PHIL 406 A: PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS IN FEMINISM

- Winter 2017

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Meeting Time: MW 1:30pm - 3:20pm
Location: SIG 228
SLN: 18961
Instructor: Alison Wylie
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ADDITIONAL DETAILS:

Critics of the very idea of feminist philosophy of science insist that, because feminism is an explicitly political stance, it can have nothing to do with science or how we understand it philosophically. What distinguishes scientific inquiry and understanding is its ability to transcend partisan, political interests and the relativism that threatens if these are allowed a role in science. The epistemic ideals implicit in such arguments have come in for sharp and sustained criticism in recent decades, especially by feminist philosophers of science who have built a compelling case for recognizing that scientific knowledge – its production, its content and its authority – is inevitably configured by a range of social, contextual factors; there is no escape to a ‘view from nowhere’. And yet, feminist philosophers of science routinely insist that this robust contextualism need not entail a reductive relativism.

The aim of this seminar is to explore the range of positions articulated by feminist philosophers of science in response both to conventional ‘aperspectival’ ideals and charges of relativism. Our point of departure will be a close reading of sophisticated arguments for feminist empiricism as developed by Helen Longino and Lynn Hankinson Nelson. We then turn to an appraisal of several variants of feminist standpoint theory, as developed by Nancy Harstock, Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, and Dorothy Smith, and consider the agential models advocated by Karen Barad and Donna Haraway. The quarter will close with discussion of the growing body of critical race and feminist literature that articulates jointly epistemic and political/ethical conceptions of trustworthiness as a regulative ideal for scientific practice.

TEXT: Feminism and Philosophy of Science: An Introduction, Elizabeth Potter.

Catalog Description:
Detailed examination of questions raised by recent feminist scholarship in particular areas of philosophy, such as political theory, ethics, epistemology, or philosophy of science. Emphasis varies.

GE Requirements:
Diversity (DIV)
Individuals and Societies (I&S)
Writing (W)

Credits: 5.0