

COURSE OUTLINE
PHIL 242 INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST THEORY
ENGTR 0100

Fall term 2024: MW 9:35-10:25 (plus a discussion conference, for which you must register separately on Minerva)

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This course is an introduction to feminist theory, with an emphasis on political theory. The aims of the course are to acquaint students with the diversity of feminist theories, to introduce certain concepts basic to feminist theory (e.g. feminist consciousness, oppression, gender), and to indicate some of the issues on which feminists differ. The first part of the course will consider liberal feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, and radical feminism. These theories all provide some account of the practices that maintain the inequality between men and women. The various feminist theories differ, however, both in their analyses of these practices, and in their recommendations for political change. Some of the questions we will address are: If we could ensure that women had opportunities equal to those of men, would we thereby ensure the equality of women with men? Can the unequal status of women be analyzed as an instance of, or a function of, some other political or economic inequality? How are we to understand equality? Does radical feminism offer a viable political strategy? In the second part of the course we will consider two sets of issues: (1) colonialism and Indigenous feminisms (2) sex, gender and sexuality. Throughout the course we will be considering criticisms of the history of exclusion in feminist theory and practice with respect to class, race, and sexuality.

Students should note that while they will not be expected to have any prior knowledge of feminist theory or political theory, they should be prepared to read a substantial amount, and to learn how to read, write and discuss philosophy. Note also that this course is an introduction to feminist theory and not an introduction to the circumstances that have given rise to feminist theory. We will begin with two assumptions: that women do not now enjoy equality with men, and that this is neither a natural nor a necessary state of affairs.

Readings:

Readings for this course (all of which are required) will be available on myCourses. You are advised to print out the readings so that you can bring them with you to lectures and (especially) to conferences (see Policy on the Use of Technology in the Classroom below).

Course requirements:

(i) Reading: come to class having read the reading(s) assigned for that day, and prepared to discuss the material.

(ii) Conferences: these are discussion sections, led by your Teaching Assistant, where you will have an opportunity to raise any questions you may have, and review, explore, and discuss the material with other students. Participation (10%) in these conferences will be evaluated according to your presence, the thoughtfulness of your responses to weekly questions, as well as any contributions you make to discussion. This assignment assesses your ability to:

- read charitably and critically
- comprehend and analyze a question in light of the readings
- weigh competing claims and arguments

- formulate a cogent response to a philosophical question

(iii) Two assignments, each 25%. Instructions for each assignment will be distributed 2 weeks in advance of the due date (listed on the Course Syllabus):

(a) in Assignment 1 (~600 words) you will be required to analyze a term that is central to one of the readings. This assignment assesses your capacity to:

- read carefully, charitably and critically
- identify important passages in a text
- analyze nuances in philosophical meaning
- synthesize different philosophical claims
- distinguish philosophical terms
- articulate claims with precision

(b) in Assignment 2 (~600 words) you will be required to analyze an argument in a passage from one of the readings. This assignment assesses your capacity to:

- read carefully, charitably, and critically
- identify the conclusion of an argument
- reconstruct the reasoning of an author in your own words
- distinguish premises and sub-premises from the conclusion
- recognize the relation between the conclusion of a passage and the conclusion of the whole
- construct a criticism

(iv) Final exam: one in-person exam (40%), covering material from the entire course. Possible exam questions will be distributed 10 days in advance of the last day of class. You will have an opportunity to flag anything unclear or otherwise problematic in the possible questions, and also to express your preferences. The date and place of the exam will be determined by the university. The exam will assess your capacity to:

- synthesize claims and arguments from different readings
- engage critically with the claims of different authors
- structure a cogent and persuasive answer to a philosophical question

Assignments will be submitted through myCourses. See [FAQs for students using myCourses: Assignments](#).

Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text matching software within myCourses.

Grading criteria: To do excellent work in this course you need to be able to do more than just reiterate what various authors have said in your reading or what was said in class. An "A" indicates that you not only understand and comprehend the material, but that you have thought critically about it, fully drawing out its subtleties and implications so that you can creatively apply the material at many levels. A "B" reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; "B" work does not capture the complexity of the issues and tends toward accurate summary rather than independent analysis. A "C" suggests a struggle with the material that manages an average, basic comprehension of it but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A "D" indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with much of the material being misunderstood. An "F" indicates no understanding of the material, or a failure to comply with instructions.

Policy on the use of technology in the classroom:

The use of electronic devices (computers, iPads, cell phones, etc.) is not permitted in lectures or conferences. All electronic devices must be turned off and stored during the class period. If you believe you have exceptional circumstances that make the use of an electronic device beneficial to your learning, you may request permission by e-mail from the instructor and/or the T.A. **The recording of lectures and conferences is not permitted and is illegal without the consent of the instructor/T.A.**

Policy on extensions:

No extensions will be granted without prior approval from your Teaching Assistant. Requests for extensions must be made in writing, by e-mail, and directed to your Teaching Assistant (Prof. Deslauriers does not handle such requests); include if possible a proposed date of submission. If you have not received approval for an extension, late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade **per calendar day** past the due date. For example, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same paper, if two days late, would receive a C+.

Content warning:

Many of the readings for the course raise issues of sexual violence and coercion, racism, homo- and trans-phobia, sometimes in non-academic language. Lectures may include discussion of these issues, students in the class may pose questions about them, and conferences may extend these discussions. We will talk about how we can engage with one another in open and respectful ways. Students should feel free to contact the instructor with any concerns or questions.

Required Course Outline Statements:

Policy statement: Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#) (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See [McGill's guide to academic honesty](#) for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l'honnêteté académique de McGill](#)).

Policy statement: Language of Submission

Conformément à [la Charte des droits de l'étudiant](#) de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue.

In accord with McGill University's [Charter of Students' Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.