



Early Modern Women Philosophers

PHIL 496-61 / WSGS 458-01

PHIL 536-61 / WSGS 673-01

Wednesdays 5:00-7:40 pm

Dr. Daniel Selcer



PERHAPS, SHE SUGGESTED, MIND AND BODY ARE NOT SO DIFFERENT AFTER ALL.



Still typically excluded from the philosophical canon, early modern women made significant conceptual contributions to and interventions in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political theory, and the philosophical foundations of modern science. Feminist historians of philosophy have now effectively demonstrated that to ignore this fundamentally distorts the history of early modern philosophy (and also perhaps makes it more boring). Grounded in their methodological approaches, the seminar will engage primary texts by women philosophers (and occasionally their allies and interlocutors) written in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including Élisabeth de Bohême, Margaret Cavendish, Émilie du Châtelet, Anne Conway, Olympe de Gouges, and François Poullain de la Barre.

Though ‘gender’ in the sense we understand it today was not yet an explicitly formulated category, these philosophers critically engage theories of embodiment, knowledge-production, and politics in ways we can now only describe in its terms, establishing rich theoretical models for arraying experience and experiment, reason and passion, intellectual and political equality, as well as simultaneously metaphysical, ‘natural philosophical’ (i.e., scientific), and social accounts of power.

The seminar will require active intellectual and discursive participation. Written work may engage our primary texts from any relevant disciplinary or multidisciplinary perspective. The undergraduate crosslists are intended for advanced students majoring in any liberal arts discipline who are interested in philosophy or gender studies; they require no specific background. The graduate crosslists also requires no specific background, though it will be useful to have some training either in philosophy, the early modern period (whatever the discipline), or historical approaches to gender (whatever the period or discipline).

This course satisfies the modern philosophy distribution requirement for the Philosophy graduate programs.