

Gender and Political Theory POL 365

Prof. Elena Gambino

Weds. 9:15am-12:15pm

Office Hours: Weds. 12:30-1:30pm

Course Description

Although we often think of “gender” as a distinctly modern concept, it has in fact been the subject of nearly uninterrupted debate amongst political theorists since at least the time of the Ancient Greeks. In this course, we will trace the shifting meanings of gender – and its relationship to sex, sexuality, the household, the economy, and political authority – in its changing relation to the field of political theory. The course will argue, at its most basic, that questions about the complex relationships between sexuality, marriage, reproduction, and children are – and have always been – foundational building blocks for conceptualizing political life. By foregrounding this building block throughout the canon of political theory, key questions will emerge: Are “gendered” issues something apart from politics, a “private sphere” belonging only to intimate feelings like love and sentiment? Does it serve as an analogy for politics, where “proper” rulers such as fathers and masters reign like kings? Can justice be achieved in the family, or is the family itself an oppressive institution? To what extent are sexuality, reproduction, and children political *in themselves*?

We will tackle these questions in six units by tracing the ways that political theorists have understood the role of gender in political life from the Ancient Greeks to the present. While approaches to understanding the significance of the household will vary across time and thinkers, we also emphasize the surprisingly persistent specter of the family throughout the tradition of political theory.

Course Goals

- Understand and articulate the historical significance of gender and its sexual, economic, and cultural implications for politics over time through a mixture of formal and informal writing as well as in-class discussion.
- Connect historical arguments about the role of the household to contemporary debates over sexual, reproductive, and other political discourses in two “Contemporary Resonance” response papers.
- Present “Contemporary Resonance” response in two small-group presentation sessions.
- Make sustained, critical arguments about required course texts in two major papers.

Course Readings and Materials

All course readings will be available in PDF format on Canvas. These readings will be available for download and/or printing at least a week (but often well before that) prior to the assigned date. You will need to budget plenty of time to complete the course readings, but I strongly

recommend completing your readings on pace with the course each week rather than reading ahead.

Other course materials, including links to Prof. Gambino's video lectures, PowerPoint slides, and other relevant links/resources for class discussions will all be available and public on the course Canvas site throughout the course of the semester. As detailed below, video lectures for each will be available no later than 5pm on Tuesday evenings, and will be posted as links on the canvas site along with accompanying PowerPoint slides and any other resources you may need for that week's discussion.

Class Sessions and Weekly Assignments

This class will make use of a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning tools, meaning that you will complete much of the coursework within each week on your own timeline AND we will meet for an hour-long discussion over Zoom on Wednesdays.

Each week, your responsibilities are:

- To complete the week's assigned readings by no later than the start of class time on Wednesdays.
- To view Prof. Gambino's video lectures (these will be posted on the course Youtube channel and linked on Canvas **no later than 5pm on Tuesdays**) by 11am on Wednesdays.
- To join the class discussion session over Zoom on **Wednesdays from 11am-12pm**.
 - Zoom discussions will draw on and build upon the background information and framing presented in the video lectures, so it is really important that you watch these before attending the discussion!
 - Discussion sessions will often involve watching a short video clip to discuss in relation to the readings over Zoom's screen share function, holding small group discussions in breakout rooms, and sharing your responses to "in class writing" prompts that you'll be asked to complete during the video lectures.

Written Assignments

The grade breakdown of this course will be as follows:

- Attendance and Participation: 10%
- 12 "In-Class" Writing Responses: 10%
- 2 Contemporary Resonance Papers: 30% (15% each)
- Contemporary Resonance "Final" Presentation: 10%
- 2 Analytical Papers: 40% (20% each)

Attendance and Participation (10%): I expect all students in this course to attend class, complete assigned readings, and engage with your fellow students, and a success in this class is very much tied to all three. Although part of your grade for this class is tied to participation in our group dialogues, it is important to remember that **participation can mean many things; it doesn't always mean talking the most!** While participating in class discussion is certainly welcome and encouraged, there are also other ways to contribute to a healthy and productive class discussion: sometimes it means making space for others to participate, sometimes it means asking a question, sometimes it means attending office hours to clarify the readings or to seek

support from me. Your participation grade will not only reflect the number of times you raise your hand – this course will reward great class citizens of whatever sort.

