

Syllabus

That ethics has something to do with bodies — and with our being embodied beings — is at once obvious and subversive. The degree to which our conceptions of the good should embrace or strive to ignore our embodied states is a persistent issue. While ethics may comprise attempts to answer the question ‘how should one live?’, many of these attempts seem to consider ethics to apply equally to a brain in a vat as to living, breathing persons in the blooming, buzzing world. That bodies (and the world) are gendered, and that this gendering has ethical significance, has become a commonplace at least in academic circles of discourse. Sometimes, however, that discourse may seem more to circle than to move forward. (Think of this “circling” in relation to images of vultures circling ready to pounce, as well as ideas of running in circles, circular reasoning, and speaking only to those in one’s own circle.) Nevertheless, in many domains, and ethics may be a prime example, feminist approaches have provided insightful critique of traditional analyses of ethical issues; however, the positive project of feminist ethics may seem less successful. Perhaps feminist ethics may be regarded as a “useful corrective,” but not a theory or approach to theorizing that can stand on its own. Or, perhaps the critical stance afforded by feminist tools of analysis itself constitutes a positive project.

This seminar explores, in part, what it means to take a feminist approach to something, particularly ethics, and what it means to examine the gendered nature of something, particularly bodies, ethics, and even feminist approaches themselves. Is feminism always beside something else, as the editors of **Feminism Beside Itself* contend? Could feminism stand alone? Given its own conceptual and ethical commitments, would feminist theory want to “stand alone” if indeed it could? (*Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman, Routledge, 1995) Is feminism moving from an initial deconstructive phase to the task of feminist theoretical “reconstruction,” as the editors of *Feminism as Critique* suggest (Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, Minnesota University Press, 1987)?

The seminar will construe ‘body’ in a variety of ways — including the physical body of most persons, political bodies, the body politique, and concrete mass — and thus we will consider a variety of different problems associated with these different construals, for example:

issues associated with physical and biological bodies

- biological essentialism
- sex and gender, biological and social understandings, dichotomous and continuous conceptualizations
- abstract concepts, and particular concrete circumstances and people
- sexual bodies, theories of pleasure, and sexual ethics

problems of representation

- giving voice to others, purporting to speak on behalf of others
- political representation
- visual (cultural) representations of bodies, women, femininity/masculinity, mothers
- imaging technologies

the mind/body dichotomy

- reason and affect (and ethics)
- minds and brains, mental health, and moral responsibility

issues of agency

 rhetoric and reality of choice

 constraints on choice, conceptions of freedom and autonomy

 agency, embodiment, and political participation/representation

issues of body image

- sizism and ageism, aesthetics and ethics
- eating disorders and issues of image and agency

commodification of bodies and body parts

- selling labor, selling sex, selling organs
- aesthetic surgery, social construction of beauty

control of bodies

- control and legitimacy of female sexuality
- social control of reproduction and pregnancy
- community “ownership” of mothers and their children, and the social construction of motherhood
- methods of controlling (constituting, motivating, leading, silencing) social and political bodies

Central to thinking about bodies (of all sorts) and about gender — and, according to feminists, central to thinking about ethics — are two concepts or facts: power and relationship. Whether we are thinking about concrete masses or mothers and children, bodies stand in relation to each other and have effects on each other (i.e., exert power). Gender is a matter of both power and relationship; indeed, most would say that gender is constituted by relationships of power.

The seminar’s first major third will focus primarily on ethics, although attention to gender and embodiment is used by our feminist authors as a tool to correct traditional ethical approaches. The final two thirds of the course will be structured around topics raised by theorizing about bodies, with particular attention to ethical concerns. Seminar participants will assume substantial responsibility for selection of the topics, assignment of readings, and discussion leadership. The seminar’s consideration of feminist ethics begins with a focus on relationship and gradually shifts toward concerns about power. It opens with consideration of the foundations for an ethics of care in the empirical work of psychologist Carol Gilligan and theoretical elaborations on her insights by philosophers like Joan Tronto, Sara Ruddick, and Annette Baier.

Seminar objectives

The seminar has several objectives; these include to:

- ▶ explore the relationship of gender, bodies, and embodiment to ethics
- ▶ analyze the ethical significance of bodies, embodiment, and gender, as well as the gendered nature (or gendering) of various types of bodies and the gendered character of ethical discourse
- ▶ familiarize participants with the work of prominent authors employing various feminist approaches, and encourage critical analysis of that work
- ▶ identify and employ analytical tools drawn from feminist theory and ethical theory, and analyze the usefulness of these tools in various contexts
- ▶ hone participants’ analytical, writing, and teaching skills

Course requirements

Attendance and evidence – perhaps written, but certainly oral – **of having prepared for seminar discussion are required.** Participants will find it helpful to bring the relevant texts with them to seminar meetings.

