WS 822-5 Graduate Seminar in Feminist Theory: European Feminisms

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This seminar will survey important feminist theories and theorists in Europe in their historical and intellectual contexts, from 1700 through 1960. Students will have the opportunity to read and analyze critical feminist thinkers and their major works, ranging from Mary Astell's, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies (1694/97), Mary Wollstonecraft’s, A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler, Appeal of One Half the Human Race… (1833), August Bebel’s Women Under Socialism (1879), Ellen Key, The Woman Movement (c.1912), Alexandra Kollontai, The Social Basis of the Women’s Movement, Vera Brittain, Testament of a Peace Lover, and various suffragists’ written works. In the last five weeks, we will do a detailed study of the most important feminist philosophical text of the 20th C, Simone de Beauvoir’s, The Second Sex (1949). Student papers may also treat contemporary European feminist theorists. We will discuss feminists’ positions on these and other issues: individualism and equal rights; marriage, maternity, and the family; nationalism, socialism, and internationalism, essentialism and post-modernism.

The seminar will include lectures on the historical and intellectual contexts in the first two thirds of the semester; both them and later, most of the class will be devoted to oral reports on key texts and class discussion of assigned texts.

Required readings:

Course requirements and Grading Structure:
Seminar participation 30% of final grade
Oral report on an important feminist text 15% of final grade
Short paper (5 – 7 pages) on another feminist text 15% of final grade
Proposal and bibliography for a term paper 10% of final grade
Term paper (15 – 20 pages) on major feminist theorist 30% of final grade

THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN’S STUDIES ENCOURAGES CLARITY OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION AND GOOD WRITING. STUDENTS WILL BE EVALUATED ON THESE SKILLS IN ALL COURSES GIVEN BY THE DEPARTMENT.