

# Feminist Epistemology

Phil 97, Fall 2024

Harvard University

## Instructor Information

Denish Jaswal, [denishjaswal@g.harvard.edu](mailto:denishjaswal@g.harvard.edu)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 9–10am, Lamont Library Cafe or by appointment

**Course Time & Location:** Fridays 9:45–11:45am, Sever Hall, rm. 105

## Course Description

Feminist epistemology investigates how feminism bears upon central questions and concerns of knowledge production and construction. In this course, we will consider and critically evaluate a range of questions taken up by feminist epistemologists: is ‘rationality’ gendered? Does sexism impact how knowledge is produced by science? Are there specifically gendered ways of knowing? Does one’s social situation impact the ability for one to know about certain aspects of the world? Can one’s social situation afford any form of epistemic privilege? What is epistemic injustice and how might we address it? What might a feminist conception of knowledge or understanding look like? In addressing these questions, we will consider answers provided by a range of feminist thinkers as well as their critiques. This course requires no prior background in either epistemology or feminism.

## Learning Goals:

In this class, you will...

- ...gain an overview of several main theories and debates within feminist epistemology
- ...learn how to critically read and reconstruct philosophical texts
- ...learn how to construct cogent arguments in discussion and writing
- ...learn to write clear and persuasive philosophical arguments
- ...learn how to lead and engage others in philosophical discourse
- ...learn how to critically discuss questions with philosophical nuance

**But ultimately & most importantly,** the point is for this course to be of use to you! To change the way you think, feel, and act in the world & to carry that education beyond yourself.

## Assignments & Grading

1. **Biweekly Reflections** (10%) – one page, single spaced, 11–12 pt. font to be uploaded to Canvas by Friday 5pm every other week. Graded pass/fail on completion. Your reflection can take a variety of forms, including but not limited to: what you initially thought of any of the topics we have covered in class thus far, how the readings did or did not change your views, agreement or disagreement with the readings and why, extension or application of arguments covered in the readings to your life or the lives of others. Content must be thematically related to the week's readings – no grocery lists!
2. **Reading Questions** (10%) – for each week's readings, you will be asked to answer a set of Reading Questions to be completed before class begins. These questions will cultivate your skills as a reader of philosophy and will serve as the foundation for each class session. Full details can be found [here](#), and under 'Files' on Canvas.
3. **Classroom Discussion Lead** (10%) – all students are required to lead discussion at least once over the semester & meet with Denish prior to prepare. Full instructions & the sign-up sheet can be found [here](#), and under 'Files' on Canvas.
4. **Midterm Paper** (25%) – 1000 words, due midnight on October 25 via Canvas. Prompts will be provided in class on October 11. Rewrite possible, due midnight November 8 via Canvas.
5. **Final Paper** (25%) – 2000 words, due midnight December 13 via Canvas. Prompts will be provided in class on November 8.
6. **Participation** (20%) – the final participation grade is subject to the discretion of the instructor, and generally will be satisfied if you attend all classes and are actively contributing to discussion/in-class activities. Attendance is required at all class sessions, barring illness or good reason. This is a discussion based seminar, so everyone will be expected to contribute by speaking each class period.

## Late Policy + Extensions

The assignments for this course are designed for you to actively participate in the course content – due dates exist for the instructor & students to coordinate on this goal in a timely fashion and for you to also learn how to manage your time well. But of course, life happens – if you need an extension on any assignment, please email Denish at least 24h prior to the due date with a new due date for the

assignment. These extensions will be granted fairly leniently (e.g., ‘having a lot going on this week’ is a fine reason). Extension requests occurring less than 24h prior to the due date may or may not be granted.

## **Technology Policy**

The use of laptops, tablets, mobile/smart phones, or any other electronic devices is generally not permitted in this course. Notes should be taken on paper. The only exception to this policy is using a laptop/tablet to view the course readings – in this case, the laptop/tablet should have the internet turned off.

This policy is in place because electronic devices are often a distraction for the user and other students in the class, which in turn decreases performance and learning (see [Glass and Kang, 2019](#); [Felisoni and Godoi, 2018](#); [Bjornsen and Archer, 2015](#); [Demirbilek and Talan, 2018](#)). Their use is also potentially quite disrespectful in a small, discussion-based course like ours. Exceptions, however, can be made – see the disability section below or send Denish an email if you think an exception may be relevant to you.