Participants will need to **attend at least two additional academic presentations, talks, or events** of relevance to the ideas and methods considered in the seminar. One of these will be the focus of a brief (3 page) **written critical reflection** on how the methods and ideas of the seminar were reflected (or not) in the presentation, how they could be useful, barriers to their use, and so on.

In addition, participants will **write a brief critical analysis** of something else — e.g., a phenomenon, happening, event, or news item; a work of poetry, fiction, or art — that employs the methods and ideas of the seminar. Although the focus of the analysis should be something “nonacademic,” the analysis should be rigorous and engage with the academic discourse of the seminar. Participants are encouraged to focus their analysis on something outside of their disciplinary domain. In other words, this is an opportunity for those who usually do literary analysis to analyze a political problem, or for those who typically theorize on a Saturday night to attend and theorize about a hockey game.

Both of these shorter papers should be submitted by _____.

One substantial **term paper** is required. The paper should present an analysis that considers at least two, but ideally all three, of the three aspects of the course (gender, ethics, and body). This paper should engage with existing literature, as reflected in appropriate citations. Participants may use this paper as an opportunity to employ the methods and ideas of the seminar to address issues within the participants’ home disciplines. The paper will be due _____ at _____ to Ms. Ferris. A **proposal** for the paper is due _____ at the beginning of class; additional instructions will be given regarding the content of the proposal and paper.

Finally, each participant will be required to assume **responsibility for one of the seminar meetings**. This responsibility will involve setting the readings for the meeting, in consultation with the instructor, and leading discussion. Participants should use the first week of February to identify readings to assign and should meet with the instructor to discuss plans for the seminar. All requirements must be completed in order to receive credit for the course. Work may be submitted as an e-mail attachment in Word or WordPerfect, but students retain responsibility for the instructor’s receiving a well-formatted, paginated paper that includes proper citations. Copies of written work will be retained by the instructor, and written work may be shared with other seminar participants.

Basis of evaluation (grading)

Written comments will be provided on papers submitted. These are intended to be helpful and meaningful, indeed more meaningful than letter grades by themselves. Evaluation is based on the quality of oral and written contributions to the seminar.

Seminar discussion and attendance at two other presentations	-	20%
First short paper	-	10%
Second short paper	-	10%
Responsibility for seminar meeting	-	20%
Term paper	-	40%

Emergencies occur; barring such circumstances, however, work is expected on time, with the following exception. Those students who are in a position to receive an Incomplete grade (I) at the end of the term may elect to submit their term paper on _____ to Ms. Ferris by _____. Papers submitted under this option will be graded according to the same standards as those submitted in April; this option does not impose an obligation to produce a superior paper, but is intended to accommodate the end of term time crunch.

The University's policy on Academic Integrity is in effect. Participants who have any questions about its provisions should consult the instructor.

Contacting the instructor Lisa S. Parker;
home:
office:
e-mail:
administrator: Karen Ferris; phone: email:
Ms. Ferris is typically in 8:30-4:15 and takes lunch 1-2:00

Texts

We will read substantial portions of:

- Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, 1982
- Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, Routledge, 1993
- Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, 1990

We will read parts of a number of other books, as well as journal articles. These will be made available as a set of readings from Ms. Ferris. Full citations are (or will be) provided in the schedule of readings, so that participants may purchase copies of the texts if they prefer.

Tentative schedule of readings and class meetings

- 1 ***Introduction to the seminar***

- 2 ***Gender and Ethics — The Promise and Peril of a “Women’s Morality”***
Gilligan, Carol: *In a Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, 1982, 1-105 (i.e., through chapter three)
Tronto, Joan C.: *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, Routledge, 1993, 1-97; skip chapter two 25-59 *except* for reading the first paragraph of the second chapter on p. 25

