

PHIL 442 Topics in Feminist Theory – Winter 2022

Topic: *Feminist Epistemologies of Ignorance*

Wednesdays 2:35-5:25 PM / ARTS W-20

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The land on which this class takes place is traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we will explore the emerging field of epistemologies of ignorance with a focus on feminist race-critical approaches. The phenomenon of ignorance is complex and goes far beyond the absence of knowledge as such. We will work through theorizing ignorance, its connection to relationality and epistemic injustice, the ways ignorance can be strategic and uphold various oppressive structures, and how philosophy itself can perpetuate ignorance. Finally, we will consider resistance and responses to the problems of ignorance, including the reevaluation of (certain types) of ignorance, and resistant strategies for oppressed groups.

Our central course questions include: how is identity (e.g., race and gender) epistemologically significant? How is ignorance conceptualized as more than a simple lack of knowledge and what can it illuminate for us? How is ignorance taught or encoded in our society? What are strategies for unlearning our ignorance or resisting the ignorance of others?

Prerequisites: PHIL 242 and one intermediate course in philosophy

This is a seminar-style course, so the format will be presentation and discussion. All participants must come to the seminar well-prepared, i.e. (having done the reading for that week) and ready to participate in the discussion.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES:

Class participation: **worth 25%**, including (a) attendance; (b) interventions in class; and (c) a presentation. The presentation will be approximately 20 minutes and will introduce the class to the main argumentative points of the chosen reading, its key definitions, and provoke discussion with informed questions.

Midterm essay: **worth 25%**, 4 pages, double-spaced. This paper will be a reflection on your own social identity, positionality, and how it relates to knowledge and ignorance. You must make use of at least one reading from the course. More details will be given in class.

Final essay: **worth 50%**, 7-8 pages, double-spaced. The topic and format of this paper is to be designed by you, in consultation with the instructor. It will be due in the last week (date to be announced). This paper must be critical and should relate to the themes of the course, but you are allowed in this paper to extend those themes according to your interests. The paper must, however, be mainly based in the readings we have done in the course.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

Week 1 (January 5): Introduction

Maduro, Otto. Chapter 1 of *Maps for a Fiesta*. 13-35.

Week 2 (January 12): Identity and Knowledge

Linda Martin Alcoff. (2001). "On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant?" *Engendering Rationalities*, edited by Nancy Tuana and Sandra Morgen (SUNY Press): 53-80.

Toole, Briana. (2019). "From Standpoint Epistemology to Epistemic Oppression", *Hypatia* Vol 34 Issue 4, pp 598-618.

Week 3 (January 19): Understanding Ignorance

Alcoff, Linda M. (2007) "Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types", in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. New York: SUNY Press, pp. 39-57.

Tuana, N. (2006) "The Speculum of Ignorance: The Women's Health Movement and Epistemologies of Ignorance". *Hypatia*, 21(3), 1-19

Week 4 (January 26): Epistemic Injustice

Dotson, Kristie. (2011) "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26: 236-57.

McKinnon, Rachel [now Veronica Ivy]. (2017). "Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice" in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. 167-174

Week 5 (February 2): Active Ignorance

Pohlhaus, Jr., Gaile. (2012), "Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance", *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 27 (4): 715–735.

Medina, José. (2013) "Active Ignorance, Epistemic Others, and Epistemic Friction", in *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*: 27-55.

Week 6 (February 9): White Ignorance

Mills, Charles (2007), "White Ignorance", in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. New York: SUNY Press, pp. 11–38.

Ortega, Mariana (2006), "Being lovingly, knowingly ignorant: White feminism and women of color", *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 21 (3): 56–74.

Week 7 (February 16): Colonial Ignorance

Sullivan, Shannon. (2007) "White Ignorance and Colonial Oppression: Or, Why I know So Little about Puerto Rico" in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. New York: SUNY Press, pp. 153-172.

Cook, Anna. (2018) "Recognizing Settler Ignorance in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission", *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 4 (4): 1-25.

Midterm paper due

Week 8 (February 23): Collective Forgetting

Stoler, Ann Laura. (2011) "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France". *Public Culture* 23 (1): 121–156.

Nelson, Charmaine. (2020), "A Brief Overview of Canadian Slavery" in *Slavery and McGill University: Bicentenary Recommendations*, 23-49.

March 2: [No Class – Reading Week]

Week 9 (March 9): Philosophical Ignorance

Harding, Sandra. (2006) "Two Influential Theories of Ignorance and Philosophy's Interests in Ignoring Them". *Hypatia*, 21(3), 20-36.

Alcoff, Linda M. (2017) "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an epistemology of ignorance" in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*.

Week 10 (March 16): Epistemic Trust

Grasswick, H. (2014) "Climate Change Science and Responsible Trust: A Situated Approach". *Hypatia*, 29(3), 541-557.

Lugones, Maria. (1987) "Playfulness, World Traveling and Loving Perception," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 2(2): 3–20.

Week 11 (March 23): Epistemic Resistance

Medina, José. (2011) "Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and Guerrilla Pluralism". *Foucault Studies*.

Pohlhaus, Gaile. (2020) "Gaslighting and Echoing, or Why Collective Epistemic Resistance is not a "Witch Hunt". *Hypatia* 35(4): 674-686.

Week 12 (March 30): Revaluing Ignorance

Townley, Cynthia. (2006) "Toward a Revaluation of Ignorance." *Hypatia*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 37–55.

Lugones, María. (2006) "On Complex Communication". *Hypatia*, 21(3), 75-85.

Week 13 (April 6): Essay Workshop

GRADING CRITERIA: To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than reiterate what was said in class. An “A” indicates that you not only understand the material, but that you have also thought critically about it, grasping at least some of its subtleties and implications. A “B” reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; “B” work does not capture the complexity of the issues. A “C” suggests a struggle with the material that results in basic comprehension but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A “D” indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An “F” indicates no understanding either of the assignment or of the material

POLICY ON EXTENSIONS: These will be granted only in exceptional circumstances like serious illness or family emergency and documentation will be required. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade per calendar day past the due date. For example, an assignment that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same assignment, if two days late, would receive a C+.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

LANGUAGE: In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.