causing Disability”

Oct 5: Zora Simic, “Fat is a Feminist Issue: A History”

\*Optional: Nicola Dall’Asen, “Pinterest Just Banned All Weight-Loss Advertisements”

## V. SEXISM AND MISOGYNY

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- Oct 7: Kate Manne, *Down Girl*, Chapters 1 and 2.
- \*Optional: Robin Dembroff, "Trans Women are Victims of Misogyny Too"
- \*\*\*MIDTERM EXAM DUE SUNDAY OCT 10 at 11:59 PM**

## VI. SILENCING + EPISTEMIC OPPRESSION

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- Oct 12: Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within"
- Oct 14: Rebecca Solnit, "Men Explain Things to Me"
- \*Optional: Lara Rutherford-Morrison, "6 Subtle Mansplanations Women Encounter Everyday"
- Oct 19: Miranda Fricker, excerpts from *Epistemic Injustice*
- \*Optional: Huzeyfe Demirtas, "1000 Word Philosophy: Epistemic Injustice"
- \*Optional: "Epistemic Injustice" (Arts & Ideas Podcast)
- \*Optional: Joyce Vance, "Brittney Spears' IUD Testimony is Disturbing – and Connects to a Larger Societal Pattern"
- To view and discuss in class: clips from Britney Spears June 2021 testimony
- Oct 21: Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing"
- \*Optional: "Episode 009: Kristie Dotson on Ignorance" (The UnMute Podcast)
- Oct 26: Kate Abramson, "Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting"
- \*Optional: Veronica Ivy, "Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice"

## VII. STEREOTYPING, MICROAGGRESSIONS, + HATE SPEECH

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- Oct 28: Laurence Blum, "Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis"
- Nov 2: Lauren Freeman and Heather Stewart, "Microaggressions in Clinical Medicine"
- Nov 4: Lynne Tirell, "Genocidal Language Games"

**\*\*\*RESPONSE PAPER 2 DUE NOVEMBER 7 AT 11:59 PM**

VIII. GENDER IN HEALTHCARE

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- Nov 9: Maya Dusenbery, "Is Medicine's Gender Bias Killing Young Women?"
- \*Optional: Aubrey Hirsh, "Medicine's Woman Problem" (Comic)
- \*Optional: Joe Fassler, "How Doctors Take Women's Pain Less Seriously"

IX. GENDER AND SPORT

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- Nov 11: Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl"
- Nov 16: Veronica Ivy, "If 'Ifs' and 'Buts' Were Candy and Nuts: The Failure of Arguments against Trans and Intersex Women's Full and Equal Inclusion in Women's Sport."
- \*Optional: Veronica Ivy and Aryn Conrad, "Including Trans Women Athletes in Competitive Sport"
- \*Optional: Veronica Ivy on CBC, "Where Is Sport in Its Fight For Inclusion of Trans Athletes?"
- \*Optional: Julian Savulescu, "Ten Ethical Flaws in the Caster Semenya Decision on Intersex in Sport."
- Nov 18: Lonnae O'Neal, "The Struggle is Real: The Unrelenting Weight of Being a Black, Female Athlete."
- Kylie Cheung, "Recent Olympic Rulings Show Dehumanization of Black Women in Sports"
- Kylie Cheung, "Simone Biles Should be Praised, Not Punished for Achieving a Feat That Was Deemed Impossible"

**\*\*\*OP -ED ASSIGNMENT DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 21 AT 11:59 PM**

- Nov 23: FALL BREAK – RELAX ☺
- Nov 25: Holiday – Enjoy time with loved ones or practice self-care!

X. RESPONSES TO INJUSTICE

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- Nov 30: Myisha Cherry, "Love, Anger, and Racial Injustice" (BB)

\*Optional: Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger”

Barrett Emerick, “Love and Resistance: Moral Solidarity in the Face of Perceptual Failure”

\*Optional: Meena Krishnamurthy, “Democracy Needs Discomfort and Distrust is a Political Virtue”

Dec 2: Last Class – *You made it!* 😊

Alison Jaggar, “Thinking About Justice in the Unjust Meantime”

Dec 9: **Final Paper Due at Noon.**

### **SUMMARY OF COURSE DEADLINES:**

September 26: Response Paper 1 Due

October 10: Midterm Exam Due

November 7: Response Paper 2 Due

November 21: Op-Ed Assignment Due

December 9: Final Paper Due