- 3 **Gendered Care: Public/Private, Disposition/Practice**
Gilligan, Carol: *In a Different Voice*, 106-174
Tronto, Joan C.: *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, 101-180
Harding, Sandra: “The Curious Coincidence of Feminine and African Moralities: Challenges for Feminist Theory,” *Women and Moral Theory*, ed. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, Roman & Littlefield, 1987, 296-315
- 4 **Trust, Respect, and Nurture**
Baier, Annette: *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics*, Harvard University Press, 1994, “Trust/Anti-Trust,” 95-129 and “Trust and Its Vulnerabilities, 130-151
Ruddick, Sara: *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, Ballantine, 1989, 3-123
Buss, Sarah: “Appearing Respectful: The Moral Significance of Manners,” *Ethics* 1999; 795–826
- 5 **Political Bodies, Women’s Bodies: Conceptual Categories, Concrete and Cultural Differences**
Young, Iris Marion: *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, 1990, “The Ideal of Impartiality and the Civic Public” 96-121, “The Scaling of Bodies and the Politics of Identity” 122-155, and “The Politics of Difference” 156-191
Okin, Susan Moller: “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” *Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?* ed. Susan Moller Okin, Princeton University Press, 1999, 9-24
- 6 **Representation and Voice: Representative Bodies, Representing Others** (student topic 1)
Alcoff, Linda Martin: “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity*, ed. Judith Roof and Robyn Weisman, University of Illinois Press, 1995, 93-119
Mohanty, Chandra Talpade: *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, 2003, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” 17-42, “Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism” 43-84, “What’s Home Got to Do With It?” 85-105, “Sisterhood, Coalition, and the Politics of Experience” 106-123, “Under Western Eyes” Revisited: Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles” 221-241; notes: 253-255
- 7 **The Power of Naming and the “Case” of Intersexuality** (student topic 2)
Katz, Jonathan Ned: “The Invention of Heterosexuality,” *Socialist Review* 1996: 7-34
Dreger, Alice Domurat: “Ambiguous Sex - or Ambivalent Medicine?,” *The Hastings Center Report* 1998; 24-35
Diamond, Milton: “Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation in Children With Traumatized or Ambiguous Genitalia,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 1997; 199-211
Fausto-Sterling, Anne: “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough,” *The Sciences* 1993; 20-24
Ahmed, S.F., S. Morrison and I.A Hughes: “Intersex and Gender Assignment; The Third Way?,” *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 2004; 847-850
Fausto-Sterling, Anne: “Should There Be Only Two Sexes?” *Sexing the Body*. Basic Books, 2000, 78-114, notes: 295-307

- 8 ***Fear, Agency, and Knowledge in Constructing Sexual Identity*** (student topic 3)
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky: *Tendencies*, University of California Press, 1990, “Epistemology of the Closet,” 40-45
 “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys,” *New York Native* 1989; 154-164
Williams, Alex: “Gay Teenager Stirs a Storm,” *New York Times*, July 17, 2005
Nicolosi, Joseph and Linda Ames Nicolosi: *A Parent’s Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*, InterVarsity Press, 2002, “Introduction” 11-17, “The Prehomosexual Boy: Why Should Parents Intervene?,” 33-53, “From Tomboys to Lesbians,” 147-165, notes: 242-254
Raphael, Rebecca: “Rosie O’Donnell’s Primetime Interview,” ABC News, Available at <http://www.lezbeout.com/rosieodonnell.htm>
Tolins, Jonathan: *The Twilight of the Golds*, Samuel French, Inc. 1972, 52-97
Sawyer, Kieran: *Sex and the Teenager: Choices and Decisions*, Ave Maria Press, 1990, “The Choice: To Do or Not to Do It,” 27-32, “Contraception: Is It a Safe Choice?,” 63-78, “A Non-Choice: Sexual Orientation,” 85-90
Heron, Ann ed.: *Two Teenagers in Twenty: Writings by Gay and Lesbian Youth*, Alyson Publications, Inc., 1994, “Gary, 17,” 162-166, “Nicole, 12,” 167-169, “Bill Andriette, 16,” 170-171, “Jennifer Hanrahan, 18,” 172-176, “If You Work with Teenagers,” 177-178
Term paper proposals are due at the beginning of class.
- 9 ***Gender and Medicine: Women’s Health Care and Justice (where to put the punctuation?)***
 (student topic 4)
Weisman, Carol S: *Women’s Health Care: Activist Traditions and Institutional Change*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, “Introduction” 1-9, “The Social and Historical Context of Women’s Health Care” 10-36
Dresser, Rebecca: “What Bioethics Can Learn from the Women’s Health Movement,” *Feminism & Bioethics: Beyond Reproduction*, ed. Susan M. Wolf, Oxford University Press, 1996, 144-159
Shuster, Evelyn: “For Her Own Good: Protecting (and Neglecting) Women in Research,” *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 1996; 5(3):346-361
Rogers, Wendy: “Evidence-based Medicine and Women: Do the Principles and Practice of EBM Further Women’s Health?,” *Bioethics*. 2004; 18(1):50-71
Rogers, Wendy A.: “Evidence Based Medicine and Justice: A Frame-Work for Looking at the Impact of EBM Upon Vulnerable or Disadvantaged Groups,” *J Med Ethics* 2004; 30:141-145
- 10 ***Feminism, Material Bodies, and the Possibilities of Lesbian Ethics*** (Lisa Parker)
Mann, Bonnie: “Talking Back to Feminist Postmodernism: Toward a New Radical Feminist Interpretation of the Body.” *Recognition, Responsibility and Rights: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*, eds. Robin Fiore and Hilde Nelson, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, 143-159, notes: 159-165
Hoagland, Sarah Lucia: *Lesbian Ethics*, Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1989, 402-410
Card, Claudia: *Lesbian Choices*, Columbia University Press, 1995, “What is Lesbian Culture?” 28-35, notes: 244-247, “Lesbian Ethics” 65-79, notes: 250-255, “Lesbian Friendship: Separations and Continua” 83-105, notes: 254-257

