

# Feminist Theory

## Preliminaries

**1. Logistics** I would like you to write six essays of around 1,600-2,000 words each for me across the term. It is up to you in which weeks you write these essays. For each topic I have suggested an essay question. It is up to you whether you answer this question or come up with your own. In weeks when you do write an essay, please email it to me by 19.00 the day before our tutorial to give me a chance to read through it before we meet. When emailing me your essay, I would appreciate it if you could include both your name and the essay topic in the name of the document. In the two weeks in which you do not write an essay, you should still aim to do the reading for that week's topic. If for any reason (illness, a pileup of other commitments, etc.) writing an essay proves to be difficult in a week when an essay is due, do not worry: just email me and we can sort something out (e.g. writing the essay in week 9, or whatever works best).

**2. Topics** We will begin by looking at standpoint epistemology in week 1. After that you can choose which topics we look at each week from those remaining on the list.

**3. Reading** (i) *Order* I recommend reading the texts listed for each topic in roughly the order I have listed them. (ii) *Quantity* I do not expect you to get through all the texts listed for a given topic during the given week in term time, but you should aim to get through at least half. (iii) *Note-taking* It is important that as you read you take high-quality notes from which you will later be able to revise. You will be better-off in the long-run reading fewer texts while taking high-quality notes than reading more texts without taking high-quality notes. (iv) *Revising* At the end of term you should decide which four topics you will prepare to answer on in Finals, and use the vacation to get through any remaining texts listed for those topics. You should also make sure to consult the faculty reading list for those topics prior to Finals.

**4. Writing** I strongly recommend reading Rachel Fraser's "Essay Writing Instructions" and "What Not to Do" before writing your first essay, available here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1V-fuU89qX-JZAXVu3V3zWS1dQNz0bjQd>.

---

## Standpoint Epistemology

QUESTION: Are women, as women, epistemically privileged?

\*\*\*

Kristen Intemann, "Feminist Standpoint" in Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.261-282.

Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism" in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka eds., *Discovering Reality* (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), pp.283-310.

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge, 2000), Ch.11 "Black Feminist Epistemology".

Uma Narayan, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist" in Sandra G. Harding eds., *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.213-224.

Olúfémí O. Táíwò, "Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference" in *The Philosopher* Vol.108 no.4 (2021).

Lidal Dror, "Is There an Epistemic Advantage to Being Oppressed?" in *Noûs* Vol.57 no.3 (2023), pp.618-640.

Emily Tilton, ""That's Above My Paygrade": Woke Excuses for Ignorance" in *Philosophers' Imprint* Vol.24 no.8 (2024), pp.1-19.

## Sex and Gender

QUESTION: If one is not born a woman, when does one become one?

\*\*\*

Lorna Finlayson, *Introduction to Feminism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Ch.4 "(De-)constructing Coatracks: Feminism, Sex and Gender".

Mara Viveros Vigoya, "Sex/Gender" in Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.852-873.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 2010), "Introduction" and Ch.1 "Childhood".

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Routledge, 1999), Ch.1 "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" [especially sections I, II, and IV].

Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), Ch.1 “Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex”.

Judith Butler and Cristan Williams, “Gender Performance: *The TransAdvocate* interviews Judith Butler” (1 May 2014), at: [https://www.transadvocate.com/gender-performance-the-transadvocate-interviews-judith-butler\\_n\\_13652.htm](https://www.transadvocate.com/gender-performance-the-transadvocate-interviews-judith-butler_n_13652.htm).

Oyérónké’ Oyéwùmí, *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

## Intersectionality

QUESTION: Must any plausible feminism be intersectional?

\*\*\*

Brittney Cooper, “Intersectionality” in Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.385-406.

Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement” (1977), available at: <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour” in *Stanford Law Review* Vol.43 no.6 (1991), pp.1241-1299.

Naomi Zack, *Inclusive Feminism* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), Ch.1 “Beyond Intersectionality”.

