

Feminist Philosophy

Isaac Wilhelm (iwilhelm@nus.edu.sg, isaacwilhelm.com)

PH3217

Fri 3-5:30pm, AS4-0115, Fall 2025

Office hours: Mon 11:30am-12:30pm and by appt, AS3 05-04

Course Description

What sorts of things are genders? How is gender related to our social practices? What is it to be a woman, or a man, or a trans woman, or a trans man, or bigender, or agender, or genderfluid, or any of the other genders which there are? Similarly, what sorts of things are races, and what is it to be one race rather than another? How do different social properties, like gender and race, interact? What specific sorts of oppression do people with certain genders, or races, or other social properties, face? And how should all these questions inform our pursuit of social justice: for example, in opposing colonialism?

Throughout this course, students will explore some answers to these questions. We will begin with five weeks on gender: what gender oppression and gender privilege are, how gender properties are socially constructed, what gender is, and more. The next two weeks will focus on topics related to race: how race intersects with gender, what race is, and so on. In the week after that, we will discuss feminist theories of disability. Finally, in the last four weeks, we will focus on feminism in southeast Asia in particular: feminism and colonialism, single-sex schools, feminist theories of military conscription, and interracial dating.

We will discuss difficult, sensitive topics in this course. Some of you may have strong political views about some of the topics. And some topics may, for some of you, be extremely personally significant. So when engaging in discussions, keep that in mind. Everyone should treat everyone else with thoughtfulness, kindness, and respect.

Course Requirements

1. Participation (100 points).
 - Students are expected to ask questions, attend all lectures, and occasionally work together in small groups.
 - See the course website for the rubric which I use to grade participation.
2. Reading comprehension quizzes (10 points each).
 - Due dates: from the second course meeting on, at the start of each class, take a 5 minute reading comprehension quiz on the assigned article.
 - Your lowest quiz grade is dropped.
3. Final paper exam (100 points).
 - Due date: Nov 14 at 3pm.

- In-person exam, which consists of writing a paper about a selection from the course readings.
- A few weeks before Nov 14, a detailed description of this will be posted to the course website.

For information about various course policies—for instance, the late assignment policy, the grade appeals policy, and the make-up work policy—see the course websites.

1. Canvas course website: <https://canvas.nus.edu.sg/courses/80210>
2. My course website: isaacwilhelm.com/teaching.htm

Learning outcomes

By this course's conclusion, you should be able to

- present some basic ideas of feminist philosophy,
- defend those ideas against standard criticisms,
- identify forms of oppression, and privilege, that often get overlooked,
- write clear, coherent papers that argue for a particular thesis, and
- discuss difficult, politically charged topics respectfully.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Please adhere to the NUS policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for violations of these policies can be severe: they include an automatic failing grade for the course, and possibly worse. A comprehensive overview of these policies can be found here:

<https://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/programmes/plagiarism.html>

Accessibility

This class should be a great, fun, and educational experience for everyone. And of course, everyone deserves equal access to all educational opportunities at NUS. Those with disabilities are encouraged to speak with me if that would be helpful, and to avail themselves of the services provided by the Disability Support Office:

<https://nus.edu.sg/osa/student-services/student-accessibility-unit>

Schedule

The readings are drawn from several sources: articles, websites, and selections from books. All readings are required. And all are posted on the course's Canvas website.

In the schedule below, I list the requirements for each week. The requirements include attending lectures, reading literature, taking short quizzes, and taking a final exam. Note that the readings, for any given week, should be completed before the lecture in that week.

Announcements about changes in the readings—if they occur—will be made in class, and only later added to the syllabus. You are responsible for knowing about those changes.

Week 1: Introduction to Feminist Philosophy

Aug 15

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Logic for Justice,” Chapters 1 and 2 (Wilhelm).
- “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” (hooks).

Week 2: Oppression and Privilege

Aug 22

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” (hooks).

Week 3: Oppression and Privilege

Aug 29

- Lecture.

Readings

- “The Politics of Reality,” pp. 1-16 (Frye).
- “Five Faces of Oppression” (Young).

Week 4: Gender as a Social Phenomenon

Sept 5

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender,” sections 1 and 2 (Mikkola).
 - See <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/>
- “The Second Sex,” Introduction (de Beauvoir).
- “Ain’t I a Woman?” (Truth).

Week 5: Genderspace

Sept 12

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Trans 101” (Bettcher).
- “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies” (Stryker).

Week 6: What is Gender?

Sept 19

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?” (Haslanger).

Week 7: What is Race?

Oct 3

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Racial Realism I: Are Biological Races Real?” (Spencer).
- “Cultural Constructionism” (Jeffers).

Week 8: Intersectionality

Oct 10

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (Crenshaw).

Week 9: Feminism and Colonialism

Oct 17

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Decolonizing Universalism” pp. 21-49 (Khader).

Week 10: Single-Sex Schools in Singapore

Oct 24

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Causal Effects of Single-Sex Schools on College Entrance Exams and College Attendance” (Park, Behrman, Choi).
- “Single-sex schools linked to better student performance” (Seah, Cheng).
- “Accounts of Self-Differentiation in Singapore’s Schools” (Yi et al.).
- “ACS Primary going co-ed” (Teng).

Week 11: Military Conscription in Asia

Oct 31

- Lecture.

Readings

- “The Spread of Feminism and the Silence of Gendered Militarism in the Neoliberal Era” (Choo).

Week 12: Racial Dating Preferences in Singapore

Nov 7

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Navigating Sexual Racism in the Sexual Field” (Ang et al.).
- “Attitudes, Actions, and Aspirations” p. 73 statistics on dating, and pp. 80-81 statistics on dating (Mathews et al.).

Week 13: Final Paper Exam (no lecture)

Nov 14

- This is a 2.5 hour exam. You will write a paper—at least five pages long—on one of three different selections from the course readings.