

## FEMINIST THEORY: PHIL 542/ POLI 613

Winter 2011 W 11:05 - 1:25

Leacock 927

Professor Hasana Sharp

Office phone: 514-398-3050

Office Hours: M 10:15 - 12:15,

and by appointment (Ferrier 415)

email: [hasana.sharp@mcgill.ca](mailto:hasana.sharp@mcgill.ca)

### Course Description:

This course will be an intensive study of Simone de Beauvoir's landmark feminist work *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), which has only just become available in English without abridgement. Although she did not identify herself as a feminist at the time she wrote the work, it has undeniably been a foundational text for feminist theory, as well as for other considerations of oppression and liberation. *The Second Sex* marks both an intervention into the existentialism and phenomenology of her day and a strikingly original and probing philosophical analysis of the situation of women. Beauvoir's text begins with the question: What is a woman? She proceeds to offer both a critique of this "irritating" question and a rich and multi-layered response to it.

We will take it upon ourselves to read the entire work (766 pages in English translation) with fresh eyes. We will strive to appreciate how Beauvoir's insights set the stage for feminist theory and politics. *The Second Sex* raises many issues that continue to contour feminist thought, such as: the relation between sex and gender; embodiment and sexual difference; the normalization of the masculine subject; the oppression, liberation, and complicity of women; psychosexual development; the representation of women in history and literature; and much more. We will also seek to determine how this work remains bound to its own situation, and thus diverges from our current preoccupations.

We will also have occasion to discuss the controversies surrounding the new translation. In preparation for the course, you are encouraged to read the contrasting reviews by Toril Moi ("The Adulteress Wife") in the *London Review of Books* 32.3 (2010) and by Meryl Altman ("The Grand Rectification") in *Women's Review of Books* (September 2010). They are both available online.

### Texts:

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Knopf, 2010).

If you prefer to read it in the original language, there is an affordable version published by Gallimard, éditions Folio, in two volumes.

Books available at "The Word" bookstore on 469 Milton Street.

**Requirements:** Evaluations will be based upon in class participation (10%), one short paper (5-7 pp.) presented in class (30% of grade), one term paper proposal (10%), and one term paper (15-25 pp.) (50% of grade). Late papers will be penalized.

Short paper/ presentation: You should isolate a controversial or difficult aspect of the reading due for that day and explicate it critically. Your aim should be primarily (1) to produce a rich and subtle understanding of what is at stake in the concept or issue, but also (2) to make suggestions about its promise or limits with respect to political theory more generally, and (3) to pose some questions that the class might discuss collectively. You do not have to answer all of the questions raised by what you pick out from the reading. Your task is to discover what might be surprising, problematic, or interesting about something in the text. Your task is not to demonstrate mastery of the material. Rather, you want to engage in critical analysis and provoke discussion. Since the paper is short, you should pick something very specific and focus on it. Yet, since you don't have to answer all of the questions it raises, you should choose something sufficiently complex with which we can wrestle a while. Your goal should be to say something that clarifies the text and

solicits discussion. If two of you are presenting on the same day, you should obviously coordinate with one another to avoid duplicating topics. (limit: 1,500 – 2,100 words)

Paper proposal: Just after mid-term, you will be asked to turn in a 300-600 word abstract of your anticipated term paper. It should include an account of your proposed topic and tentative argument as well as a short list of relevant secondary sources that you will consult. (10% of grade)

Term paper: You will choose the topic for your term paper. It must treat *The Second Sex* in a meaningful way and involve independent research. You are encouraged to connect Beauvoir's thought to any interest you may have. (Aim for 15-20 pp., please do not exceed 25 pp./ 7,500 words.) Grading criteria will be posted on MyCourses.

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 <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information). Note that the code stipulates that any assignment suspected of plagiarism should be submitted directly to the associate dean for review.

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

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.

### Schedule

January 5	Introduction to course
January 12	Volume I, Part 1, Destiny, Introduction – Ch. 3, pp. 3-68.
January 19	Part 2, History, Chs. 1-5, pp. 71-156.
January 26	Part 3, Myths, Ch. 1, pp. 159-213.
February 2	Part 3, Myths, Chs. 2-3, pp. 214-274.
February 9	No Class.
February 16	Volume II, Part 1, Introduction – Ch. 1, pp. 279-340.
February 23	Reading week.
March 2	Part 1, Formative years, Chs. 2-3, pp. 341-216.
March 9	Parts 1-2, Situation, Chs. 4-5, pp. 417-523.
March 16	Part 2, Situation, Chs. 6-7, pp. 524-598.
March 23	Part 2, Situation, Chs. 8-10, pp. 599-664.
March 30	Part 3, Justifications, Chs. 11-13, pp. 667-717.
April 6	Part 4, Toward Liberation, Ch. 14 – Conclusion, pp. 721-766.