

PHIL 4500: SEMINAR IN FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY, FALL 2012

Course Director: Professor A. MacLachlan
Office Hrs: Wed 2.30-4.30pm S418 Ross
Email: amacla@yorku.ca

Class Location: Ross Bldg South 421
Class Time: Thursday, 2.30pm-5.30pm
(Note: contact me by email, not phone)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This seminar provides an intensive study of select, recent, feminist philosophical writings. This semester, we will focus on a question that is increasingly relevant to thinkers engaged in moral, social, and political philosophy: the nature and limits of *repair*. From the artifacts around us to our personal relationships and the broader social fabric of our communities – not to mention our own agency and personhood – the worlds we live in are subject to wear and tear, violence, and fissure. We engage in a number of mechanisms for correcting these damages: physical acts of mending alongside apologies, reparations, and the work of courts and truth commissions. Ultimately, philosopher Elizabeth Spelman writes, “to repair is to acknowledge and respond to the fracturability of the world in which we live in a very particular way” (6). By engaging with the work of feminists Elizabeth Spelman, Margaret Walker, and Susan Brison, we will take up issues surrounding the repair and reconstruction of agency following violence (apologies, amends, reparations, and narrative reconstruction), while critically exploring the theoretical frameworks provided by these philosophers.

COURSE READINGS:

Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*. Princeton UP, 2003.
Elizabeth Spelman, *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*. Beacon Press, 2002.
Margaret Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing*. CUP, 2006.
All three are available at the York University Bookstore, and copies are on reserve at the Scott library. Please let me know if you have trouble purchasing or accessing them.

You are expected to come to class having read and reflected on the readings, and be prepared to respond and discuss the author’s position, arguments and examples. I will clarify any confusion, answer your questions, and guide our class conversations.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this course:

1. You will be able to engage in key contemporary discussions in feminist ethical theory, and to identify and evaluate the insights, values, and theories underlying various positions in those discussions.
2. You will be able to identify and respond to philosophical questions about moral agency, responsibility and repair, evaluating key concepts and assumptions behind those questions, and you will be able to form thoughtful and sophisticated views of your own.
3. You will be able to think critically about the relationships between philosophical ethics, feminist theory, and gender politics, and to apply that thinking to concrete scenarios.
4. You will have developed advanced analytic and communicative skills in philosophy; namely, the ability to articulate and defend a coherent thesis within an essay, as well as the ability to absorb, synthesize, and reflect upon complex information gained from reading assignments or in a classroom setting.

York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity and are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty: www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/acadhonesty.htm

Students are also expected to review the Academic Integrity website. www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There are six components to your course assessment in PHIL 4500:

a) Weekly Responses: (25% of final grade; 8 responses worth 3% + 1% bonus)

A short, critical response to the week's readings, that explores and responds to a particular claim, argument or example of interest, to be emailed by **5pm** the day *before* class. Your response should include a question for discussion. You may 'pass' on three weeks' readings.

b) In-Class Seminar Presentation: (20% of final grade)

A *short* (10-12 minute) class presentation over the course of the semester; this will include a handout and at least 2 questions for class discussion. Specific instructions and a sign-up sheet will be given out on the first day of class, **September 6**.

c) Final Paper, First Draft: (12% of final grade)

Paper topics and specific instructions will be given out in class on **October 11**.

You will submit two electronic copies of your paper draft (7-10 pages double-spaced): one to me, and one to another student in the class, with whom I will pair you in advance. Due **November 8** by the beginning of class.

d) Peer Criticism: (13% of final grade)

You will be asked to provide constructive, *respectful* feedback on your partner's paper draft. Keep in mind, he or she will be offering the same service to you. Each of you will submit your comments to your partner and to me. You will be assessed on how careful, thorough and constructive your comments are. Due **November 22** at the beginning of class.

e) Final Paper, Final Draft: (20% of final grade)

You will be expected to edit and revise your draft in light of your partner's comments and mine. Your paper will be evaluated both on its quality and on its relative *improvement* from earlier drafts. 10-12 pages double-spaced; due **December 6** by 9am (electronic copies to amacla@yorku.ca and to www.turnitin.com).

f) Participation: (10% of final grade)

This includes your attendance, your respectful and engaged verbal contributions to class discussion and group work (this is a matter of quality, and *not* quantity, of contributions) and *especially*, your participation in our class's online discussion forums (you can, for example, choose to share your weekly responses online, or to pose a question regarding the readings the night before class). If you feel uncomfortable speaking in a classroom setting, coming to office hours and pertinent email inquiries (again, quality not quantity, please) will also count toward your grade. Alternatively, you can contribute to your participation grade by keeping a class journal, into which you record your reflections and thoughts on the course readings and class discussion, and which you will submit to me by the end of the semester (**December 6**).

Late work (or a missed test) will only be accepted without penalty if you have prior approval from me, or in the event of a documented emergency. All other work will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day. After 5 days it will not be accepted.

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SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

| Date: | Topic: | Required Readings (complete <i>before</i> class) |
|-------|---|---|
| 6/9 | Week One: Introduction to the Course | <i>NONE</i> |
| 13/9 | Week Two: Thinking about Repair | Spelman, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 (pp. 1-50) Cheshire Calhoun, "Emotional Work" (4 pgs) |
| 20/9 | Week Three: Justice and Repair <i>Guest Lecturer: No Presentations</i> | Spelman, Chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 50-101) |
| 27/9 | Week Four: the Irreparable and the Irredeemable | Spelman, Chapters 6 and 7 (pp. 102-139) |
| 4/10 | Week Five: What is Moral Repair? <i>Film: Death and the Maiden (Ariel Dorfman/Roman Polanski)</i> Note: the subject matter of this film is disturbing; check IMDB and use your judgment. Attendance won't be taken. | Walker, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-39) |
| 11/10 | Week Six: Hope and Trust | Walker, Chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 40-109) |
| 18/10 | Week Seven: Resentment and Assurance | Walker, Chapter 4 (pp. 110-150) |
| 25/10 | Week Eight: Forgiveness | Walker, Chapter 5 (pp. 151-190) |
| 1/11 | <i>Co-Curricular Days: No Class</i> | <i>NONE</i> |
| 8/11 | Week Nine: Making Amends Rough Drafts Due | Walker, Chapter 6 (pp. 191-231) |
| 15/11 | Week Ten: Surviving | Brison, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-36) |
| 22/11 | Week Eleven: Remembering Peer Criticism Due | Brison, Chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 37-84) |
| 29/11 | Week Twelve: Forgetting Final Paper due on December 6 at 9am | Brison, Chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 85-118) |

Please Note: some of the topics in PHIL 4500 are very personal, and may be painful to discuss. If you have particular circumstances you feel may prevent you from participating fully in the class or that require you absent yourself from a particular week's discussion, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can make all the necessary arrangements. Disclosures will remain private & confidential