

Contemporary Feminist Political Theory
Spring 2004
Prof. Schaeffer

Course Description

In this course, we will consider broadly and seriously the question of what is meant by “feminism” as well as what it means to “theorize.” Is feminist theory a distinctive form of theorizing, or is it application of other theories to women? Does it offer a distinctive perspective on women in particular or on reality as such? What is feminist theory trying to explain and what are the various ways we might go about it? Why is it that feminist inquiries into political matters so often lead to questions about the foundation of knowledge? What tensions might exist between the term “feminist” understood as a political perspective and “feminist” understood as a philosophical perspective? Is it possible for feminism (or any other perspective, such as liberalism) to achieve unity -- on either a political or theoretical level -- that reflects differences without simply assimilating them? Does a tension between equality and difference create an impasse? How might we try to move beyond this impasse, and to what degree can post-modern theories help us to do so? Different ways of dealing with these issues yield different conceptions of reality, knowledge, law, the individual, and equality. Rather than taking a “menu” approach and surveying various feminist theories, we will identify the core puzzles, questions, and tensions that cut across different perspectives.

Required Texts

John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* [1869] (Hackett, 1988)
Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward A Feminist Theory of the State* (Harvard, 1989)
Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought – 2nd ed.* (Routledge, 2000)
Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* (Vintage, 1990)
Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault* (Routledge, 1991)
Linda Nicholson, ed., *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (1997)
Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Culture* (Routledge, 1997)
There will also be several readings on reserve at the library.

Grading

Students are expected to read and think carefully about all assignments, and to come to class prepared to engage in an open, respectful and lively exchange of ideas. There will be two papers and a final exam. Papers must be handed in on time. Late papers lose one-half letter grade per day late. Exams cannot be rescheduled. Exceptions to these policies will be made only for extraordinary, documented circumstances (e.g. hospitalization).

Paper #1 = 25%

Paper #2 = 35%

Final Exam = 30%

Class Participation = 10%

Office Hours

Mondays and Thursdays 2-4 p.m. (and by appointment)

Assignments

- Thurs. Jan 22 Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction" to *The Second Sex* (SW, Ch. 1)
- Tues. Jan 27 Mill, *On the Subjection of Women*
- Thurs. Jan. 29 Wendy Williams, "The Equality Crisis" (SWR, Ch. 5)
- Tues. Feb. 3 Carol Gilligan, "A Woman's Place in Man's Life Cycle" (SWR, Ch. 12); additional excerpt from Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (on reserve)
- Thurs. Feb. 5 Virginia Held, "Non-contractual Society: The Post-patriarchal Family as a Model," in *Feminist Morality* (on reserve)
- Tues. Feb. 10 Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint" (SW, Ch. 13)
Catherine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, pp. 3-6; 37-59
- Thurs. Feb. 12 MacKinnon, TFTS, Ch. 12, "Difference and Dominance"
- Tues. Feb. 17 MacKinnon, TFTS, Ch. 7 "Sexuality"
MacKinnon, "Pornography, Civil Rights and Speech" in *Feminist Philosophies*, ed. Kourary, Stera & Tong (on reserve)
- Thurs. Feb. 19 MacKinnon, TFTS, Ch. 6 "Method and Politics"
- Tues. Feb. 24 MacKinnon, TFTS, Ch. 5 "Consciousness Raising"
- Thurs. Feb. 26 MacKinnon, TFTS, Ch. 13, "Toward Feminist Jurisprudence"
Elsa Bartky Brown, "What Has Happened Here," (SW, Ch. 16)
- Tues. March 2 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought (BFT)*, Ch. 1, 2, 3
- Wed. March 3 * * * PAPER #1 DUE by 4:00 p.m. * * *
- Thurs. March 4 Collins, *BFT*, Ch. 4, 6
- SPRING BREAK
- Tues. March 16 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, pp. 1-15
Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault*, Ch. 1, "Foucault and Feminism: Toward a Politics of Difference"
- Thurs. March 18 Foucault, pp. 17-29; 53-73

