

**PHL 860: Seminar in Metaphysics and Epistemology**  
***Feminist Epistemology***  
**FALL 2009**

Kristie Dotson  
W 7:00 – 9:50 pm  
Office Hours: W 4:00 – 6:00 pm & by Arr.

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SKH 514; Ext. 3 – 4617

***Required Books:***

Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.  
Alcoff, Linda and Elizabeth Potter, eds. *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge, 1993.  
Course Packet

***Course Description:***

As Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter explain in the introduction of their now classic anthology, *Feminist Epistemologies*, feminist epistemology has no clear referent. Questions concerning knowledge and gender (sexuality, race, ability, age, etc.) exist in feminist discourse across philosophical and disciplinary divides. Most, if not all, feminist investigations into knowledge fall into the broad category of ‘feminist epistemology.’ However, within philosophy, there is a set of questions that characterize contemporary feminist epistemological investigations. This class will seek to introduce and explore these questions.

The questions we will consider include: Is rationality gendered? Are conceptions of philosophy “masculine”? What role do ‘subjects’ play in knowledge production? What epistemic role does ignorance play in knowing and unknowing? What role does epistemic responsibility play in being justified? What is epistemic injustice and how can such injustice be addressed? In addressing these questions, we will explore numerous ways that feminist philosophers take up issues surrounding the construction/production of knowledge.

***Course Requirements:***

1. **Presentation and Commentary:** See separate assignment sheet. (Presentation = 20% of grade; Commentary = 10% = 30%)

2. **Short Paper:** You will be expected to write one short critical summary paper for this class. The first paper should be no more than 1250-2000 words. The short paper assignment requires you to offer a summary of at least one of the articles read between Weeks 2-8. I will grade this assignment on whether you produce clear, concise, jargon-free writing that offers a well-supported reading of the article(s) under scrutiny. (10% of grade)
3. **Research Paper:** You will be expected to write either a research paper. The paper should be within 15-20 pages and demonstrate considerable engagement with an issue(s) raised during the course of the seminar. (60% of grade)
4. **Attendance** is mandatory.

***Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:***

Students with disabilities should provide me with a copy of her/his VISA. I will be happy to restructure relevant assignments and course requirements to meet your academic needs. If you have yet to procure a VISA, please, contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a disability specialist, call 353-9642 (voice), 355-1293 (TTY), or visit MyProfile.rcpd.msu.edu.

***Academic Honesty:***

In this class, **all** of your work is to be done only by yourself. All work is individual work. Plagiarism is presenting the work or ideas of another person as if they are one's own. I will not consider any instances of plagiarism to be 'accidental' or done 'with good will'. Examples of plagiarism include, but **are not limited to**: 1) Putting your name on group work to which you have not contributed equally; 2) Submitting work that has been purchased or given to you; 3) Turning in work that you have merely agreed with, but not thought of yourself; 4) Submitting work that was found online; and 5) Incorporating the words of an author without giving that author due credit. There is a minimum of one of two penalties for plagiarism in my class:

- 1.) You will receive a zero on the plagiarized assignment.
- 2.) You will receive a failing grade for the class and your academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean.

Subsequently, at my discretion, I reserve the option to pursue further university action against any student who commits plagiarism. If you have further questions see the Ombudsperson's web page <<https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/dishonestystud.html>>.

## Tentative Schedule

FE = *Feminist Epistemologies*; EJ = *Epistemic Injustice*; CP = Course Packet

Week One (9/9):     ***Introduction: Traditional Epistemology***

*Required Reading:*

Bonjour, "Introduction," "Descartes Epistemology," and "The Concept of Knowledge" (CP)

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Week Two (9/16):   ***Feminism and Epistemology?***

*Required Reading:*

Rae Langston, "Feminism in Epistemology" (CP)

Elizabeth Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense" (*Hypatia*, 10.3 (1995): 50-84)

Michele Le Doueff, "Long Hair, Short Ideas" (CP)

*Recommended Reading:*

Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, "Introduction" (FE)

Linda Alcoff, "Philosophy Matters: A Review of Recent Work in Feminist Philosophy" (*Signs*, 25.3 (2000): 841-882)

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Week Three (9/23): ***In the Beginning...Reason***

*Required Reading:*

Marilyn Frye, "In and Out of Harm's Way" (CP)

Luce Irigaray, "Is the Subject of Science Sexed?" (*Hypatia*, 2.3 (1987): 65-87)

