COURSE OUTLINE/ PHIL 642 Seminar in Feminist Theory
Fall term 2016: T 13:30 – 15:30
Leacock 927

PROFESSOR M. DESLAURIERS
Office: LEA 943
Phone: 514-398-6215
Philosophy Main Office: Leacock 414
e-mail: marguerite.deslauriers@mcgill.ca
Office Hours: Tuesday, 15:30-17:30

The topic of this seminar is the history of philosophical conceptions of sexual difference and sameness, from ancient accounts of differences in the bodies and souls of the two sexes through the Renaissance and early modern period, and into the 18th and 19th centuries. The emphasis will be on feminist or so-called pro-woman conceptions. We will also be interested in the political implications of those conceptions, particularly with respect to calls for the education of women and arguments for the political participation of women. Two questions will guide our discussions. First, what is the relation between (i) the -- very common -- assertions of equality or sameness of the rational soul in men and women, and hence claims for the equality of the sexes and (ii) arguments for the superiority of women over men? The question is both philosophical (how does one reconcile equality and superiority?) and historical (when exactly -- if ever -- did feminists restrict themselves to equality claims?). Second, is the commonly held view that feminism as we know it began sometime after Descartes correct? The answer to that will depend in part on what we think the necessary elements of a feminist position are, but also on how we construe ancient and Renaissance discussions of sexual difference.

Prerequisites: Students in this course should have some acquaintance with the history of philosophy and also some knowledge of feminist philosophy.

Texts: Readings will be made available on MyCourses.

Course Requirements: participation in class discussions (10%); one presentation to the class (10%); a write-up of the presentation (30%); one term paper (50%). All work must be submitted in hard copy. Students are advised to save electronic versions of all their work. You are expected to have read the assigned material before each class (consult the syllabus for weekly readings).

PLEASE NOTE: DEPENDING ON CLASS SIZE, THESE REQUIREMENTS MAY BE CHANGED; IF THEY CHANGE I WILL INFORM THE CLASS AND POST THE NEW COURSE OUTLINE BY SEPTEMBER 9.

Grading criteria: To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than reiterate the readings 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, 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+. 
Required syllabus statements:
McGill University values academic integrity. All students must, therefore, 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/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

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.

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