

**PHIL 4500: SEMINAR IN FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY**  
**FALL 2011**

Course Director: A. MacLachlan  
Office Hours: Tues, 2pm-4pm, S418 Ross  
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Class Location: McLaughlin Coll. 216  
Class Time: Thursday, 2.30pm-5.30pm  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This seminar provides an intensive study of recent feminist philosophical writings. This semester, we will focus on a question central to feminist theory and practice: namely, what it means to become and live as a self and as a moral agent under social conditions of inequality, oppression and even violence. By engaging with the work of feminists Claudia Card, Susan Brison and Lisa Tessman, we will take up philosophical issues of personal identity, responsibility, moral luck, moral damage and even moral virtue, 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.  
Claudia Card, *The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck*. Temple UP, 1996.  
Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*. Oxford UP, 2005.

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. *Burdened Virtues* is also available as an e-book through the York Library website.

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 personal identity, moral responsibility and individual character, evaluating key concepts and assumptions behind those questions, and you will be able to form thoughtful and sophisticated views of your own in response to them.
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: (<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/acadhone.htm>)  
Students are also expected to review the materials on the Academic Integrity website. (<http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity>).

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**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

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

a) Weekly Responses: (20% of final grade; 10 responses worth 2% each)

A short, critical response to each week's readings, that explores and responds to a particular claim, argument or example of interest. You may 'pass' once or write 11 and discount your lowest mark.

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

A *short* (10-15 minute max) 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.

c) Final Paper, First Draft: (10% of final grade)

Paper topics and specific instructions will be given out in class on **October 6**.

You will submit two electronic copies of your paper draft: one to me, and one to another student in the class, with whom I will pair you in advance.

8-12 pages double-spaced; due **November 3** by the beginning of class.

d) Peer Criticism: (15% 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 17** at the beginning of class.

e) Final Paper, Final Draft: (25% 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.

10-15 pages double-spaced; due **December 6** by 9am (electronic copies to me and to [www.turnitin.com](http://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).

If you feel uncomfortable speaking in a classroom setting, contributions to online forums, 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) |
|-------|--|--|
| 8/9   | Week One: Introduction   | <i>NONE</i>                                      |
| 15/9  | Week Two: Responsibility and Moral Luck                                | Card, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-48)                |
| 22/9  | Week Three: Gender and Character                                       | Card, Chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 49-96)               |
| 29/9  | Week Four: Terror, Gratitude, Obligation                               | Card, Chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 97-139)              |
| 6/10  | Week Five: Race and Sexuality  | Card, Chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 140-182)             |
| 13/10 | <i>Co-Curricular Week</i><br><i>(no class)</i>                         | <i>NONE</i>                                      |
| 20/10 | Week Six: The Self under Oppression                                    | Tessman, Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-32)   |
| 27/10 | Week Seven: Moral Damage   | Tessman, Chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 33-80)            |
| 3/11  | Week Eight: Response and Resistance<br><b>Rough Drafts Due</b>         | Tessman, Chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 81-132)           |
| 10/11 | Week Nine: Burdened Virtues  | Tessman, Chapter 6 and Conclusion (pp. 133-168)  |
| 17/11 | Week Ten: Surviving<br><b>Peer Criticism Due</b>                       | Brison, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-36)              |
| 24/11 | Week Eleven: Remembering   | Brison, Chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 37-84)             |
| 1/12  | Week Twelve: Forgetting<br><b>Final Paper due on December 6 at 9am</b> | 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.\*\*