

# PHIL 316: Philosophy of Gender

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Second Semester 2007

Basic principles of philosophical analysis help to read critically the literature of gender studies and clarify the fallacies underlying gender-based discrimination. Gender-based discrimination is one form among other manifestations of social, economic, and political injustice, studying its roots helps to illuminate a broader foundation of injustice understood generally. But there are particular features of sexism that make its institutionalised practice and legal endorsement throughout societies unique in certain respects.

This syllabus teaches standard methods and principles of philosophical analysis which have broad relevance to many fields of social and political theory, epistemology, metaphysics and moral theory, but will be applied in this course to gender issues specifically.

## I. Demotion by definition: (3 weeks)

A. When is a conceptual dualism well defined?

- Tools for analysing the meaning of ‘masculinity vs. femininity’

- Two aspects of meaning: connotation (intension) vs. denotation (extension) of a term
- Types of definition—lexical, theoretical, operational, stipulative, ostensive, theoretical, real (essential)

**Rdgs: Hand outs and discussion exercises**

B. Essentialist sexism

- Aristotle’s doctrine of essences
- Interrogating the contrast between essential vs. accidental properties: is this dualism ‘well defined’?
- Borrowing from analyses of racism to understand sexism

**Rdgs: K.A. Appiah**, “The Conservation of ‘Race’,” Section VI, from *Black American Literature Forum* 23.1 Spring 1989, reprinted in David T. Goldberg (ed.) *Anatomy of Racism* (1990) extract pp.44-47.

**L.M. Alcoff**, “Racism,” *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* ed. Jaggar and Young (2000) pp. 485-486.

- Fallacy of radical dualism of gender-based experience

**Rdg: H. Lauer**, “The Logical Limitations to Misunderstanding” *Legon JI of the Humanities*, May 2007.

## II. Value laden descriptions of gender difference (5 weeks)

A. Value judgments vs. empirical judgments; their interdependence in the social sciences

**Rdg: T. Govier**, “Facts and Figures in the Social Sciences,” excerpts of *A Practical Guide to Argument*  
**Hand out of discussion exercises**

B. Value laden definitions of human nature provide a rationale ‘explaining’ women’s subordinate status: normative dualism and abstract individualism

**Rdg: A. Jaggar**, “Classic Liberalist views of Human Nature” and “Marxist Critique of Classic Liberalism,” Excerpts from *Feminist Theories of Human Nature* (1980)

**N. Holmstrom**, “Human Nature,” *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (2000) pp. 280-288.

C. The ‘nature vs. nurture’ controversy: is this dualism ‘well defined’?

- fallacies of genetic determinism

**Rdg: ‘Do Brains and Brawn Go Together?’**—commentary on IQ and gender

## III. Moral theory & women’s rights discourse (4 weeks)

A. Is morality necessarily impartial?

- Presupposing a masculine norm and bias inherent in the psychological theory of moral development
- Presupposing a gender sensitive perspective introduces new dimensions in moral theory

**Rdg: C. Gilligan**, *In a Different Voice* (1982) Chap.2 excerpts

**A. Maihofer**, “Care” in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (2000) pp. 383-393

**M. Friedman**, “Impartiality,” *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (2000) 393-401

B. Are women’s rights human rights?

- Contrasting definitions of ‘rights’—negative rights to ‘freedom from interference’ vs. enabling rights

**Rdg: V. Held**, “Rights,” in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (2000) pp. 511-519.

*Readings are required* in order to participate in group discussions; class will divide to maximize participation and reconvene for review of groups’ deliberations; voluntary written replies to reading questions will be assessed; reading questions help to prepare for the final examination. Final exam mark = course grade.