## **Academic Integrity**

All of the work completed for this course is expected to be original to you and should not contain any content generated by other individuals or any form of AI technology. Both will be treated as cases of academic misconduct, and handled via [Harvard’s Academic Misconduct Policy](#).

Philosophy is, however, often best done in conversation. To that end, you are strongly encouraged to discuss this course and its content with your peers. If any of these conversations result in insights you’d like to discuss in class or in written assignments, please cite them in the footnotes of your assignment.

## **Disability Accommodations**

If you have a disability and require academic accommodations, please send Denish an email or come talk to her about it. If it’s documented and you have a letter from AEO, that’s great; if you don’t, that’s also okay – come talk to Denish anyways and we’ll try to figure out something that works. Discussions related to disability and accommodations will be treated confidentially.

## **Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy**

Pursuant to FAS’s Title IX Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Other Sexual Misconduct Policy, in her role as an instructor, Denish is obligated to notify the relevant Title IX Coordinator(s)

if she learns about sexual or gender-based harassment affecting you. If you want to learn more about the University's policy, you can click [here](#). If you would like to speak to someone confidentially, you can find a list of resources [here](#).

## Reading Schedule

\*PDFs of all readings will be uploaded to Canvas

\*\*You are not required to read the selections listed under *Optional* and *Further Readings* for class

### September 6: Introduction, no reading

*Optional:*

- “Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science,” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* – Heidi Grasswick (2018)
- “Feminist Social Epistemology,” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* – Elizabeth Anderson (2024)

\*\* ‘FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY ON SOCIAL MEDIA?’ ASSIGNMENT DUE \*\*

### Part I. The Rationale for Feminist Epistemology

### September 13: Gender and Social Situated Ways of Knowing

- “Maternal Thinking” – Sara Ruddick (1980)
- “In A Different Voice: Women’s Conceptions of Self and Morality” – Carol Gilligan (1977)

*Optional:*

- “Have we got a theory for you! Feminist theory, cultural imperialism and the demand for ‘the woman's voice’” – Maria Lugones & Elizabeth Spelman (1983)
- “The Evidence of Experience” – Joan Scott (1991)
- “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” – Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991)
- “Who We Are and From Where We Speak” – Paula Moya (2011)

\*\* BIWEEKLY REFLECTION PAPER DUE \*\*

### September 20: Class Canceled!

### September 27: Objectivity, Rationality, Masculine Bias?

- “Introduction,” in *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* – Robert Audi (1998)
- “Knowledge and Subjectivity,” in *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* – Lorraine Code (1991)

- “The Autonomy of Reason” in *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* – Lorraine Code (1991) [read until ‘Epistemological Consequences’]

*Optional:*

- Selections from *The Flight to Objectivity* – Susan Bordo (1987)

## **Part II. Feminist Epistemology – Applications**

### **October 4: Standpoint Theory**

- “The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism” – Nancy Hartsock (1998)
- “Is There an Epistemic Advantage to Being Oppressed?” – Lital Dror (2022)
- “Trans\*formative Experiences” – Veronica Ivy [published under her former name, Rachel V. McKinnon] (2015)

*Optional:*

- “choosing the margin as a space of radical openness” – bell hooks (1989)
- “Recent Work in Standpoint Epistemology” – Briana Toole (2021)
- “Why Standpoint Matters” – Alison Wylie (2003)
- “Standpoint Theory: Productively Controversial” – Sandra Harding (2009)
- “Feminist Standpoint Theory,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* – T. Howell

**\*\* BIWEEKLY REFLECTION PAPER DUE \*\***

### **October 11: Feminist Philosophy of Science**

- “Values and Science,” in *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* – Helen Longino (1990)
- “Strong Objectivity,” in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* – Sandra Harding (2016)

*Optional:*

- “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” – Donna Haraway (1988)
- “Can There Be a Feminist Science?” – Helen Longino (1987)
- “Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology” – Elizabeth Anderson (1995)

*Further Reading:*

- “Sciences of Consent: Indigenous Knowledge, Governance Value, and Responsibility” – Kyle Whyte (2020)
- “Latin American Decolonial Feminist Philosophy of Knowledge Production” – Sandra Harding & Breny Mendoza (2020)

