

COURSE OUTLINE/ PHIL 442 Topics in Feminist Theory

Winter term 2012: T TH 13:00 – 14:25, LEA 210

Topic for 2012: Early Modern Feminist Philosophy

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This course will survey a number of works written between the 14th and the 19th centuries, by different authors in Europe, in different languages, concerned with questions about the nature and merits of women. Most of the readings are drawn from the early modern period, and were intended as contributions to the long-running debate called *la querelle des dames*. Some, however, are earlier (e.g. Christine de Pizan wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies* in the early 15th century); in these we will see the origins of the *querelle* and the development of questions that structured the debate over time. Some of the readings are later (e.g. Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft, late 18th, and early 19th century); these will allow us to see the difference between claims about the worth of women as they were framed in the early modern period, and assertions of the political rights of women in revolutionary times. Some of the questions and themes that will link our discussions of the readings are these: (i) Why, and how, would one argue for the superiority of women over men, rather than the equality of women with men? (ii) the relation between knowledge and virtue (iii) rhetorical methods and their political implications (iv) the relation between the rule of men over women in the domestic sphere and political rule (v) what is philosophical in these treatises?.

Students should come to class having read the material assigned for the day (see the Syllabus and the List of Readings), prepared to ask questions and to discuss the reading.

PREREQUISITES: You will find this course easier to follow, and more interesting, if you have previously taken at least one of these courses: Aristotle, Plato, 17th Century Philosophy, Introduction to Feminist Theory.

READINGS: The following works will be available at the Word Bookstore, 469 Milton Street. The Word accepts cash and personal cheques in payment. Other readings will be available from the Reserves desk at McLennan library (see the List of Readings for a complete list).

- *The Politics of Obedience and Étienne de la Boétie*, Étienne de la Boétie and Paul Bonnefon. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2007.
- *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, Margaret Cavendish, ed. Kate Lilley. London: Penguin Books, 2004.
- *The Nobility and Excellency of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, Lucrezia Marinella, ed. Anne Dunhill. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1999.
- *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works*, Marie le Jars de Gournay, ed. R. Hillman and C. Quesnel. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2002.
- *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, ed. A. Rabil, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1996.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Participation, as evidenced by (a) attendance, (b) submission of discussion questions and quality of those questions, and (c) interventions in class (20%); peer review of rough draft (10%); short paper analyzing a passage (30%); final paper (40%). All work must be submitted in hard copy on the date and at the time indicated in order to avoid penalties. Students are advised to save electronic versions of all their work (including discussion questions). You are expected to have read the assigned material before each class.

GRADING CRITERIA: To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than reiterate what Aristotle says (or seems to say), or what was said in class. An "A" indicates that you not only understand the material, but that you have also thought critically about it, grasping at

least some of its subtleties and implications. A “B” reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; “B” work does not capture the complexity of the issues. A “C” suggests a struggle with the material that results in basic comprehension but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A “D” indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An “F” indicates no understanding either of the assignment or of the material.

POLICY ON EXTENSIONS: No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade per calendar day past the due date. For example, an assignment that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same assignment, if two days late, would receive a C+.

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 (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

LANGUAGE: 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.