WS 102-3 – Introduction to Western Feminisms: Histories, Legacies, Resistances

Course Description:
What is feminism? When did it originate? What is its history? Is it a women’s concern only? Does it still speak to the sexed and gendered identities of our times? In addressing these questions, this course will examine the history of feminism in Western cultures from ancient times (Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions) to the mid-20th century. Our methodology will comprise the analysis of historical texts of various sources (religion, mythology, history, law, philosophy, medicine, and cultural representations) alongside their critical re-readings to illuminate the ways in which, throughout history and across geographies, women have fought, resisted, and subverted the knowledge that patriarchal discourses have construed about female identities and roles in society. Our focus, therefore, will be the understanding of the ways gender is produced through knowledge formation and the new ‘feminist’ visions that are produced through acts of resistance. Topics will include: definitions of feminism/s and feminist consciousness; theories of the origin of patriarchies; women’s role in religion (Judaism, Christianity, Muslim, and Native American); feminine symbolism in spiritual practices; struggles for emancipation and equal rights; maternal feminism; the suffrage movement in Europe and North America; female sexuality and reproduction; women and labour; women and race; women’s creativity; and female subjectivity in language.

Course Texts and Courseware:
Supplementary readings will be posted on WebCt.

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
20% Attendance and tutorial participation (includes Blog discussion)
10% Documentary analysis
20% Mid-term exam
25% Paper (6-7 pages, max 1,500 words) on a pre-second wave feminist
25% Final exam

Prerequisites: None