Feminist Political Thought
Gov 94 KF

Course description

This course is an introduction to feminist political thought since the mid-twentieth century. It explores the key arguments that have preoccupied radical, socialist, and liberal feminists: What and who is a woman? How do the state, the law, and the economy shape gender relations? Should housework be waged? How does gender relate to class and race? Are prostitutes victims or workers? Does ‘women’s liberation’ remain the ‘longest revolution’?

We will proceed chronologically, reading texts mostly written during feminism’s so-called ‘second wave’ – by a range of influential thinkers from Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone to bell hooks and Catherine MacKinnon. We will examine how feminists theorized patriarchy, capitalism, labour, property and the state; the relationship of claims of sex, gender, race, and class; the development of contemporary ideas about sexuality, identity, and gender; and how and whether these ideas change how fundamental problems in political theory are understood.

Week 1: Feminist Politics in Theory and Practice (August 30)


Lorna Finlayson, ‘Feminist theory, feminist practice’ and ‘Outposts in your head: ideology, patriarchy and critique’ in An Introduction to Feminism (Cambridge, 2016), 4-24

Week 2: The Second Sex (Sept 6)

Simone De Beauvoir, The Second Sex (1949)

Betty Friedan, ‘The Problem that Has No Name’ and ‘The Crisis in Woman’s Identity’, in The Feminine Mystique (Penguin, 1963), 5-20, 51-60
Week 3: Strategies For and Beyond Equality  (Sept 13)

The National Organization for Women (NOW), Statement of Purpose (1966)  
http://now.org/about/history/statement-of-purpose/


The Chicago Women’s Liberation Union, ‘How to Start Your Own Consciousness-Raising Group’ (1971) Online:  
http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/crwlu.html


Week 4: Liberation or Revolution (Sept 20)


Week 5: Work, Housework, Sex Work (Sept 27)


Week 6: Solidarity and Difference (Oct 4)


Week 7: The Sex Wars (Oct 11)


Laura Kipnis, ‘(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading Hustler,’ in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler (eds.), Cultural Studies, Routledge, 1992), 373-91


Week 8: Sexuality (Nov 1)


Michel Foucault, ‘We ‘Other Victorians’, The History of Sexuality vol 1 (1978) 1-14

Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974), 401-416


**Week 9: Gender (Nov 8)**


**Week 10: The Liberal State (Oct 18)**


Wendy Brown, ‘Finding the Man in the State’, *Feminist Studies* 18. 1 (1992), 7-34 or in *States of Injury*


**Week 11: Bodies, Ownership, Slavery (Oct 25)**


Angela Y Davis, ‘Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves’, *Black Scholar* (1971)

**Week 12: Standpoints and Intersections (Nov 15)**


**Week 13: NO CLASS (Nov 22)**

**Week 14: Recognition and Redistribution (Nov 29)**


Susan Bickford, ‘Anti-Anti-Identity Politics: Feminism, Democracy and the Complexities of Citizenship’, *Hypatia* 111-131

Nancy Fraser, ‘Contradictions of Capital and Care’, *New Left Review* 100 (July/Aug 2016), 99-117

**Assignments:**

(1) Participation:

a. Active participation in discussion (15%)

b. Weekly questions (10%): Each week students are expected to submit by email two or three questions arising from the reading the day before the class meeting (by Tuesdays 8pm).

(2) Seminar Presentation, paper and handout (25%): Each student will introduce one meeting of the seminar by giving a 10 minute presentation. This presentation should place the readings into conversation with each other, and articulate three clear questions/ puzzles/ areas of concern for discussion. This will be based on a 2-3 page paper, which will be emailed to me by Monday 5pm before the Wednesday meeting. Papers can provide interpretations of the text, focus on their arguments or context, or engage a particular argument from the readings. Presenters will distribute a handout based on the paper to guide discussion.
(3) Prospectus (10%): By week 7 you should have approached me to discuss your research paper. By week 9 you should submit a 2-3 page prospectus, outlining plan for research, questions and arguments you plan to pursue.

(4) Research Paper (50%): A seminar paper of 25-30 pages. This research paper may be a revised and expanded version of your seminar presentation. They are due TBC

Books Available for Purchase


Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949)

All other course materials available on course website

Collaboration Policy Statement

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to scholarly work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), you must also acknowledge this assistance.