

PHIL/FEMGEN179B/279B: FEMINIST ETHICS

Instructor: Anna-Bella Sicilia (please call me “Anna-Bella”)

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Location: [Lathrop Library](#), Rm 298 ([access info](#))

Time: Tues & Thurs at 3:00-4:20pm

As ethicists, we ask how to act rightly, develop moral understanding, respect others, cultivate virtues, and live flourishing lives. In this class, we ask these ethical questions from a feminist perspective, taking into account how gender-based oppression threatens our ability to act, understand, and live well. We examine feminist criticisms of the very concepts – contracts, rights, justice – through which central ethical questions have traditionally been asked. And we explore alternative moral frameworks, including care- and dependency-based reasoning, lesbian separatism, and the cultivation of resistant moral emotions.

Enrollment: Undergraduates should enroll in 179B. Graduate students should enroll in 279B.

Office hours: Tuesdays at 11am-12pm in the Department of Philosophy (Building 90 on the Main Quad, Rm 92K; [accessibility info](#)) or by appointment. My office is on the second floor, which can only be accessed by stairs, but I am always happy to arrange an alternative meeting spot for us.

Learning outcomes for this course: Students who take this course will...

- * develop well-rounded knowledge of the methodology of analytic feminist ethics, the subfield’s organizing questions and issues, and some of its major contributions,
- * learn to extract theses and basic arguments from dense texts.
- * cultivate the skills required to clearly explain these theses and arguments to others, both conversationally and in writing, and
- * devise and communicate original arguments for philosophical positions in major debates.

With these outcomes in mind, the course readings contain both texts in analytic feminist philosophy and texts designed to prompt reflection on the process of philosophical writing/argumentation itself. These readings are marked with an asterisk on the course schedule below.

Assignments & course structure: This is a *student-guided class*. You get to personalize the assignments to your interests, goals, and learning styles; see assignment details on Canvas. There are two tracks for the class. On the **exam track**, you will write a short (1000-1500 word) paper and take two exams (for which you can choose an oral or written format). On the **paper track**, you will write one short (1000-1500 word) paper and one longer (2000-2500 word) paper. Students on the paper track will complete additional preparations for both papers. Graduate students enrolled in the course must take the **paper track**.

Assignment	Points (1 point = 1% of grade)
Reading Notes (voice note, written note, or class presentation)	32 (voice/written notes earn 2 points; class presentations earn 10)
Exam #1 or paper swap & short paper	20
Short paper or scaffolding & meeting for long paper	16
Exam #2 or long paper	32
Total =	100

Course materials: All readings for the course are Canvas. While there are no required books for the course, I highly encourage students (to whom this doesn't pose an accessibility issue) to print out course readings to avoid the use of screens in class. (Learn how to use Cardinal Print and consult a map of available printers [here](#). The cost of printing is less than 3¢/page.)

Participation: Students are expected to prepare for (by reading the assigned reading), attend, and actively participate in each class. If you are wondering whether to attend class, determine whether you have a legitimate excuse. These include illness/pain/disability-related barriers, unexpected childcare or work obligations, family emergencies, or similarly unavoidable and demanding situations. (Forgetfulness, having assignments due for other classes, and extracurricular activities are not legitimate excuses.) Students with legitimate excuses should stay home and notify me that you have a legitimate reason for not attending. If necessary, we will devise alternative ways for you to participate.

Late & makeup work: Use the above guidelines for determining whether you have a legitimate excuse for submitting an assignment late. If so, send me an email letting me know you have a legitimate excuse without any details (please do not share personal or health information), and we will agree on a reasonable extension at no penalty to your grade. If you do not have a legitimate excuse for an assignment, submit it when you can; the penalty for unexcused late assignments is a half letter grade (5%) per day it's late. Barring extreme and unexpected circumstances, you must let me know in advance if you will need to schedule a makeup exam. I am not able to grant extensions for assignments or makeup exams that accumulate in the last two weeks of the quarter.

Academic dishonesty: Per the University [honor code](#), [plagiarism](#) (copying passages from other peoples' work without attribution) is prohibited. This includes submitting work *as your own* when it includes passages (i.e., more than a single word or phrase) or ideas/arguments copied from or substantially informed by generative AI. Students are welcome to use AI for purposes specified by assignments, with an awareness that learning to use AI *well* – in ways that improve the quality of your work and promote your learning – is an important aspect of digital literacy. But using it sloppily, including failing to attribute its use, can constitute a violation of the honor code.

Writing & tutoring support: We will do a lot of writing in this class. For writing support, consider visiting the [Hume Center](#), or seeking [tutoring/Academic Coaching](#).

Disabilities & course accessibility: Is English your second or third language? Would sitting near the front of class, taking frequent breaks, or standing (rather than sitting) help you concentrate? This course is for learners of all kinds (including those with “invisible”/non-documented disabilities or demanding personal circumstances). If, at any point in the quarter, a disability or personal circumstances affects your learning, please feel free to reach out to me with the knowledge that I am committed to working collaboratively with you on possible access supports. If you have a documented condition and want to seek official university accommodations, you can do so via the [Office of Accessible Education](#) (OAE). (They won't disclose information about your disability to instructors.) Stanford's [Diversity & Access Office](#) also offers helpful resources. As I hope is clear, though, I am happy to work with you on course accessibility in ways not addressed by such accommodations, for reasons [nicely expressed by Desiree Valentine](#).

