

PHIL 262: Women and Philosophy in the Early Modern Era

Fall 2023 / 11:30–1:00 (Union 114) / Cross-listed with GSST 262 / Syllabus v2.1

Instructor: Chuck Goldhaber
Office Hours: Thursdays 4:00–6:00

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Course Description

Women played an important, yet often neglected role in the development of early modern philosophical thought. Due to various social barriers, it was often impossible for women to publish systematic philosophical works. But they nonetheless remained at the center of philosophical conversations by writing influential letters to published male philosophers and to each other, and by publishing non-standard philosophical writings in the forms of novels, plays, poems, and epistolary dialogues. This course seeks to revive women’s voices from 17th and 18th century European philosophy. We will cover various topics (mind/body, the nature of matter, education, happiness), with a special focus on early modern feminism and the opposition it met.

Course Goals

By the end of the term, you will be able to...

- speak and write clearly about central topics in early modern philosophy.
- think both abstractly and vividly about the early sources of feminism and its relation to other topics in philosophy.
- understand and articulate the role women played in the development of European thought, including an appreciation of the way social barriers are both reflected and circumvented in their writing.

Course Requirements

- Up to 60 pages of dense philosophical reading per week
- Regular participation in class discussion
- Six journal entries of 300–500 words 30%
- One 3–4 page (900–1200 word) paper on a selection of topics 25%
- 6–8 page (1800–2400 word) final paper on a chosen topic 30%
- 600 word final paper proposal, 8-min oral presentation, 200 word abstract each 5%

Prerequisite: One 100-level Philosophy course or instructor approval.

Required Texts

- Shapiro, Lisa and Marcy Lascano (eds.). *Early Modern Philosophy: An Anthology*. 2022. Broadview Press (ISBN: 978-1554812790). = [EMP]
- Cavendish, Margaret. *The Blazing World, and Other Writings*. 1666/1994. Penguin Books. (ISBN: 978-0140433722). = [BW]
- All other texts will be made available on Moodle. = [M]

Readings

In the schedule below, readings are listed underneath the dates by which they must be read. Many readings, even the more literary pieces, can be dense and tough. Make sure you budget enough time to read the reading carefully, and perhaps several times.

Always bring the week's required reading to class. Please acquire the exact editions of the books listed above. (Try searching by ISBN, if buying online.) A copy of each required book should be available at the library.

Participation

Regular verbal participation in group discussions is crucial for developing philosophical reasoning skills, which are very closely related to conversational and debate skills. If you are feeling shy in class, come to office hours, and let's start talking there. Consistent and thoughtful class participation will boost borderline final grades generously!

Journal Entries

Journal entries (300–500 words) should be thoughtful reflections on the reading. A good strategy is to start out by summarizing some aspect of/argument from the reading, using one or more brief quotations. You should then think about what you find puzzling, insightful, interesting, or outrageous about the reading, and write about that. Feel free to get personal, relating the topics of the texts to your own life. This is an open-ended exercise, so feel free to get creative. But it should be taken seriously. Take your time writing each reflection; make sure you are thoughtfully engaging with the reading.

You must submit *six* (6) journal entries during the course. You can submit them whenever you'd like, as long you follow these guidelines: (a) You submit at least *three* (3) in the first half of the course (before Fall Break); (b) Each journal reflection must discuss a reading we have not yet discussed in class, and must be submitted via email by 5pm the day before the relevant class; absolutely NO reflections will accepted after that! It's your responsibility to know/follow these guidelines; I won't chase after anyone!

Each journal reflection is worth 5% of your final grade and will be graded out of 5: 5 for a thoughtful, clear, well-written, and creative reflections; 3 for entries that show some understanding of the reading, but are shallow, hard to follow, or treat the subject unfairly; 1 for entries that show little understanding of the reading or veer off-topic.

I encourage you to post entries on the Moodle message board, but this is not required.

Papers

You must write one short paper (3–4 pages, 900–1200 words). The paper is due Monday 10/13, by 3pm via email. The paper must address one of several provided topics concerning the course readings, unless you get my approval for your own topic at least a week before the deadline. Provided topics will be distributed by 9/28.

The final paper should be submitted via email by Friday 12/22, by noon. This is an open ended assignment with no provided topics. But you must write on at least one topic, theme, or philosopher from the course. Feel free to do your own independent research. I will make time to discuss paper topics in class.

A 600-word final paper proposal which introduces your topic/texts and outlines your intended argument is due via email by Monday 11/20, 3pm. Everyone will give an 8-min oral presentation of their final paper during the last week of class, 12/12–14, and must submit an abstract of up to 200 words in preparation for that (due Friday 12/8, 3pm).