**\*\* MIDTERM PROMPTS DISTRIBUTED \*\***

**October 18: Theories of Feminist Epistemology**

- “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and Defense” – Elizabeth Anderson (1995)
- “Black Feminist Epistemology,” from *Black Feminist Thought* – Patricia Hill Collins (2000)
- “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist” – Uma Narayan (2004)

*Optional:*

- “Feminist Epistemology as a Local Epistemology” – Helen Longino (1997)
- “Situating Feminist Epistemology” – Natalie Alana Ashton & Robin McKenna (2018)
- “The Market for Feminist Epistemology” – Harriet Baber (1994)

**\*\* BIWEEKLY REFLECTION PAPER DUE \*\***

**Part III. Epistemology & Structural Injustices**

**October 25: Epistemic Injustice**

- “Testimonial Injustice,” from *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* – Miranda Fricker (2007)
- “Hermeneutical Injustice,” from *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* – Miranda Fricker (2007)
- “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice” – Alison Bailey (2018)

*Optional:*

- “Emotional Injustice” – Arina Pismenny, Gen Eickers, & Jesse Prinz (2024)
- “From ‘She Would Say That, Wouldn’t She?’ to ‘Does She Take Sugar?’ Epistemic Injustice and Disability – Jackie Leach Scully (2018)
- *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* – Miranda Fricker (2007)
- “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression” – Kristie Dotson (2012)
- “White Feminist Gaslighting” – Nora Berenstain (2020)

*Further Reading:*

- “Mansplaining as Epistemic Injustice” – Nicole Dular (2021)
- “Epistemic Injustice in Science” – Heidi Grasswork (2017)
- “Epistemic Injustice in Medicine and Healthcare” – Havi Carel & Ian James Kidd (2017)
- “Epistemic Injustice and Mental Illness” – Anastasia Philippa Scrutton (2017)

**\*\* MIDTERM PAPERS DUE \*\***

**November 1: Epistemic Authority and Power**

- “Whose Story is it Anyways?: Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill”, in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* – Kimberlé Crenshaw (1992)
- “Can the Subaltern Speak?” – Gayatri Spivak (1988)
- “Trusting experts and epistemic humility in disability” – Anita Ho (2011)

*Optional:*

- “The Problem of Speaking for Others” – Linda Alcoff (1991)
- “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” – Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984)
- “‘I am just terrified of my future’ — Epistemic Violence in Disability Related Technology Research” – Anon Ymous et al., (2020)

*Further Reading:*

- “On Epistemic Appropriation” – Emmalon Davis (2018)
- *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* – Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999)

**\*\* BIWEEKLY REFLECTION PAPER DUE \*\***

**November 8: Ignorance**

- “White Ignorance” – Charles Mills (2007)
- “Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance” – Nancy Tuana (2004)
- “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing” – Kristie Dotson (2011)

*Optional:*

- “White to the Slave is the Fourth of July” – Frederick Douglass (1852)



- “The Speculum of Ignorance: The Women's Health Movement and Epistemologies of Ignorance” – Nancy Tuana (2009)

*Further Reading:*

- “Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* – Linda Alcoff (2017)
- “‘Calm Down, Dear’: Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance” – Alessandra Tanesini (2016)
- “Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability” – Kristie Dotson (2017)

**\*\* FINAL PAPER PROMPTS DISTRIBUTED \*\***

**\*\* MIDTERM REWRITE DUE \*\***

**Part IV. Paths Forward**

**November 15:** Class Activity, no in-person class

**\*\* BIWEEKLY REFLECTION PAPER DUE \*\***

**November 22:** Perspectives

- “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception” – María Lugones (1987)
- “Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color” – Mariana Ortega (2006)

**December 5 (12-2pm):** Conclusion

- “Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions” – Elizabeth Anderson (2012)
- “Resistant Imaginations and Radical Solidarity,” in *The Epistemology of Resistance* – José Medina (2012)

*Optional:*

- “Can Epistemic Virtues Help Combat Epistemologies of Ignorance?” – Emily McWilliams (2019)

*Further Reading:*

- “Ch’ixinakax Utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization” – Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012)

\*\* BIWEEKLY REFLECTION PAPER DUE DEC 6 \*\*

\*\* FINAL PAPERS DUE DECEMBER 13 \*\*