

Philosophy

Also relevant for Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Political Theory and the History of Ideas

Course: Philosophy

Group of courses: Humanities

Provided by: PD Dr. Susanne Lettow

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Course objectives:

Students should be enabled to recognise and apply gender as a central category and critical instrument of analysis in all areas of philosophy.

This involves.

- a) acquiring knowledge of philosophical gender theories from ancient times to the present day,
- b) becoming familiar with historical and contemporary female philosophers, and
- c) developing an ability to critically analyse texts and concepts that do not deal with gender explicitly, but which are indirectly structured by gender, e.g. via metaphors, comparisons and omissions. Methodological reflection and acquiring methodological skills are thus central learning objectives.

In addition, students should be taught about the development of the field and key approaches in current debates in feminist philosophy and interdisciplinary gender studies in order to be able to contribute to and intervene in such debates.

Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

Women's and gender studies in the area of philosophy analyse theoretical articulations of gender and gender relations. They also deal with the development of modes of thought and concepts that enable dominance relations to be named and altered. A central issue is analysing and overcoming a "false universalism", i.e. rejecting general concepts that appear to be neutral but in fact reflect an androcentric bias. Philosophical women's and gender studies assume the existence of a complex interplay of social structures, philosophy and other forms of knowledge. Work on philosophical terminology is thus considered to be "situated". Research often reflects the disciplinary boundaries of the subject "philosophy" and critically questions epistemic strategies of excluding certain content and ways of thinking.

Women's and gender studies take on the task of reconstructing, criticising and innovating concepts and theories in all the different sub-areas of theoretical and practical philosophy.

In the field of theoretical philosophy, the following contributions are particularly noteworthy:

Metaphysics and ontology

- Research on gender articulation and the hierarchical ordering of basic dichotomous concepts such as being/non-being, nature/culture, body/mind aims to discover and name the social and cultural contexts that are "inscribed into" metaphysical and/or ontological principles. Moreover, it strives to understand how constructions of gender structure our thinking and thereby stabilise social gender systems or contribute to changing them.
- Philosophical conceptions, which examine the alliances between feminist philosophy and other forms of modern metaphysical criticism (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, post-structuralism, discourse ethics) in the context of metaphysical thought. These conceptions attempt to find starting points for developing new theories despite the gender bias and simplistic terminology for gender and gender relations that exist in practically all mainstream philosophical conceptions.
- Philosophical works that deal with ontologies and basic metaphysic assumptions that are implicitly or explicitly formulated in feminist theories. In particular, this includes works on the

concept of matter and the material turn in the humanities and social sciences.

- Works in the field of analytic feminism.

Philosophy of science, epistemology

- Research on androcentrism in conceptions of rationality and science. Conceptions of science and rationality are examined to determine how far they are based on androcentric assumptions regarding the subject and knowledge-constitutive interests. Research analyses the gendering of the human cognitive faculty, e.g. by the reason/feeling opposition. To bring the assumption of neutral objectivity into question, relations of knowledge and power are analysed following various methodological avenues (including psychoanalysis, critical theory and post-structuralism).
- Gender research in philosophy is intensely concerned with questions of epistemology by critically discussing both positivistic and cultural-relativistic approaches in the philosophy of science. Key among them are the standpoint theory, the conception of "situated knowledge" and approaches with reference to historical epistemology and social studies of science. The focus is on a redefinition of the concept of objectivity in order to integrate different perspectives of women and other "others" on knowledge and knowledge-production without losing the possibility of formulating claims to truth. Central to this are theories about epistemic ignorance and epistemological injustice. In this context and beyond, various researches focus on a knowledge-based understanding of emotions and affects.

In the field of practical philosophy, the following contributions are particularly noteworthy:

Political philosophy/social philosophy

- Research dealing with gender conceptions and androcentric underlying assumptions in philosophical theories about the state and society, marriage, family, generativity and education in all periods of the history of philosophy from antiquity to the present. It investigates historical changes in gender hierarchies and symbolisations and analyses continuities. Analyses of the relation of the public and the private, of the state, democracy and the political as well as definitions of power, authority and rule are of central importance here.
- In contemporary social philosophy, feminist philosophy is of particular relevance for debates on equality and justice, identity, difference and recognition. It investigates how social, economic and cultural factors interact or should ideally interact, at least to further a plural, gender-balanced society. Topics such as equality/inequality, social justice, globalisation (post-)colonialism and cultural identity are included in this discussion. Ecology/natural conditions are increasingly important. Impulses for dealing with these and other topics are based on theories of intersectionality that conceptualize the interrelatedness of different forms of power and social principles of hierarchization.

Moral philosophy/ethics

- Feminist ethical conceptions were initially formulated as alternatives to universalistic approaches to law and justice based on the autonomous subject of social contract theory. More than anything else, the proposed "ethics of care" orientated towards women's life experience and skills such as social binding skills, context-sensitive thinking and emotionality have led to a

rich philosophical debate on the possibility of a "female morality" and the dichotomy of universalism and relativism. Furthermore, there have been numerous debates concerning a re-conceptualization of the term "autonomy" and the concepts of relationality, dependency and vulnerability. Recently, intense discussions on the concept of care in the sense of "life care" and with regard to care work have taken place.

