Is gender natural or not? This is a recent debate among feminists (Grosz vs. Butler), enhanced by contributions from transgender theorists (Kessler & Mckenna), but it has an ancient lineage, beginning with Plato, who used it not only to argue that women should become philosopher-queens, but also to introduce his doctrines of nature and being. This course begins and ends with recent thinkers (Fausto-Sterling & Califia), but tries to clarify it through an intervening survey of differing accounts: Greeks (Plato vs. Aristotle), Catholics (Aquinas & George), queer theorists (Morland & Hennessy), evolutionary biologists (e.g., Roughgarden & Ridley), evolutionary psychologists (Campbell & Buss), philosophers of science (Dupre & Mameli), genealogists of selfhood (Nietzsche & Foucault), and Sophists (Greeks & Rorty). One goal of the course will be to answer our central question (Is gender natural?), but a more important goal will be to consider how much is at stake whichever answer one favors. For above all, this course aims to show, every answer to this question makes commitments to a specific understanding of body and mind, nature and being.

This course is, in a way, four courses. It is cross-listed between Philosophy and WSGS (Women’s Studies and Gender Studies), but it is also cross-listed in both disciplines between the graduate and the under-graduate level. One of the professor’s tasks will thus be to sustain a conversation at the intersection of these various “courses.” Common ground for everyone will be not only the readings and an interest in the central question of the course, but also two exams: a take-home midterm and a final exam. Study-guides for each will be distributed in advance of the exams themselves. The purpose of these exams will be to motivate and evaluate each participant’s immersion in the diverse theoretical languages of the course. For only by learning lessons from each of these languages will it be possible for anyone to contribute to a reasoned discussion of our question. Each participant will also write a final paper, although the expectations for these papers will depend on the section for which they have been written. It will not be necessary to buy any books for this course, as all the readings will be made available on Blackboard as PDFs. These will be excerpts from ...

Grosz (Becoming Undone), Butler (Gender Trouble, Bodies that Matter), Striker and Aizura (The Transgender Studies Reader 2), Plato (Meno, Republic), the Sophists (fragments), Aristotle (Physics, Parts of Animals, Politics), Aquinas (Summa Theologica II-II questions 153–54, Supplementum questions 41–68), George (What is Marriage? Man and Woman), Hall and Jagose (The Routledge Queer Studies Reader), Darwin (Origin of the Species), Ridley (The Red Queen), Roughgarden (Evolution’s Rainbow), Barrett (The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology), Buss (Evolutionary Psychology), Dupre (The Disorder of Things), Nietzsche (Genealogy of Morality, Twilight of the Idols), Foucault (History of Sexuality) Rorty (Contingency, Irony, Solidarity), Fausto-Sterling (Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World).

The PHIL 685 section satisfies two area requirements: Ancient and Contemporary.