- 11 ***Disabled Bodies and the Body Politic: Care and Justice, Private and Public, Love and Luck Performance at the City Theater: Pyretown***
- 12 ***The Male Gaze, Cultural Norms of Beauty and of the Well-lived Life, and Aging Bodies*** (student topic 5)
Young, Iris Marion: (2005). "Breasted Experience: The Look and the Feeling," *On the Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, 2005, 75-96
Furman, Frida Kerner: (1999). "There Are No Old Venuses: Older Women's Responses to Their Aging Bodies," *Mother Time: Women, Aging and Ethics*, ed. M. Walker, Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, 7-22
Ruddick, Sara. "Virtues and Age," *Mother Time: Women, Aging and Ethics*, ed. M. Walker, Rowan and Littlefield, 1999, 45-59
Bartky, Sandra Lee: "Unplanned Obsolescence: Some Reflections on Aging," *Sympathy and Solidarity*, Rowman and Littlefield, 1990, 61-7
Walker, Margaret Urban: "Getting Out of Line: Alternatives to Life as a Career," *Mother Time: Women, Aging and Ethics*, ed. M. Walker, Rowman and Littlefield, 1999, 97-111
- 13 ***Power, Objectification, and Pornography*** (student topic 6)
Allen, Amy: "Feminist Perspectives on Power," *The Stanford Encyclopedia on Philosophy*. ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2005, Available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/feminist-power/>
MacKinnon, Catharine: "Desire and Power," *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life's Law*, Harvard University Press, 1988, 46-62
MacKinnon, Catharine A.: "Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: Pleasure Under Patriarchy," *Ethics* 1989; 99:314-346
Dworkin, Andrea: "Power," *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, The Women's Press, 1981, 13-31
Haslanger, Sally: "On Being Objective and Being Objectified," *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason & Objectivity*. eds. Louise Antony & Charlotte Witt, Westview Press, 1993, 85-125
Walker, Alice: "Coming Apart," *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*. ed. Laura Lederer, William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980, 95-104
Collins, Patricia Hill: "Pornography and Black Women's Bodies," *Making Violence Sexy*. ed. Diana Russell, Teachers College Press, 1993, 97-103
Nussbaum, Martha C.: "Objectification," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1995; 24(4):251-291
- 14 ***Rape: Sex, Violence, Construction of Feminine and Confrontation with Patriarchy*** (student topic 7)
Reitan, Eric: "Rape as an Essentially Contested Concept," *Hypatia*, 2001; 16(2):434-65
Cahill, Ann J.: "Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body," *Hypatia* 2000; 15(1):43-63
Swiss, Shana and Joan E. Giller: "New PHR Report: Rape as a Crime of War-A Medical Perspective," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1993; 270(5):612-615
Miech, Ralph P.: "A Proposed Novel Treatment for Rape Victims," *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, 2005; 687-695

- 15 ***Feminism, Concepts of Analysis, and the Seminar: More(?) Food for Thought***
Smith, Lauren: “Secret Basketball: One Problem with the Student-centered Classroom,”
Feminist Teacher 1994; 8(1):16-
Wallace, Miriam L: “Beyond Love and Battle: Practicing Feminist Pedagogy,” *Feminist
Teacher* 1999; 12(3), 184-
Term papers are due April 28 by 4:15.

Acknowledgments

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