UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Term 2 | 2018

PHIL 560: PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE:
Feminist Philosophy of Science

Instructor: Professor Alison Wylie
Class meetings: Mondays 10:00-1:00, BUCH D324
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Seminar Description

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 knowledge is its ability to transcend partisan, political interests and the relativism that threatens if these are allowed a role in science. The epistemic ideals that underpin such arguments have come in for sharp and sustained criticism in recent decades. Feminist philosophers of science and science studies scholars have been prominent among those who have argued that the ideal of "value-free" science is untenable; the production, content and authority of scientific knowledge is deeply configured by social, contextual factors. While their critics object that such arguments to entail a corrosive relativism, feminist philosophers of science rarely embrace such conclusions; they take up the challenge of systematically reformulating epistemic ideals like objectivity in more nuanced and practicable terms. The aim of this seminar is to explore the range of positions articulated by feminist philosophers of science in both critical and constructive responses to conventional "value-free" ideals.

Following the line of argument developed by Elizabeth Potter in *Feminist Philosophy of Science* (2006), our point of departure will be a sampling of the feminist critiques of science and research programs that catalyzed feminist science studies, and the case Lynn Hankinson Nelson makes for taking a socially naturalized approach to understanding their philosophical implications. We then consider several ways of conceptualizing the role of social values in scientific practice. These include Helen Longino's contextual empiricism and arguments from inductive risk updated by Heather Douglas; critiques of these "gap arguments"; and alternatives to them that recognize a deeper entanglement of epistemic and social values. In connection with this last we consider the "aims approach" proposed by Elizabeth Anderson and recently developed by Kristen Intemann and Inma Melo-Martin, and Kevin Elliott. A central question here is: how, and in what form, does a diversity of situated experience and knowledge become a resource for scientific inquiry rather than a compromising source of bias or disabling dissent?

In the final segment of the course we discuss feminist standpoint theory as developed in the 1970s and 1980s by Nancy Hartsock and Dorothy Smith, and later expanded in scope by Sandra Harding and Patricia Hill Collins, among others. Our aim here will be to assess proposals for reconceptualizing objectivity in jointly epistemic and social/ethical terms: the proceduralist account offered by Longino, Harding's "strong objectivity," and approaches that centre on trust and trustworthiness. We juxtapose this literature with recent analyses of epistemic injustice based on essays drawn from the *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (2017). At the close of the term we turn to meta-philosophical questions and consider the goals and status of feminist philosophy of science as a form of "non-ideal" theory.

Course texts
Elizabeth Potter, *Feminism and Philosophy of Science* (Routledge, 2006).
All other readings are available on Canvas and/or through UBC Library Course Reserves.

Format and requirements
This is a reading-intensive course with the emphasis on seminar discussion. The requirements include five discussion posts (20%), in-class presentations and seminar participation (20%), and a thesis-driven term paper (60%). The details of the course requirements and policies are available on Canvas.