“In-Class Writing” Responses (10%):

Throughout the semester, my video lectures will include opportunities for you to pause the video and take ~5 minutes to write an informal reaction to a discussion question. These are intended to get you thinking towards our Zoom sessions, and will not be graded for their content. **“In-Class Writing” responses are due on Canvas by the beginning of our class Zoom sessions at 11am on Wednesdays. I expect you to complete a total of 12 “in-class” writing assignments over the course of the semester (this means you can miss up to two weeks with no questions asked) in order to receive full credit for this part of your grade.**

Video lectures will be posted by NO LATER than 5pm on Tuesdays, which means you may post your response to the “in-class” writing prompts anytime on Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning.

Contemporary Resonance Papers (30%): While we will be focusing primarily on ways that political theorists and activists have historically conceptualized the household, these issues are by no means limited to the past. Each day stories from around the world highlight the ways that households, families, children, sexualities, and other themes from this course persist as political issues. In the Contemporary Resonance assignment, your job is to find a recent news article, podcast, or other media (documentary, longform magazine article, and so on) that speaks to the themes of this course and put it in conversation with one of our course texts.

Contemporary Resonance Papers should be 2 pages long, and should include a brief summary of the main ideas/arguments of your contemporary media piece, an explanation of how and why you are using your chosen course text in relation to this contemporary issue, and a reflection on how the contemporary issue challenges, expands, reinforces, or otherwise interacts with our class discussion. I will discuss more details of this assignment in class.

Contemporary Resonances Group Presentation (10%): The day of the scheduled final exam, we will devote a class zoom session to presentations of ONE of your contemporary resonance papers. **These will not be formal presentations, but they will be graded for your preparation and clarity.**

We will break into three or four smaller groups, where you will present your ideas to your classmates in an informal way round-robin style. Your classmates will be responsible for asking you questions (and keeping track of the discussion via a note-taking template!), and part of your grade for this assignment will be the extent to which you engage your classmates’ work. Attendance for the presentation sessions is mandatory; failure to attend or participate will result in a failing grade for this assignment.

Paper Assignments (40%): You will also be responsible for writing two traditional course papers on prompts that I will distribute in class. These papers will not require you to do any outside reading or research, but will require time, revision, and clarity. I will be grading you not on *what* you argue, but on the strength of your argument, which is to say that a significant portion of your grade will be based on your use of textual evidence, a clear point of view on the texts and questions at hand, and an original argument.

Course Schedule

Module 1

9/2: *The Household in the Polis*

Aristotle, *The Politics*

Selections: Book 1

9/9: *Familial and Legal Authority*

Aristotle, *Antigone*

9/16: *Slavery and Wifehood*

Margaret Urban Walker, "Made a Slave, Born a Woman"

Module 2

9/23: *Gender, Christianity, and the Social Contract*

John Locke, *First Treatise of Government*

Selections: Book 1, Chapters 1-2 (pp. 141-151)

Book 1, Chapters 5-6 (pp. 171-194)

Book 1, Chapter 9 (pp. 202-216)

Amelia Lanyer, "Eve's Apology"

9/30: *How do you solve a problem like "Sophie"?*

Rousseau, *Emile*

Selections

Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, selections

DUE: CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE PAPER 1

Module 3

10/7: *Marx on the Family*

Communist Manifesto

Dalla Costa and James, "Wages for Housework"

10/14: *Feminist Readings of the Nuclear Family*

Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*

Selections: "Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women," (pp. 61-133)

10/21: Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*

Selections, Chapters 1, 3 and 4 (pp. 10-21; 37-63)

10/28: Freud, “Dora” and Shulamith Firestone “Freudianism: A Misguided Feminism”

11/14: Foucault, “We Other Victorians,” “Objective,” “Method,” and “Domain” in *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1*

DUE: ANALYTIC PAPER 1

Module 4

11/11: Davis, “Reflections on the Black Women’s Role in the Community of Slaves”

11/18: Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice*

Selections: “What Could Free Possibly Mean?”

“Racial Violence and the Post-Emancipation Struggle for Intimate Equality”

11/25: No Class

12/2: Warner, “The Ethics of Sexual Shame” and “What’s Wrong with Normal?” in *The Trouble with Normal*

12/9: Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens” and “Deviance as Resistance”

DUE: ANALYTIC PAPER 2

Final “Exam” – Date TBD

DUE: CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE PAPER 2

CLASS CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE DISCUSSION OVER ZOOM