

**PHIL 470/POLS 404: The Politics of the Body**  
**Final seminar paper: 25% of final grade**

Due by Friday April 5 at 4pm. Hand in to my office in Tory 11-27, please. Late penalties are one grade point (e.g. B>B-) per 24 hours or part of 24 hours thereafter, unless you have made prior arrangement (for good reasons) with me. Late papers may be submitted by e-mail as Word attachments.

Write no more than 2500 words (about 10 double-spaced, numbered pages), including any footnotes and your references page. Use any standard referencing style, but please be sure to indicate all citations and quotations very clearly (review the policy on plagiarism, and ask me if you are unsure about this).

Write on any one of the following topics (or a narrowed-down or tweaked version of one of the topics), or pose and answer your own question. You may also re-pose and answer any of the critical questions you (or anyone else) asked in your short assignments. All of these ideas are only jumping-off points for you to explore an idea or problem that the course has made vivid for you.

Please run a short plan for your paper by me (in person after class or during office hours, or over e-mail) by March 27 at the latest. I am most willing to meet with any of you to discuss your ideas, notes, or draft as you work on the paper. You should also feel free to e-mail me a draft of your paper for comments, but note two things: 1. it must be coherently written as a proper draft (no rambling “notes” that I have to make into sense), and 2. I will not be able to make written comments on drafts submitted after April 1 at 4pm. This paper is understood as a position paper—that is, you must take and argue a position, rather than only surveying a literature or marshalling evidence in support of a solely empirical claim. That said, a necessary part of any paper is also explaining a text or position or setting out a problem.

**Paper topics:**

1. Drew Leder writes that, “the body is always a place of vulnerability, not just to biological but to sociopolitical forces... This susceptibility of the body to the Other’s intentions, not just to illness and other organic forces, is a primary mechanism of dys-appearance” (1990, 98). Explain what Leder means by *dys-appearance*. What are “organic forces,” what are “sociopolitical forces,” and can they be readily distinguished? Why, if at all, does this matter for political theory?
2. Does the “phenomenological anatomy” that Leder outlines provide any useful political leverage? For what? (Work this through with reference to particular examples.)
3. What is a *discipline*, and what is *disciplinary power*, according to Michel Foucault? Does Foucault present his genealogy of discipline in a convincing way? Refer in your answer to at least one contemporary political problem that his account either explains well, or fails to explain.

4. Foucault states that “the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building; it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use” (1977, 205). Explain what this “figure of political technology” is. Is “Panopticism” still useful in explaining political life? Illustrate your answer with at least two examples.

5. What is wrong with prisons? Is anything right about them?

6. Sandra Bartky argues that feminine *assujettissement* under disciplinary power yields a constrained subject, but that the demand to give up femininity can equally be experienced as a form of “deskilling” or even self-hating. Should women then give up all the markers of femininity? Should everyone? How should we respond, politically, to this contradictory situation?

7. How should “woman’s ability to move freely in the world” (Chisholm 2008, 35) be understood by feminist thinkers? Is it a part of a political theory?

8. What is *experience*, and what role should it play in politics?

9. How does Sara Ahmed use the concept of “orientation” to offer a phenomenological account of sexuality? In what way is her article a critique of a “conservative sexual politics”? How might we disorient heterosexuality? (*Should* we?)

10. “What, then, is meant when we say that the body is a social construct?” (Salamon 2006, 581). How does she answer this question? How would you answer it, and what follows, politically?

11. According to Ladelle McWhorter, what is Foucault’s genealogy of race and racism? How does her account compare and contrast with Linda Alcoff’s (more) “phenomenological” account? Which account do you favour, and why?

12. Are we only gendered and raced “on the surface,” while sharing a common human embodiment “underneath”?

13. Alia Al-Saji argues that “western representations of veiled Muslim women are not simply about Muslim women themselves. Rather than representing Muslim women, these images fulfill a different function: they provide the foil or negative mirror in which western constructions of identity and gender can be positively reflected. It is by means of the projection of gender oppression onto Islam, specifically onto the bodies of veiled women, that such mirroring takes place. This constitutes...a form of racialization” (2010, 877). What does Al-Saji mean? Do you agree?

Some other themes you might pick up: *perception and the senses* (why the emphasis on *sight*, from Leder to Alcoff to Al-Saji? Is this a political problem?); *disability* (what is it? Does “dys-appearance” help us understand it? Do any of the texts we’ve read close down or open up discussion of disability in interesting ways?); etc.

## FAQ:

### 1. *What is a “position paper”?*

A position paper takes a theoretical question like the ones we’ve been posing and discussing in class, and develops a response that systematically defends a particular thesis.

### 2. *What kind of research should I do for my paper?*

Your paper will *not* be assessed on the basis of how much extra material you have read; it’s quite possible to get an A+ while citing only course readings. (Of course, you should do this accurately, charitably, and relevantly.) However, you will probably find it helpful to read two or three extra articles that have a more specific focus on the theme of your paper; I can make suggestions. Remember, though, that the most important thing is to *start writing early*. Don’t get bogged down in extra reading.

### 3. *How should I structure my paper?*

There are many different ways of writing a good paper. However, a good model to use is the old standby: introduction (preview of the paper, including a thesis statement); motivation of your question or problem, including or segueing to a concise presentation and juxtaposition of texts you’ve read in which this problem appears; the stating of your own argument; any anticipated objection to your position, followed by a response to the objection (repeat if necessary); conclusion (summarizing the paper). Many students work from an outline in which you’ve mapped out the various sections of your paper, the points you want to make, how the readings fit in, and so on. You may find it helpful to draw a “map” of your essay on a giant sheet of paper and refer back to it. Notice, though, that it’s mainly the practice of writing and revising that lends a paper its coherence. It’s hard to map out something you haven’t yet thought—although, often, useful to try anyway.

### 4. *Where do I start?*

There are two places it can help to start. One is with the essay question: ask yourself, “What motivates this question?” (notice that’s something you’ve worked on in your short assignments) “What theoretical problems does it point to?” “What sorts of off-the-cuff positions is a political theorist likely to adopt in answer to this question?” Write these brainstormings down—eventually they will form part of your paper. The other place to start if you are feeling overwhelmed is with the readings. Pick one or two articles that you think will be important to your essay, and write brief one-page summaries of them. Eventually you may incorporate these into the body of your essay. A third useful trick is to freewrite for 5 or (not more than) 10 minutes: just look at your essay question (or a more specific problem) and write in a stream-of-consciousness whatever you can in answer to the question. You can then edit this material, which is less daunting.

### 5. *How should I organise my time?*

Spend as much time on your writing (not reading, not “thinking”) as you can, and leave as much time for revisions of your first draft as possible. Don’t feel you have to work entirely alone: form a study group to discuss your ideas with other students in the class, or swap outlines or drafts. *Less* time spent working actively (through writing or critical discussion) is better than *more* time spent staring at a book or blank screen. Obviously, don’t leave this project until the last minute. If you start writing now, you’ll be able to test drive your ideas over the next couple of weeks.