All papers must be clear, concise, rigorous, and well argued. They must use quotes and citations when presenting the authors' views or arguments. Each paper must evaluate these views and arguments through use of objections and replies. You can't just explain what the authors think. Your job is to use course readings as a springboard for articulating your own views, and to argue for them convincingly.

Writing Resources

I am happy to discuss paper ideas and drafts in Office Hours. I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Center. Info: <https://www.haverford.edu/writing-center>. You can easily make an appointment with a writing consultant online.

Late Policy

Late work will drop 1/3 of a letter grade per each 24 hours late (e.g., A– to B+). Due to university policies, I cannot accept late final papers. Plan ahead and start early!

Academic Stressors, Resources on Campus, and Learning Differences

I am committed to partnering with you on your academic and intellectual journey and recognize that you bring many strengths, perspectives and strategies as you navigate this journey. I encourage you to think proactively and strategically about leveraging these strengths, in partnership with the many resources on campus. These resources include CAPS (free and unlimited counseling is available), Office of Academic Resources, Writing Center, Student Diversity Equity and Access Team, Health Services, Professional Health Advocate, Religious and Spiritual Life, the GRASE Center, and the Advising Deans. At times you may experience challenges or stressors that impact your ability to fully engage

intellectually. If the stressors are academic, I welcome the opportunity to discuss and address those stressors with you in order to find solutions together. If you are experiencing challenges or questions related to emotional health, finances, physical health, relationships, learning strategies or differences, or other related topics, I hope you will consider reaching out to the many resources here on campus. Additional information can be found at <https://www.haverford.edu/deans-office-student-life/offices-resources>.

Additionally, Haverford College is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body and provides equitable access to students with disabilities. If you have (or think you may have) a disability related to mental health, chronic health, neurological state, and/or physical condition—please contact the Office of Access and Disability Services (ADS) at hc-ads@haverford.edu. It is never too late to request ADA accommodations—our bodies and circumstances are continuously changing. Please know that all inquiries and health-related information is handled in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Students who have already been approved to receive academic ADA accommodations and want to use these in this course should share their accommodation letter and make arrangements to meet with me as soon as possible to discuss how their accommodations will be implemented in this course. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice in order to successfully implement.

If, at any point in the semester, a disability or personal circumstances affect your learning in this course, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I want to be sure you are aware of the full range of resources and options available to you.

It is a state law in Pennsylvania that individuals must be given advance notice that they may be recorded. Therefore, any student who has a disability-related need to audio record this class must first be approved for this ADA accommodation by Access and Disability Services and then must communicate approval to me. I will then make a general announcement to the class that audio recording may occur while respecting students right to privacy by not identifying the individual(s).

Prohibitions

Cell phones must be silenced and put away during class. I prefer that no laptops be used in the classroom, but understand that there may be good reasons for making exceptions. Please reach out, if you would like to use a laptop.

No eating is allowed in the classroom. Drinks are OK, when allowed by the College's current COVID-19 policies.

Academic Integrity

Any form of cheating, including plagiarism, will be reported to the Honor Council. You are responsible for knowing what counts as plagiarism or cheating. Please consult the Honor Code's webpage: <https://honorcouncil.haverford.edu/the-code/>.

Schedule

Class 1 (9/5) – Introduction: Three themes of the course

- No reading

Class 2 (9/7) – Studying historical women philosophers: Who and how?

- Eileen O’Neill, “Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History” M

Class 3 (9/12) – The superiority of women

- Lucrezia Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, Front matter, Chs. 3–4 M, 39–41, 55–76
- Optional: Marguerite Deslauriers, “The Superiority of Women in the Seventeenth Century” M

Class 4 (9/14) – Mistaken views about men’s superiority

- Marinella, *Excellence of Women*, start of Ch. 5 (until §1), bulk of Ch. 6 (also, until §1). M, 77–83, 119–132
- Optional: Marinella, *Excellence of Women*, rest of Chs. 5 and 6 M, 83–118, 132–145

Class 5 (9/19) – Against the superiority of one sex over another

- Marie de Gournay, *The Equality of Men and Women* EMP, 31–38

*** No class on 9/21 ***

Class 6 (9/26) – Undeniably a thinking thing

- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations I–II EMP, 85–86, 97–104

Class 7 (9/28) – We know the mind and God better than body

- Descartes, *Meditations*, Synopsis, III EMP, 95–97, 104–12
- Optional: Descartes, *Meditations*, IV–V EMP, 112–19

Class 8 (10/3) – A thinking thing... with a body?