- Feminist bioethics critically examines the gender blindness of mainstream bioethics and formulates suggestions for an intersectional approach to the problems of applied ethics. In addition, studies at the intersection of ethics and philosophy of technology are noteworthy that refer to various philosophical traditions such as post-structuralism, phenomenology, or philosophical anthropology.

Philosophical anthropology

- Research critically reconstructing the "false universalism", i.e. the implicit androcentrism of general concepts with an appearance of neutrality, e.g. "man", "subject", "reason" in philosophical conceptions of all periods. Many different methods of textual analysis have been developed here, allowing an analysis of the implicit structures of meaning of texts and discourses by means of explicit gender constructions.
- The question "What is man?" is translated into the question "What is gender?" in feminist philosophy. Conceptions of body, sexuality and identity are discussed, especially from existentialist, psychoanalytical, phenomenological and post-structural perspectives. Without using "essentialistic" terminology that assumes a common "nature" for all women, analysts try to formulate generalisable statements about the conditions and dimensions of the ability to act. Poststructuralist, constructivist as well as body-phenomenological approaches play a role here. In the course of debates on post-humanism, the demarcations between human and non-human beings as well as between humans and things/artefacts have been increasingly analysed, and the terms 'nature' and 'life' are being discussed intensely in this context.

History of philosophy

- The history of philosophy has been enriched by the rediscovery of women philosophers from throughout the history of European/Western philosophy who had been "forgotten" or made invisible. This has led to new reference books as well as a series of new editions. In addition, research in this field attempts to reconstruct vestiges of gender conflict also in texts that do not explicitly address gender subjects. Both strategies include reflections on the constructedness of "history" and "philosophy" and aim at a re-evaluation of marginalised forms of thinking.

The scientific field of gender studies within philosophy is extremely dynamic. In the past 40 years, comprehensive knowledge in the different areas of philosophy has been developed and a number of women authors have achieved the status of "classics" (particularly Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler). However, the field is subject to constant change and development. This is partially due to the energy of international debates in gender studies. Mainly, however, these developments are the result of the lively critical examination of new social and scientific/technological challenges. Thus, technological and biological sciences, ecology, the importance of globalisation processes and questions of (post-)colonialism have become central issues in recent years.

Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

The following content should be integrated into all philosophy courses. This is because gender studies in philosophy deals with basic problems in the central concepts and theories of the mainstream. Thus, it is not simply "extra knowledge" that can be taught separately. Wherever the basic orientation of the various branches of philosophy and the interpretation of "classic" philosophical writers is questioned, gender studies in the area of philosophy should be taught within the context of what is being critiqued.

If this cannot currently be integrated into the courses, we recommend creating special gender modules or module elements. There should be at least one module (or module element) from the area of theoretical and practical philosophy, and an advanced module "Philosophical Gender Studies". The modules could be constructed as follows:

1. Knowledge, power, gender

This module should cover the history of philosophy as well as present-day philosophy. It should include a) principles of feminist scientific and rationality critique, and b) feminist approaches to philosophy of science and epistemology. It would also be advisable to c) make these critiques and re-conceptualisations concrete using current examples and debates, and relating them to current developments in the field of philosophy of science.

2. Sociality, politics, ethics

This module should cover the history of philosophy as well as present-day philosophy. It should cover a) analyses of the androcentrism of traditional and contemporary conceptions of the individual, society and politics, and b) principles and problems in the current feminist philosophical debate on this topic area.

3. Feminist philosophy

This module should focus on a) the origins of the field of "feminist philosophy" and current debates and developments. This includes discussions of inter- and transdisciplinarity in philosophical gender studies and b) methodological reflection. This should include teaching various methods of textual criticism and strategies for concept and theory building in order to enable students to independent research in the field of philosophical gender studies.

Degree Stage:

The above content should be integrated into all degree stages. Modules 1 and 2 can be taught in BA courses from the second semester onwards. The third module is designed to be an advanced module and should thus only be taught in later semesters. It is vital that there is also the opportunity for more detailed study in MA courses.

Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

- Gary, Ann, Serene Khader, Alison Stone (eds.): Companion to Feminist Philosophy. London und New York: Routledge 2017
- Mikkola, Mari (ed.): Beyond Speech: Pornography and Analytic Feminist Philosophy. New York: Oxford University Press 2017
- Landweer, Hilge, Isabella Marcinski (ed.): Dem Erleben auf der Spur. Feminismus und die

Philosophie des Leibes, Bielefeld: transcript 2016

- Landweer Hilge, Catherine Newmark, Simone Miller, Christine Kley (Hg): Philosophie und die Potenziale der Gender Studies. Peripherie und Zentrum im Feld der Theorie, Bielefeld: transcript 2012
- Hagengruber, Ruth, Rodrigues, Ana (eds.): Von Diana zu Minerva. Philosophierende Aristokratinnen des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 2010
- Stone, Alison: An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy. Cambridge und Malden: Polity Press 2007
- Narayan, Uma, Sandra Harding (eds.): Decentering the Centre. Philosophy for a Postcolonial, Multicultural and Feminist World. Bloomington und Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2000

See also the series: Feminist Interpretations of ... /Re-Reading the Canon, Pennsylvania State University Press

Journals:

- PhiloSOPHIA. A Journal of Continental Feminism | [Website](#)
- Hypathia. A Journal of Feminist Philosophy. | [Website](#)