Jennifer C. Nash, “Re-Thinking Intersectionality” in *Feminist Review* Vol.89 no.1 (2008), pp.1-15.

Vrushali Patil, “From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We’ve Really Come” in *Signs* Vol.38 no.4 (2013), pp.847-867.

Anne Garry, “Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender” in *Hypatia* Vol.26 no.4 (2011), pp.826-850.

## Oppression

QUESTION: “It is a desideratum of oppression theory that it portray oppression in its full force, as inescapable, if that is its full force” (MARÍA LUGONES). Discuss.

\*\*\*

Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1983), Ch.1 “Oppression”.

Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), Ch.2 “Five Faces of Oppression”.

María Lugones, “Structure/Antistructure and Agency Under Oppression” in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol.87 no.10 (1990), pp.500-507.

Alisa Bierria, “Missing in Action: Violence, Power, and Discerning Agency” in *Hypatia* Vol.29 no.1 (2014), pp.129-145.

Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* (London: Routledge, 1990), Ch.5 “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”.

James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

## Epistemic Injustice

QUESTION: Give an example of an epistemic injustice, describing both its causes and its harms and assessing how it could have been prevented.

\*\*\*

Aidan McGlynn, “Epistemic Injustice: Phenomena and Theories” in Jennifer Lackey and Aidan McGlynn eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Social Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025), pp.295-327.

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Ch.1 “Testimonial Injustice” and Ch.7 “Hermeneutical Injustice”.

Kristie Dotson, “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression” in *Frontiers* Vol.33 no.1 (2012), pp.24-47.

Katharine Jenkins, “Rape Myths and Domestic Abuse Myths as Hermeneutical Injustices” in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* Vol.34 no.2 (2017), pp.191-205.

Nick Clanchy, "Tackling Hermeneutical Injustices in Gender-Affirming Healthcare" in *Hypatia* Vol.39 no.4 (2024), pp.688-710.

Michael Doan, "Resisting Structural Epistemic Injustice" in *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* Vol.4 no.4 (2018).

Rachel Fraser, "The Ethics of Metaphor" in *Ethics* Vol.128 no.4 (2018), pp.728-755.

## Sex and Sexuality

QUESTION: "No one can choose what they sexually desire. It is unfair to criticise someone for something about which they have no choice. So it is unfair for feminists to criticise people for what they sexually desire." Is this a good argument?

\*\*\*

Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1987), Ch.7 "Occupation/Collaboration".

Ellen Willis, *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), Ch.1 "Lust Horizons: Is the Women's Movement Pro-Sex?".

Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), Ch.3 "The Right to Sex" and Ch.4 "Coda: The Politics of Desire".

Robin Zheng, "Why Yellow Fever Isn't Flattering: A Case Against Racial Fetishes" in *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* Vol.2 no.3 (2016), pp.400-419.

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge, 2000), Ch.6 "The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood".

C. Jacob Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys and Their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men" in *Social Text* Vol.16 nos.3-4 (1997), pp.223-236.

Ela Przybylo, *Asexual Erotics: Intimate Readings of Compulsory Sexuality* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2019), "Introduction" and Ch.1 "The Erotics of Feminist Revolution: Political Celibacies/Asexualities in the Women's Movement".

## Sex Work

QUESTION: Legalise the selling of sex, criminalise the buying of sex: right in theory, wrong in practice? OR Legalise both the selling of sex and the buying of sex: wrong in theory, right in practice?

\*\*\*

Catharine MacKinnon, "Prostitution and Civil Rights" in *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law* Vol.1 no.1 (1993), pp.13-32.

Juno Mac and Molly Smith, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (London: Verso, 2018).

Ann Cahill, "The Difference Sameness Makes: Objectification, Sex Work, and Queerness" in *Hypatia* Vol.29 no.4 (2014), pp.840-856.

