

PHIL/FEMGEN179B/279B: FEMINIST ETHICS

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.

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>
<p>Week 5. Contracts</p>	<p><i>Assignments:</i></p>
<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>
<p>Week 6. Care</p>	<p><i>Assignments:</i></p>
<p>May 5. Eva Kittay, “Relationships of Dependency and Equality” from <i>Love’s Labor</i> (1999) <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>
<p>Week 7. Love & separation</p>	<p><i>Assignments:</i></p>
<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>	
<p>Week 8. Disability, pregnancy, & embodiment</p>	<p><i>Assignments:</i></p>
<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>Students on the paper track meet with me about their long papers.</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>Week 9. Resistant emotions</p>	<p><i>Assignments:</i></p>
<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>May 28. Students on the paper track submit paper prep for their long papers.</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>