Gender, Sex, and Religion:  
Jewish and Christian foundations

I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”  
Alasdair MacIntyre,  

Prof. Ahuvia  
Office Location: TBA  
Office Hours:  
Email: mahuvia@uw.edu  

Spring 2016  
Location: MTWR  
Time: TBA

Class Description:  
The interpreters of the bible shaped the gendered categories and hierarchies that many readers take for granted today. In this class, students are invited to explore debates about these categories within ancient texts, within scholarship, and within society. To analyze biblical stories and their legacy in Judaism and Christianity, we will employ academic approaches from the fields of bible and literary criticism, history, anthropology, sociology, archaeology as well as gender and feminist studies.

Course learning objectives:

- Introduce students to foundational religious texts on the topic of sex and gender.
- Students will learn how to read texts closely and rigorously, recognizing their own preconceptions and the text’s assumptions about gender, sex, and sexuality.
- Students will develop an understanding of the politics of knowledge production in antiquity and grasp related ethical considerations for knowledge production today.
- Students will engage with multiple scholarly models for analyzing biblical texts, analyzing texts in their ancient historical and literary context as well as with contemporary gender-theory perspectives.
- Students will develop a more sophisticated understanding of the category of religion, differentiating theological, academic, and contemporary perspectives on critical social issues.
- Through daily reflections, class discussions, their own commentary, and final paper, students will develop their own voice and the capacity to link what they have learned in class to non-academic and academic careers and communities.

Course Requirements:  
Details for written assignments will be discussed in class sessions. This is an overview only.

- Discussion thread (20%)
  - Due on Canvas daily before class: In 1 paragraph students will identify and describe key idea in every secondary reading, paraphrasing it in their own words, and write 2 questions that they have about the reading or related topics.
- Article critique (oral presentation 10%; written follow-up 10%).
- Midterm (20%) and final exam (20%) will test students’ grasp of scholarly methods, basic religious concepts, dates, and names; graduate students will be in charge of organizing and leading study sessions for exams.
- 5-7 page final research paper (20%); graduate students are expected to submit research papers befitting graduate level study (10-15 pages).
Course Materials

- Coursepack
- Bal, Meike. *Death & Dissymmetry*
- Harvey, *Song and Memory: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition*

Recommended Resources:

- *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Gender Studies*
- *Encyclopedia Judaica* (available online)

Classroom Norms
Unit 1: In the Beginning… (March 28-31)

- 3.28 What is religion and what is the way of studying it?
  - Bring bibles to class.
  - Setting shared expectations
  - Basic religion- literacy quiz (Bible, Judaism, Christianity)
    - Intro to bible in academia

- 3.29 What is the bible and how do we read it?
  - Culture and history of the Jewish and Christian bibles.
  - How to use the Jewish Study Bible and other resources.

- 3.30 What is academic bible interpretation? gender, sex, sexuality and why study it?
  - Genesis 1-3 in JSB — What did the story of Adam & Eve mean in the ancient world?

- 3.31 What is a feminist approach to bible interpretation?
  - Genesis 1-3.
  - Phyllis Trible, “Eve & Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread”
  - Cheryl Exum, “Danger and Desire – Edenic Reflections.”

Supplementary

- 4.4 What is the Adam & Eve story about?
  - Genesis 1-3
  - Ilana Pardes, “Beyond Genesis 3” from Countertraditions in the Bible: a Feminist Approach

- 4.5 What is the Adam & Eve story about?
  - Ruether, “Three Classical Creation Stories,” Gaia & God.
  - Carol Meyers, “Women and the Domestic Economy of Early Israel”

- 4.6 What is the Adam & Eve story about?
  - Ilona Rashkow, “Throw Momma from the Garden a Kiss: Or Paradise Revisited,” Taboo or not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible

Unit 2: Biblical Families

- 4.7 What is a Womanist approach to the bible?
  - Genesis 12-16; 21.
  - Dolores Williams, Introduction and Chapter 1: “Hagar's Story: A route to black women’s issues,” Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk

Supplementary:
- Frymer-Kensky, “Hagar, My Other, My Self” Reading the Women of the Bible

- 4.11 Pursuing the perfect body: what is circumcision?
  - Genesis 17

  - Jennifer Kunst, circumcision chapter of Unprotected Texts
  - Eilberg-Schwartz, The Savage in Judaism

---

JSIS C and GWSS 334/534
HSTCMP 490/590

---
• 4.12 Abraham and the Binding of Isaac—What is biblical sacrifice of sons about?
  o Genesis 21:23:1
  o Carol Delaney, “The Legacy of Abraham”
  
  • Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar” Mimesis

• 4.13 What is Dinah’s story about?
  o Genesis 29:30, 34-35
  o Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, “The Dinah Affair”

• 4.14 A model man? Joseph’s story
  o Genesis 37, 39-45.
  o Kugel, “Joseph and his brothers,” How to Read the Bible, 176-187.

