

## COURSE OUTLINE/ PHIL 442 Topics in Feminist Theory

Winter term 2012: T TH 13:00 – 14:25, LEA 210

Topic for 2012: Early Modern Feminist Philosophy

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This course will survey a number of works written between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, by different authors in Europe, in different languages, concerned with questions about the nature and merits of women. Most of the readings are drawn from the early modern period, and were intended as contributions to the long-running debate called *la querelle des dames*. Some, however, are earlier (e.g. Christine de Pizan wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies* in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century); in these we will see the origins of the *querelle* and the development of questions that structured the debate over time. Some of the readings are later (e.g. Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft, late 18<sup>th</sup>, and early 19<sup>th</sup> century); these will allow us to see the difference between claims about the worth of women as they were framed in the early modern period, and assertions of the political rights of women in revolutionary times. Some of the questions and themes that will link our discussions of the readings are these: (i) Why, and how, would one argue for the superiority of women over men, rather than the equality of women with men? (ii) the relation between knowledge and virtue (iii) rhetorical methods and their political implications (iv) the relation between the rule of men over women in the domestic sphere and political rule (v) what is philosophical in these treatises?.

Students should come to class having read the material assigned for the day (see the Syllabus and the List of Readings), prepared to ask questions and to discuss the reading.

**PREREQUISITES:** You will find this course easier to follow, and more interesting, if you have previously taken at least one of these courses: Aristotle, Plato, 17<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy, Introduction to Feminist Theory.

**READINGS:** The following works will be available at the Word Bookstore, 469 Milton Street. The Word accepts cash and personal cheques in payment. Other readings will be available from the Reserves desk at McLennan library (see the List of Readings for a complete list).

- *The Politics of Obedience and Étienne de la Boétie*, Étienne de la Boétie and Paul Bonnefon. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2007.
- *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, Margaret Cavendish, ed. Kate Lilley. London: Penguin Books, 2004.
- *The Nobility and Excellency of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, Lucrezia Marinella, ed. Anne Dunhill. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1999.
- *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works*, Marie le Jars de Gournay, ed. R. Hillman and C. Quesnel. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2002.
- *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, ed. A. Rabil, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1996.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** Participation, as evidenced by (a) attendance, (b) submission of discussion questions and quality of those questions, and (c) interventions in class (20%); peer review of rough draft (10%); short paper analyzing a passage (30%); final paper (40%). All work must be submitted in hard copy on the date and at the time indicated in order to avoid penalties. Students are advised to save electronic versions of all their work (including discussion questions). You are expected to have read the assigned material before each class.

**GRADING CRITERIA:** To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than reiterate what Aristotle says (or seems to say), or what was said in class. An “A” indicates that you not only understand the material, but that you have also thought critically about it, grasping at least some of its subtleties and implications. A “B” reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; “B” work does not capture the complexity of the issues. A “C” suggests a struggle with the material that results in basic comprehension but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A “D” indicates only a rudimentary comprehension

of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An “F” indicates no understanding either of the assignment or of the material.

**POLICY ON EXTENSIONS:** No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade per calendar day past the due date. For example, an assignment that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same assignment, if two days late, would receive a C+.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

**LANGUAGE:** In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

## LIST OF READINGS

Readings in sequence (if no parts or page numbers are indicated, you should read the work in its entirety):

1. Christine de **Pizan**, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. E. J. Richards. New York: Persea Books, 1982. Read Part One, with particular attention paid to sections 1-11, 27-34, 43. The Introduction, by Richards, is also helpful.
2. Henricus Cornelius **Agrippa**, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, ed. A. Rabil, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1996. Read the *Declamation*.
3. Étienne de la **Boétie** and Paul Bonnefon, *The Politics of Obedience and Étienne de la Boétie*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2007. Read Part III: *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*.
4. Baldesar **Castiglione**. *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. G. Bull. London: Penguin Books, 1976/2003. Read pp. 199-255 (from “I do not deny...” on p. 199 to “...against the waves of the sea,” on p. 255).
5. Lucrezia **Marinella**, *The Nobility and Excellency of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, ed. Anne Dunhill. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1999. Read all of Part One.
6. Marie le Jars de **Gournay**, *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works*, ed. R. Hillman and C. Quesnel. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2002. Read *The Equality of Men and Women* and *The Ladies’ Complaint*.
7. Anna Maria van **Schurman**, *Whether a Christian Woman Should Be Educated and Other Writings*, trans. J. L. Irwin. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1998. Read *A Practical Problem: Whether the Study of Letters is Fitting for a Christian Woman*.
8. Margaret **Cavendish**, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley. Penguin Books, 2004. Read *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*.
9. François Poullain de la **Barre**, *Three Cartesian Feminist Treatises*, trans. V. Bosley. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2002. Read *On the Equality of the Two Sexes*.
10. Olympe de **Gouges**, *The Rights of Woman*, 1791. (Available from the Professor)
11. Mary **Wollstonecraft**. Both these works are available as e-books from McGill McLennan library.
  - (a) *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Read Introduction.
  - (b) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Read Chapters 1-4.

## Syllabus

January	10	Introduction
	12	Pizan (Discussion question due)
	17	Pizan
	19	Agrippa (Discussion question due)
	24	Agrippa
	26	Boétie (Discussion question due)
	31	Boétie
February	2	No class
	7	Castiglione
	9	Marinella (Discussion question due)
	14	Marinella
	16	Marinella (ROUGH DRAFT OF SHORT PAPER DUE FOR PEER REVIEW)
Reading week		
	28	Gournay (Discussion question due) (SHORT PAPER DUE)
March	1	Gournay
	6	Gournay
	8	van Schurman (Discussion question due)
	13	van Schurman
	15	Cavendish (Discussion question due)
	20	Cavendish
	22	de la Barre (Discussion question due)
	27	de la Barre
	29	de Gouges (Discussion question due) (ROUGH DRAFT OF TERM PAPER DUE FOR PEER REVIEW)
April	3	de Gouges
	5	Wollstonecraft (Discussion question due)
	10	Wollstonecraft
	12	Wrap-up: TERM PAPER DUE

See the List of Readings (overleaf) for details on the readings.