Vanessa Carlisle, "'Sex Work is Star Shaped': Antiwork Politics and the Value of Embodied Knowledge" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol.120 no.3 (2021), pp.573-590.

Virginie Despentes, *King Kong Theory* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2020), Ch.4 "Sleeping with the Enemy".

Sophia Giovannitti, *Working Girl: On Selling Art and Selling Sex* (London: Verso, 2023).

## Feminism, Work, and Capitalism

QUESTION: Should feminists demand wages for housework?

\*\*\*

Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode" in *New Left Review* Vol.86 (2014).

Vanessa Wills, "What Could It Mean to Say, 'Capitalism Causes Sexism and Racism'?" in *Philosophical Topics* Vol.46 no.2 (2018), pp.229-246.

Sylvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework" in Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming eds., *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework, and the Wages Due* (London: Falling Wall Press, 1975), pp.1-8.

Maria Dalla Costa, "A General Strike" in Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming eds., *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework, and the Wages Due* (London: Falling Wall Press, 1975), pp.125-127.

bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., New York: Routledge, 2015), Ch.7 "Rethinking the Nature of Work".

Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), Ch.13 "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective".

Amelia Horgan, *Lost in Work: Escaping Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

## Reproduction

QUESTION: Should women's reproductive labour be treated differently from other forms of labour?

\*\*\*

Elizabeth S. Anderson, "Is Women's Labor a Commodity?" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol.19 no.1 (1990), pp.71-92.

Debra Satz, "Markets in Women's Reproductive Labor" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol.21 no.2 (1992), pp.107-131.

Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now* (London: Verso, 2018), Ch.1 "Introduction" and Ch.2 "'But Aren't You Against It?'".

Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015), Chs.1, 4, and 10.

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge, 2000), Ch.8 "Black Women and Motherhood".

Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018).

## Pornography

QUESTION: Does pornography subordinate women?

\*\*\*

Mari Mikkola, *Pornography: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), Ch.1 "Introduction: What Is Pornography?".

Catherine MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Gayle Rubin, *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Duke University Press, 2011), Ch.11 "Misguided, Dangerous, and Wrong: An Analysis of Antipornography Politics".

Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol.22 no.4 (1993), pp.293-330.

Lorna Finlayson, "How to Screw Things with Words" in *Hypatia* Vol.29 no.4 (2014), pp.774-789.

Nancy Bauer, *How to Do Things with Pornography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), Ch.5 "How to Do Things with Pornography".

Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), Ch.2 “Talking to My Students About Porn”.

## Queer/Feminism

QUESTION: “Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other.” (GAYLE RUBIN) Discuss.

\*\*\*

Gayle Salamon, “Queer Theory” in Kim Q. Hall and Ásta eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp.506-516.

Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” in Carole S. Vance ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp.267-319.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), “Introduction: Axiomatic”.

Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” in *GLQ* Vol.3 no.4 (1997), pp.437-465.

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), Ch.5 “Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power”.

Caleb Ward, “Audre Lorde’s Erotic as Epistemic and Political Practice” in *Hypatia* Vol.38 no.4 (2023), pp.896-917.

## Trans/Feminism

QUESTION: What can feminism learn from the experiences of trans people?

\*\*\*

Talia Mae Bettcher, “Feminist Philosophical Engagements with Trans Studies” in Kim Q. Hall and Ásta eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp.531-540.

Emi Koyama, “The Transfeminist Manifesto” (2001), available at <https://eminism.org/readings/pdf-rdg/tfmanifesto.pdf>.

Sandy Stone, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" in *Camera Obscura* Vol.10 no.2 (1992), pp.150-176.

Talia Mae Bettcher, "Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance" in *Signs* Vol.39 no.2 (2014), pp.383-406.

Andrea Long Chu, "On Liking Women" in *n+1* (Winter 2018).

Cameron Awkward-Rich, "Trans, Feminism: Or, Reading like a Depressed Transsexual" in *Signs* Vol.42 no.4 (2017), pp.819-834.

Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamonix: Performing Transgender Rage" in *GLQ* Vol.1 no.3 (1994), pp.237-254.

## Anticolonial/Feminism

QUESTION: Is it a mistake to aspire to a global feminism?

\*\*\*

Laura Briggs, "Transnational" in Kim Q. Hall and Ásta eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp.991-1009.

Serene Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), esp. Chs.1-3.

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge, 2000), Ch.10 "U.S. Black Feminism in Transnational Context".

Ranjoo Seodu Herr, "Reclaiming Third World Feminism: or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism" in *Meridians* Vol.12 no.1 (2014), pp.1-30.

Breny Mendoza, "Coloniality of Gender and Power: From Postcoloniality to Decoloniality" in Kim Q. Hall and Ásta eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp.100-121.

María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Modern/Colonial Gender System" in *Hypatia* Vol.22 no.1 (2007), pp.186-209.

María Lugones, "Towards a Decolonial Feminism" in *Hypatia* Vol.25 no.4 (2010), pp.742-759.

## Feminism and Philosophical Method

QUESTION: "If sometimes one must choose between being a feminist and being a philosopher, then so much the worse for philosophy." Discuss.

\*\*\*

Martha Nussbaum, "Feminists and Philosophy" in *New York Review of Books* (October 1994).

Amia Srinivasan, "Does Feminist Philosophy Rest On a Mistake?" (2015) at [https://users.ox.ac.uk/~corp1468/Research\\_files/Does%20Feminist%20Philosophy\\_KCL%20talk.pdf](https://users.ox.ac.uk/~corp1468/Research_files/Does%20Feminist%20Philosophy_KCL%20talk.pdf).

Miranda Fricker, "Feminism in Epistemology: Pluralism Without Postmodernism" in Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.146-165.

Alice Crary, "The Methodological is Political: What's the Matter with 'Analytic Feminism'?" in *Radical Philosophy* Vol.2 no.2 (2018), pp.47-60.

Kristie Dotson, "How is This Paper Philosophy?" in *Comparative Philosophy* Vol.3 no.1 (2012), pp.3-29.

Talia Mae Bettcher, "What is Trans Philosophy?" in *Hypatia* Vol.34 no.4 (2019), pp.644-667.

Michelle Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), "First Notebook".

## Feminist Art (Week 8 Only)

TASK: Read **one** of the following books and watch **two** of the following films. Write 1,000-2,000 words discussing one or more of your chosen texts – together or separately, and in whatever form you feel appropriate – in light of what you have learned over the previous seven weeks.

\*\*\*

### Books

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899).

Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946).

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* (1975).

Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976).

Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982).

Qiu Miaojin, *Notes of a Crocodile* (1994).

Annie Ernaux, *Happening* (2000).

Elena Ferrante, *The Lost Daughter* (2006).

Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (2015).

Andrea Lawlor, *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl* (2017).

Shola von Reinhold, *LOTE* (2020).

\*\*\*

*Films*

Ousmane Sembène dir., *Black Girl* (1966).

Sarah Maldoror dir., *Sambizanga* (1972).

Chantal Akerman dir., *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975).

Agnès Varda dir., *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977).

Lizzie Borden dir., *Born in Flames* (1983).

Lizzie Borden dir., *Working Girls* (1986).

Jennie Livingstone dir., *Paris is Burning* (1990).

Cheryl Dunye dir., *The Watermelon Woman* (1996).

Céline Sciamma dir., *Tombboy* (2011).

Andrew Bujalski dir., *Support the Girls* (2018).

Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Kathleen Hepburn dir., *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* (2019).

Céline Sciamma dir., *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019).

Isabel Sandoval dir., *Lingua Franca* (2019).

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun dir., *Lingui: The Sacred Bonds* (2021).

Alice Diop dir., *Saint Omer* (2022).