  • Ahuvia, “Sexual Violence” Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Gender

• 4.18 Sexual ethics & biblical marriage (levirate marriage, prostitution, etc.)
  o Genesis 38
  o Frymer-Kensky, “Royal Origins: Tamar,” Reading the Women of the Bible

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, “Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy,” Anti-Covenant: Reading Women’s Lives in the Hebrew Bible

Unit 3: Sex and Violence in the Hebrew Bible

• 4.19 Gender Violence in the book of Judges
  o Judges 1-5 (Deborah and Yael), 13-16 (Samson and Delilah)
  o Bal, Ch.1: “The Coherence of Politics and the Politics of Coherence,” Death & Dissymmetry

• 4.20 Jephthah’s daughter
  o Judges 11
  o Bal, Ch. 2: “Virginity and Entanglement”

• 4.21 The concubine at Gibeah – Is this about rape, politics, or gendered strife?
  o Judges 19-21 (cf. Genesis 19).
  o Bal, ch. 3: “Virginity Scattered” and excerpts from ch. 4: “Violence and the Sacred—Contribution to the Ethnography of Fatherhood”

• 4.25 David: King, messiah, lover
  o 2 Samuel 5-12
  o Frymer-Kensky, “Kings to the Rescue,” etc.
Unit 4: Biblical Purity

4.26 Leviticus: What is Biblical Purity?
- Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel”

4.27 Homosexuality in biblical law
- Leviticus 18-20
- Milgrom, “Does the Bible Prohibit Homosexuality?”

4.28 Women’s purity in the bible and ancient Judaism
- Leviticus 15 (with commentary)
- Mishnah Niddah 1-3
- Charlotte Fonrobert, “Framing Niddah,” Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender

5.2 The Song of Songs: Divine love, courtly love, or sexual love?
- The Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)
- Pardes, "I Am a Wall, and My Breasts like Towers": The Song of Songs and the Question of Canonization

Supplementary:
- Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality
- Brøosten, Love Between Women
- Brenner, A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs
- Jennifer Wright Knust, Unprotected Texts

Unit 5: Between the Bibles

5.4 Historical and Cultural Background: How did Hellenic culture impact ancient Judaism?
- Ben Sira, especially introduction, chapter 24, 42, and final hymn.

5.5 Fallen angels, women, and the origin of evil.
- 1 Enoch: the Book of Watchers

5.9 Where shall the ideal woman be found? (Harper Collins Study Bible—Apocrypha)
- Sketch out the ideal qualities of women described in one of the following:
  - Esther, Judith 7-16, Susanna.
  - cf. Proverbs 31
Unit 6: The New Testament: the historical Jesus and historical Mary

- 5.10 Intro to New Testament (Judaism and Christian in the Greco-Roman world)

- 5.11 Representations of Jesus in the Gospels
  - Mark 1, Matthew 1, Luke 2-3, John 1.

- 5.12 John 4:1-42 and Mark 14:3-9 – Representations of women in the gospels
  - Mary Rose D’Angelo “(Re)Presentations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark” *W&CO*
  - Brooten, “Junia…Outstanding among the Apostles” (Romans 16:7)

Unit 7: New Testament and Beyond: the Apostle Paul and Saint Thecla

- 5.16 Paul and ethics for living on the edge of time
  - Thessalonians, Philemon, Galatians:
  - Ehrman, “Paul the Apostle,” *The New Testament*

- 5.17 Paul on sex, marriage and gender roles in the end times
  - 1 Corinthians; cf. Galatians
  - Margaret MacDonald, “Women Holy in Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7”

- 5.18 Reconsidering gender norms in light of the delay of the end
  - 1 Timothy 2
  - Maloney, “Pastoral Epistles”

- 5.19 *The Acts of Paul & Thecla*: challenging gender norms in the early church
  - The Acts of Paul and Thecla

- **Thinking Beyond Thecla**
- **Thecla: A Modest Apostle**
- Castelli, “Paul on Women & Gender” in *Women and Christian Origins*

*May 19-21 UW Feminism & Classical Studies Conference: extra credit*
Unit 8: Sex and Gender in early Judaism and Christianity

5.23 Women’s leadership in the synagogue
   - Bernadette Brooten, “Female Leadership in the ancient Synagogue”

5.24 Sexual practice and self-definition in the early churches

5.25 Sex, Gender, and God in the Gnostic Gospels
   - “Thunder, Perfect Mind”
   - Elaine Pagels, “God the Father/God the Mother,” *The Gnostic Gospels*

5.26 Gender categories in Classical Judaism
   - In class discussion of: mishnah on the Androgynous; intersexuality in Roman art
     - Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*
     - Reviews of Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*
     - Boyarin, “Behold Israel According to the Flesh: On Anthropology and Sexuality in Late Antique Judaism”
     - A Medieval poet’s prayer to become female

5.31 Singing Jewish and Christian Sacred Song
   - Harvey, *Song and Memory: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition*
   - Laura Lieber, “Yannai’s Women” in *Yannai on Genesis: an invitation to Piyyut*
   - Ophir Munz-Manor, “All About Sarah: Questions of Gender in Yannai’s Poems on Sarah’s (And Abraham’s) Barrenness”
   - Eva Topping, “Women Hymnographers in Byzantium”

6.1 Gender & Sexuality in the Late Antique Imagination
   - Review & concluding discussion: the stories we inherit and the stories we tell

6.2 FINAL EXAM