- Descartes, *Meditations*, VI EMP, 120–27
- Optional: Alison Simmons, “Re-Humanizing Descartes” M

Class 9 (10/5) – Letters on mind-body interaction

- Elisabeth of Bohemia, 1643 correspondences with Descartes EMP, 168–175
- Optional: Lisa Shapiro, “Princess Elizabeth and Descartes: The Union of Soul and Body and the Practice of Philosophy” M

Class 10 (10/10) – Does happiness depend on the will alone?

- Elisabeth of Bohemia, 1645 correspondences with Descartes EMP, 175–90

Class 11 (10/12) – Cartesian feminism: “The mind has no sex”

- François Poulain de la Barre, *A Physical and Moral Discourse concerning the Equality of Both the Sexes* EMP, 551–62

*** Short paper due Friday 10/13, 3pm ***

*** Fall break ***

Class 12 (10/24) – A conversation correcting misogyny

- Poulain, *On the Education of Ladies for Training the Mind in the Sciences and Moral Judgment* EMP, 562–71
- Optional: Amy Schmitter, “Cartesian prejudice: Gender, education and authority in Poulain de la Barre” M

Class 13 (10/26) – The moral education of women

- Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, through Ch. II EMP, 605–15
- Optional: Cynthia Bryson, “Mary Astell: Defender of the ‘Disembodied Mind’” M

Class 14 (10/31) – Improved understanding and self-government

- Astell, *A Serious Proposal*, Ch. III through the end EMP, 615–24

Class 15 (11/2) – Primer on doing philosophical research

- Special guest: Paul Turner, Haverford’s humanities research librarian
- No new reading

Class 16 (11/7) – For the love of learning!

- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Response of the Poet to the Very Eminent Sor Filotea de la Cruz* **EMP**, 572–73, 576–82
- Optional: Adriana Clavel-Vázquez and Sergio Armando Gallegos-Ordorica, “The Socratic Pedagogy of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” **M**

Class 17 (11/9) – The melancholic’s ballad

- Sor Juana, “Let us pretend I am happy” **EMP**, 573–75
- Optional: Sor Juana, “Finjamos que soy feliz” (Spanish language) **M**
- Optional: Robert Burton, “The Author’s Abstract of Melancholy” **M**
- Optional: Lisa Shapiro, “Sor Juana’s ‘Let us pretend I am happy’” **M**

Class 18 (11/14) – The world is alive!

- Margaret Cavendish, “The Reason Why the Thoughts are only in the Head” **EMP**, 191–93
- Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters* **EMP**, 195–202
- Optional: Steward Duncan, “Debating Materialism: Cavendish, Hobbes, and More” **M**

Optional Event (11/14) – Philosophy in the kitchen, Sor Juana style

- Meet at 6–8pm in the VCAM kitchen to cook Sor Juana’s 17th c. Mexican recipes!

Class 19 (11/16) – Utopian furry sci-fi

- Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, first half, through the Q&A with the immaterial spirits **BW**, 119–180

*** Final paper proposal due, Monday 11/20, 3pm ***

Class 20 (11/21) – Hello, author, let’s go save the world!

- Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, second half **BW**, 180–225
- Optional: Martina Mittag, “Science with a Difference: Parody and Paradise in Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* (1666)” **M**

*** Thanksgiving break ***

Class 21 (11/28) – Scientific method

- Émilie du Châtelet, *The Foundations of Physics*, Chs. 1, 4 **EMP**, 717–24, 730–35
- Optional: Karen Detlefsen, “Du Châtelet and Descartes on the Roles of Hypothesis and Metaphysics in Natural Philosophy” **M**

Class 22 (11/30) – Does love destroy happiness?

- Du Châtelet, *Discourse on Happiness* **EMP**, 748–58
- Optional: Marcy Lascano, “Émilie du Châtelet’s Theory of Happiness: Passions and Character” **M**

Class 23 (12/5) – Don’t marry him!

- Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* **EMP**, 623–33
- Optional: Karen Detlefsen, “Custom, Freedom, and Equality: Mary Astell on Marriage and Women’s Education” **M**

Class 24 (12/7) – The social origin of feminine virtue

- David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3.2.1, 3.2.12 **M**, 477–84, 570–73
- Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, “Of Polygamy and Divorces” **M**
- Optional: Hume, *Treatise*, 3.2.2 **M**, 484–501
- Optional: Annette Baier, “Good Men’s Women: Hume on Chastity and Trust” **M**

*** Final paper abstract due Friday 12/8, 3pm ***

Class 25 (12/12) – Final paper presentations I

- Read abstracts of final papers **M**

Class 26 (12/14) – Final paper presentations II, Conclusion

- No new reading

*** Final paper due Friday 12/22, noon ***