FEMINIST ETHICS
Anna-Bella Sicilia | Fall 2026

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 explore how this might happen through (e.g.) differentiation, domination, objectification, dehumanization, and the restriction of agency. 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 ethics, lesbian separatism, and the cultivation of resistant moral emotions. Students will emerge with a strong foundation in contemporary U.S./Western feminist ethical thinking.

This course also includes a number of "meta readings" (that is, readings about the activity of reading/writing/talking philosophy itself). We will devote some class time to meta-philosophical reflection about these topics at the end of most class periods.

Week 1. Gender relations	*Assignments:*
August 24. Catharine MacKinnon, "Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination" (1984) *Optional:* Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction" from *The Second Sex* (1949)	
Week 2. Intra-feminist relations & coalition-building	*Assignments:*
August 31. María Lugones, "On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism" (1991) The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1978) *Meta reading:* David Kelley, "Philosophy Moves and Meta-Moves" (2025) *Optional:* Paula Gunn Allen, "Who is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism" (1986)	

No class on Sept 7 for Labor Day

Week 3. Moral agency under oppression, cont.	*Assignments:*
September 14. Cheshire Calhoun, "Moral Failure" from *Moral Aims* (2016) *Meta reading:* Guides to Philosophical Writing (pick one) *Optional:* Caleb Ward, "Theorizing Non-Ideal Agency" (2025)	
Week 4. Objectification	*Assignments:*
September 21. Rae Langton, "Sexual Solipsism" (2009) *Meta reading:* Anne Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts" (1994) *Optional:* Talia Mae Bettcher, "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion" (2007)	Students exchange drafts for paper swap.

Week 5. (De)humanization)	*Assignments:*
September 28. Kate Manne, "Humanism: A Critique" (2016) *Meta reading:* B.V.E. Hyde, "How to Philosophize Like an Academic" (2026) *Optional:* David Livingstone Smith, "Paradoxes of Dehumanization" (2016); María Lugones, "Gender and Universality in Colonial Methodology" (2020)	
Week 6. Contracts	*Assignments:*
October 5. Virginia Held, "Non-Contractual Society: A Feminist View" (1987) *Optional:* Elizabeth Anderson, "Women and Contracts: No New Deal" (1990)	Students submit their short papers.
Week 7. Contracts, cont.	*Assignments:*
October 12. Jean Hampton, "Feminist Contractarianism" (1993) *Meta reading:* Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women" (1931) *Optional:* Tom Dougherty, "Social Scripts and Sexual Agency" (2025); Annette Baier, "Trust and Anti-Trust" (1986)	
Week 8. Care	*Assignments:*
October 19. Annette Baier, "The Need for More than Justice" (1987) *Optional:* Sarah Lucia Hoagland, "Some Thoughts About 'Caring'" (1991)	
Week 9. Care, cont.	*Assignments:*
October 26. Fabienne Peter, "Relational Moral Demands" (2025) *Meta reading:* Helen Sword, "Structural Designs" from *Stylish Academic Writing* (2012) *Optional:* Robin Dillon, "Respect and Care: Toward Moral Integration" (1992)	
Week 10. Love & separation	*Assignments:*
November 2. Cheryl Clarke, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance" (1981) Claudia Card, "Radicalesbianfeminist Theory" (1983) *Optional:* Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980); Kim Tallbear, "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family" (2018)	
Week 11. Love & separation, cont.	*Assignments:*
November 9. Andrea Westlund, "The Reunion of Marriage" (2008) *Meta reading:* C. Thi Nguyen, "On Starting Papers: Or, How I Got Over Professional Despair and Learned to Love Philosophy Again" (2026) *Optional:* Cheshire Calhoun, "The Shape of Lesbian and Gay Subordination" in *Feminism, The Family, and the Politics of the Closet* (2002)	Students complete the scaffolding exercise and meet with me about their long papers.

Week 12. Pregnancy & embodiment	*Assignments:*
November 16. Margaret Little, "Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate" (1999) *Optional:* Iris Marion Young, "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation" (2005)	Student-led class discussion.
Week 13. Gender & embodiment	*Assignments:*
November 23. Katie Zhou, "Gender, Gender Expression, and the Dilemma of the Body" (2025) *Optional:* Susan Wendell, "Feminism, Disability, and Transcendence of the Body" in *The Rejected Body* (1996)	
Week 14. Resistant emotions	*Assignments:*
November 30. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" (1978) Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger" (2018) *Optional:* Marilyn Frye, "A Note on Anger" in *The Politics of Reality* (1984)	Students submit their long papers.