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)

2. MacKinnon. February 10 (Rae and Sally)
Catharine MacKinnon, ‘Francis Biddle’s Sister,’ in Feminism Unmodified (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987);

[February 17: Monday classes—no class]

3. Gender and race. February 24 (Sally)

4. Objectification. March 3 (Rae)

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


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

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)


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

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)

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)


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