

# Topics in Feminist Political Philosophy: Gender, Objectification and Pornography

[DRAFT SYLLABUS]

24.611J Political Philosophy, Spring 2009  
Prof. Rae Langton and Prof. Sally Haslanger

In this course we'll focus on some topics to which feminist thinking has made important philosophical contributions: the controversial topic of pornography, in political and legal philosophy; and the related topic of objectification, which begins in moral philosophy but has connections with epistemology and politics. We'll naturally look at the issue of gender along the way, and draw on a variety of philosophical resources, ranging from liberal and feminist political theory, to speech act theory. We'll be looking at Rae and Sally's own work in these areas, and that of others including Simone de Beauvoir, Catharine MacKinnon, Ronald Dworkin, and Martha Nussbaum.

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*Stellar site:* <http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/24/sp09/24.611J/>

*Assessment:* one 20 page paper, plus one 10 minute presentation in final session.

*Readings:* some readings will be supplied at the course website, but it will be handy to have a copy of Rae's book, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). A fuller reading list will be given out in due course.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### 1. **Introduction: de Beauvoir.** February 3 (Rae and Sally)

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction and Ch. 1, pp. 33-37.

### 2. **MacKinnon.** February 10 (Rae and Sally)

Catharine MacKinnon, 'Francis Biddle's Sister,' in *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987);

Catharine MacKinnon, 'Method and Politics' in *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[February 17: Monday classes—no class]

### 3. **Gender and race.** February 24 (Sally)

Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" *Noûs* 34:1 (2000) 31-55.

### 4. **Objectification.** March 3 (Rae)

Martha Nussbaum, 'Objectification', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24 (1995), 249-291.  
Rae Langton, *Sexual Solipsism* (hereafter *SS*), Ch. 10, 'Autonomy-Denial in Objectification'  
(Oxford University Press, 2009).

**5. Objectification.** March 10 (Sally)

Sally Haslanger, "On Being Objective and Being Objectified," in *A Mind of One's Own*, 2<sup>nd</sup>  
edition, ed. L. Antony and C. Witt, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), pp. 209-253.

**6. Pornography: a liberal view.** 17 (Rae)

Ronald Dworkin, 'Do We Have a Right to Pornography?', *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge,  
Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

Rae Langton, *SS* Ch. 6. 'Whose Right? Ronald Dworkin, Women and Pornographers'.

Rae Langton, *SS* Ch. 7, 'Equality and Moralism: Response to Ronald Dworkin'.

[March 21: Spring Break—no class]

**7. Pornography and speech acts.** March 31 (Rae)

Langton, Chapter 1. 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts'. Also in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*  
22 (1993), 305-330.

MaryKate McGowan, 'Conversational Exercitives and the Force of Pornography', *Philosophy  
and Public Affairs* 31 (2003), 155-189.

**8. Objection: Pornography doesn't subordinate women.** April 7 (Rae)

Green, Leslie, 'Pornographizing, Subordinating, Silencing', in *Censorship and  
Silencing*, ed. Robert Post (Los Angeles: Getty, 1998).

Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and  
London: Routledge, 1997).

Langton, *SS* Ch. 4. 'Pornography's Authority? Response to Leslie Green'.

Langton, *SS* Ch. 5. 'Pornography's Divine Command? Response to Judith Butler'.

Langton and Caroline West, *SS* Ch. 8, 'Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game'.

**9. Objection: Pornography doesn't silence women.** April 14 (Rae)

Ronald Dworkin, 'Liberty and Pornography', *New York Review of Books* 15, Aug. 1991, 12-15.

Daniel Jacobson, 'Freedom of Speech Acts? A Response to Langton', *Philosophy  
and Public Affairs* 24 (1995), 64-79.

Langton, *SS* Ch. 2, 'Dangerous Confusion? Response to Ronald Dworkin'.

Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton, Chapter 3, 'Free Speech and Illocution'.

[April 21: Patriot's Day—no class]

**10. Title TBA.** April 28 (Sally)

Sally Haslanger, "But Mom, Crop-Tops *Are* Cute!" *Philosophical Issues* 17:1 (2007): 70-91.

**11. Title TBA.** May 5 (Sally)

**12. Student presentations.** May 12.