Maria Lugonés, "Purity, Impurity, and Separation." (*Signs*, 19.2 (1994): 458-479)

*Recommended Reading:*

Susan Bordo, "Purification and Transcendence" (ANGEL)

Phyllis Rooney, "Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conception of Reason" (*Hypatia*, 6.2 (1991): 78-103)

Linda Alcoff, "Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?" (*Philosophical Topics*, 23.2 (1995): 1-26)

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Week Four (9/30): ***Epistemic Location I: Standpoint Theory***

*Required Reading:*

Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" (*Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1998): 575-599)

Nancy Harstock, "The Feminist Standpoint" (CP)

Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Theory" (FE)

*Recommended Reading:*

Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" (ANGEL)

Bat-Ami Bar On, "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege" (FE)

Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience" (*Critical Inquiry*, 17.4 (1991): 773-797)\*\*\*

Nancy Harstock, "Experience, Embodiment, and Epistemologies" (*Hypatia*, 21.2 (2006): 178-183)

Alison Wylie, "Why Standpoint Matters" (ANGEL)

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Week Five (10/7): **Epistemic Location II: Intersectional Oppression and Knowing**

*Required Reading:*

Vrinda Dalmiya and Linda Alcoff, "Are 'Old Wives Tales' Justified?" (FE)

Patricia Hill Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought" (*Signs*, 14.4 (1989): 745-773)

Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (*University of Chicago Legal Forum*, (1989): 139-167)

*Recommended Reading:*

Patricia J. Williams, "The Death of the Profane" (ANGEL)

Joy James, "Discredited Knowledge" (ANGEL)

Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women" (*Signs*, 14.4 (1989): 912-920)

John Langston Gwaltney, "Hannah Nelson." (ANGEL)

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Week Six (10/14): **Epistemic Location III: The Epistemic Subject**

*Required Reading:*

Lorraine Code, "Rational Imaginings, Responsible Knowings" (CP)

Lorraine Code, "Taking Subjectivity into Account" (FE)

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Week Seven (10/21): **Epistemic Location IV: Multiplying Epistemic Subjects**

*Required Reading:*

Maria Lugonés, "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception" (*Hypatia*, 2.2 (1987): 3-19)

Maria Lugonés and Elizabeth Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You?" (*Feminist Studies International Forum*, 6.6 (1983): 573-581)

Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (*boundary 2*, 12.3 (1984): 333-358)

*Recommended Reading:*

Gloria Anzaldúa, "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness" (CP)

Shari Stone-Mediatore, "Chandra Mohanty and the Revaluing of 'Experience'" (ANGEL)

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Week Eight (10/28): **Epistemic Communities**

*Required Reading:*

Lynn Hankinson Nelson, "Epistemological Communities" (FE)

Helen Longino, "Subjects, Power and Knowledge" (FE)

Deborah Tollefsen, "Challenging Epistemic Individualism" (CP)

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Week Nine (11/4): **Epistemic Justice**

*Required Reading:*

Miranda Fricker, 1-59 (EJ)

**SHORT PAPER DUE**

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Week Ten (11/11): **Epistemic Justice**

*Required Reading:*

Miranda Fricker, 60-128 (EJ)

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Week Eleven (11/18): **Epistemic Justice**

*Required Reading:*

Miranda Fricker, 129-178 (EJ)

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Week Twelve (11/25): **Epistemic Justice and Ignorance**

*Required Reading:*

Lorraine Code, "Advocacy, Negotiation and the Politics of Unknowing" (CP)

Alison Bailey, "Strategic Ignorance" (CP)

Nancy Tuana, "Speculum of Ignorance" (*Hypatia*, 21.3 (2006) 1-19)

*Recommended Reading:*

Robert Proctor, "Agnotology: The Missing Term" (ANGEL)

Kristie Dotson, "In Search of Tanzania" (ANGEL)

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Week Thirteen (12/2): **Rigoberta Menchú**

*Required Reading:*

Elizabeth Burgos, *I, Rigoberta Menchu*

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Week Fourteen (12/9): **At the End of the Day... Rigoberta Menchú Controversy**

*Required Reading:*

David Stoll (CP)

*The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*

*Recommended Reading:*

Doris Sommer, "Rigoberta's Secrets," (*Latin American Perspectives*, 18.3 (1991): 32-50)

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**FINAL PAPER DUE: December 17, 2009**

Have a great break!!