

COURSE OUTLINE/ **PHIL 642 SEMINAR IN FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY**
Topic: Liberty and Servitude in Renaissance & Early Modern Feminist Works

Fall term 2022: W 11:30 – 14:30

Leacock 927

PROFESSOR HASANA SHARP

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Office Hours: Thursday 12:30-14:30 in person, or by appointment on zoom (personal meeting room: <https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/7357170527>)

PROFESSOR MARGUERITE DESLAURIERS

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Office Hours: Monday 11:00 - 13:00 in person

Philosophy Main Office: Leacock 414

Description: This seminar will explore the notions of liberty and servitude in feminist works from the Renaissance and the early modern period into the 19th century. We are interested in analyzing the concepts as they were used, and in identifying the varieties of liberty and of servitude that were of interest to feminist authors as they argued for the worth and the welfare of women, or the equality of the sexes. In comparison to the canonized male philosophers, do feminist thinkers in the early modern period provide an alternative perspective on the nature of liberty and servitude? Which obstacles and conditions do they pick out as necessary to living a free or good life? What are the metaphysical or anthropological foundations of their arguments? If they had servants, do they show concern for the fate of those servants?

We will examine the positive and negative connotations of both liberty and servitude. If liberty is something that women seek, what forms of liberty, and why? If servitude or subjection is sometimes good (when it is to reason, or to God), what makes it harmful, wrong, or dehumanizing in other cases? When is a relationship of rule appropriate or legitimate and when is it tyranny? In feminist works from ~1400-1800 these are questions both of personal agency and morality, and of politics. Considering these questions will lead us also to related philosophical issues: the nature of human dignity, the claim to rights, the purported differences between men and women, sociability and friendship, the ascendancy of reason, intellectual development and epistemic authority, the problem of desire and the passions.

Prerequisites: Students in this course should have taken at least two courses in the history of philosophy and/or a course in feminist philosophy or political philosophy.

Texts: Most texts are available as e-books through the library. We have ordered two texts for purchase:

- an inexpensive edition of Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; Abridged with related texts* (Hackett 2013), since it is nicely abridged and contains some useful supplementary texts.
- Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (Broadview, 2002).

Available at The Word Bookstore, 469 rue Milton.

Course Requirements:

Weekly discussion questions/ attendance/ engagement (10%); Presentation + write-up (30%) (1500-2000 words); proposal for the final paper (15%) + peer review (5%); final paper (40%) (5000 - 7000 words).

Discussion questions should be submitted no later than the Monday preceding class at 12:00 midnight on MyCourses; they should be re-submitted, collected in a single file, at the end of the course for evaluation. 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). **Presentation write-ups** will be due two weeks after the presentation. The **Final Paper** can be on any topic you choose that (i) meaningfully relates to the course material and (ii) discusses two of the assigned texts (only one of which can be the one on which you present in class). Further instructions and guidelines will be posted on MyCourses.

Grading criteria: To do excellent work in this course, you will need to engage both with the readings assigned, and with your colleagues in discussion. We will expect your written work to be clear both in structure and in expression, to be charitable and careful in interpretation, and to demonstrate a capacity for critical assessment. You will also be expected to make use of secondary sources appropriately.

Policy on extensions:

Deadlines serve to help everyone manage their time. We strongly discourage late submissions and incompletes. If you require accommodations, please alert us as early as possible.

Notes:

- 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
- We will gladly honor your request to address you by the name or gender pronoun you indicate. Please be in touch to advise us.
- McGill University is on land which is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place that has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.