Drawing the sex/gender distinction was (arguably) the inaugural move of second wave feminism. Contemporary feminism is (unquestionably) preoccupied with what to make of the distinction. Should it be revised, accepted, rejected? The seminar’s fundamental aim is to determine what this distinction is (or: what we might want it to be). Much of the traditional focus has been on the question: What is gender? But an equally important (and surprisingly difficult) question is What is sex? We need to ask: What (if anything) is the point of distinguishing sex and gender? How does drawing the distinction further the cause of women? (If it does: does it?) Is there a single category “woman” or is talk of “women” ineluctably exclusionary? Is the sex/gender distinction useful? Or is it misleading, misguided, or wrongheaded? It is important to bear in mind that there are any number of ways of drawing the distinction. A fundamental question is: What is the best way of formulating it?

Ours will be a philosophical investigation. What it is to pursue these questions in this way, how philosophy can contribute to (or hinder) the investigation are additional issues to be taken up. The seminar presupposes no prior work in the philosophy of feminism and can serve as an introduction to the field. Rather than surveying the subject, we can shall attempt to get a sense of the whole by focusing on one central, illuminating part. The seminar will address relevant issues in metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of language, the philosophy of biology, and social and political philosophy.

26 September. Introduction

Mikkola “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender” (2012)
Haslanger “Gender and Race (What) are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” (2000)

3 October. The psychiatric distinction and its feminist appropriation

Stoller Sex and Gender (1968)
Millet Sexual Politics (1969)

10 October. Gender as identity and social position

Ruben “Traffic in Women” (1975)
17 October. Feminist origins of the sex/gender distinction

    de Beauvoir  The Second Sex (1949)

24 October. The particularist critique of the sex/gender distinction

    Spelman  Inessential Woman (1988)
    Mikkola  “Elizabeth Spellman, Gender Realism, and Women” (2006)

31 October. The post-structuralist critique of the sex/gender distinction.

    Butler  Gender Trouble (1990)
    -------  Bodies that Matter (1993)

7 November. Is sex binary?

    Fausto-Sterling  Sexing the Body

14 November. Is gender wholly independent of sex?

    Money  “Psychosexual Differentiation”
    Colapinto  As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl

28 November. Thanksgiving. No class

5 December. Whither the sex/gender distinction in transgender experience?

    Bergman  The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You

Course requirements

Attendance and participation at all seminar meetings, seminar presentation (analyzing a key argument or claim in a reading and leading the discussion), and a term paper (about 12-15 pages in length) on some topic central to course themes, subject to approval by the instructor

Texts

Most readings will be made electronically available via electronic reserves. The following books should be purchased.

    S. de Beauvoir  The Second Sex (Vintage)
    S. Bergman  The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You (Arsenal)
    J. Butler  Gender Trouble (Routledge)
    J. Colapinto  As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl (Harper Perennial)
    A. Fausto-Sterling  Sexing the Body (Basic Books)
    E. Spelman  Inessential Woman (Beacon Press)