Mental health & academic accommodations: College can be extremely stressful and you are present here as a complete person, not merely a vessel for learning. Please take care of yourself! Stanford offers [many mental health resources](#), including [Counseling & Psychological Services](#), all here for your benefit. CAPS even has a 24/7 phoneline: 650-723-3785. In some cases where mental health is posing a serious barrier to your engagement in courses, it may make sense to seek a [OAE](#) accommodation. If you think you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual violence or harassment, the [Confidential Support Team](#) or [CAPS](#) are good places to start.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1. Feminist ethics	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>March 31. Catharine MacKinnon, “Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination” (1984) <i>Optional:</i> Paula Gunn Allen, “Who is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism” (1986)</p> <p>April 2. The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement” (1978) María Lugones, “On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism” (1991) <i>Optional:</i> Moya Mapps, “Getting Personal: A Feminist Perspective on Philosophical Methodology” (2025)</p>	
Week 2. Moral agency under oppression	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>April 7. Cheshire Calhoun, “Moral Failure” from <i>Moral Aims</i> (2016) *Olivia Bailey, “But How Do I Participate?” <i>Optional:</i> bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” from <i>Black Looks: Race and Representation</i> (1992)</p> <p>April 9. Sukaina Hirji, “Moral Agency Under Oppression” (2025) *David Kelley, “Philosophy Moves and Meta-Moves” (2025) <i>Optional:</i> Caleb Ward, “Theorizing Non-Ideal Agency” (2025)</p>	
Week 3. Objectification & (de)humanization	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>April 14. Rae Langton, “Sexual Solipsism” (2009) *Anne Lamott, “Shitty First Drafts” (1994) <i>Optional:</i> Talia Mae Bettcher, “Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion” (2007)</p> <p>April 16. Kate Manne, “Humanism: A Critique” (2016) *B.V.E. Hyde, “How to Philosophize Like an Academic” (2026) <i>Optional:</i> María Lugones, “Gender and Universality in Colonial Methodology” (2020)</p>	
Week 4. Consequences	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>April 21. Exam day for exam track students. Paper track students will review swapped drafts. <i>Paper track students only:</i> *Helen Sword, “The Big Picture” from <i>Stylish Academic Writing</i> (2012)</p> <p>April 23. Julia Driver, “Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics” (2005) <i>Optional:</i> Margaret Urban Walker, “Charting Responsibilities: From Established Coordinates to <i>Terra Incognita</i>” from <i>Moral Understandings</i> (1998)</p>	<p>April 20. Students on the paper track submit drafts for paper swap.</p> <p>April 21. Students on the exam track take exam #1.</p>

Week 5. Contracts	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>April 28. Virginia Held, “Non-Contractual Society: A Feminist View” (1987) *Helen Sword, “Structural Designs” from <i>Stylish Academic Writing</i> (2012) <i>Optional:</i> Elizabeth Anderson, “Women and Contracts: No New Deal” (1990)</p> <p>April 30. Jean Hampton, “Feminist Contractarianism” (1993) <i>Optional:</i> Tom Dougherty, “Social Scripts and Sexual Agency” (2025)</p>	<p>April 30. Students on the paper track submit their short paper.</p>
Week 6. Care	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>May 5. Eva Kittay, “Relationships of Dependency and Equality” from <i>Love’s Labor</i> (1999) *Virginia Woolf, “Professions for Women” (1931) <i>Optional:</i> Sarah Lucia Hoagland, “Some Thoughts About ‘Caring’” (1991)</p> <p>May 7. Fabienne Peter, “Relational Moral Demands” (2025) <i>Optional:</i> Mercer Gary, “From Care Ethics to Pluralistic Care Theory: The State of the Field” (2022); Audre Lorde, <i>A Burst of Light</i> (1988) excerpts</p>	<p>May 7. Students on the exam track submit their short paper.</p>
Week 7. Love & separation	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>May 12. Andrea Westlund, “The Reunion of Marriage” (2008) <i>Optional:</i> Cheshire Calhoun, “The Shape of Lesbian and Gay Subordination” from <i>Feminism, The Family, and the Politics of the Closet</i> (2002)</p> <p>May 14. Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980) Cheryl Clark, “Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance” (1981) <i>Optional:</i> Kim Tallbear, “Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family” (2018)</p>	
Week 8. Disability, pregnancy, & embodiment	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>May 19. Margaret Little, “Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate” (1999) *Guides to Philosophical Writing <i>Optional:</i> Iris Marion Young, “Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation” (2005)</p> <p>May 21. Katie Zhou, “Gender, Gender Expression, and the Dilemma of the Body” (2025) <i>Optional:</i> Susan Wendell, “Feminism, Disability, and Transcendence of the Body” from <i>The Rejected Body</i> (1996)</p>	<p>Students on the paper track complete the scaffolding exercise and meet with me about their long papers.</p>
Week 9. Resistant emotions	<i>Assignments:</i>
<p>May 26. Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (1978) Amia Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger” (2018) <i>Optional:</i> Marilyn Frye, “A Note on Anger” from <i>The Politics of Reality</i> (1984)</p>	

<p>May 28. Robin Dillon, “Self-Respect, Arrogance, and Power: A Feminist Analysis” (2021) <i>Optional:</i> Macalester Bell, “A Woman’s Scorn: Toward a Feminist Defense of Contempt as a Moral Emotion” (2005)</p>	
<p>Week 10. Forgiveness & repair</p>	<p><i>Assignments:</i></p>
<p>June 2. Myisha Cherry, “Forgiveness, Exemplars, and the Oppressed” (2017) <i>Optional:</i> Alice Maclachlan, “Practicing Imperfect Forgiveness” (2009)</p>	<p>Final exam day. Students on the exam track take exam #2.</p> <p>Final exam day. Students on the paper track submit their long papers.</p>