

HIS 491/GSS 491  
FERTILE BODIES  
A Cultural History of Reproduction from Antiquity to the Enlightenment  
Professor Melissa Reynolds

**Location:** TBD

**Time:** TBD

**Office Hours:** TBD

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**Course description:** The ancient Greeks imagined a woman's body ruled by her uterus, while medieval Christians believed in a womb touched by God. Renaissance anatomists hoped to uncover the 'secrets' of human generation through dissection, while nascent European states wrote new laws to encourage procreation and manage 'illegitimate' offspring. From ancient Greece to enlightenment France, a woman's womb served as a site for the production of medical knowledge, the focus of religious practice, and the articulation of state power. This course will trace the evolution of medical and cultural theories about women's reproductive bodies from ca. 450 BCE to 1700, linking these theories to the development of structures of power, notions of difference, and concepts of purity that proved foundational to 'western' culture.



Each week we will read a primary source (in translation, if necessary) alongside excerpts from scholarly books and articles. We will begin in classical Greece with Hippocratic writings on women's diseases, move through the origins of Christian celibacy and female asceticism in late antique and medieval Europe, follow early anatomists as they dissected women's bodies in Renaissance Italy, explore the origins of state regulation of women's fertility in early modern England, Germany, and France, and finally, learn how Enlightenment ideals were undergirded by new "scientific" models of anatomical sexual and racial difference. The class will take trips to Special Collections at the Firestone Library to view the earliest printed anatomies and to the Princeton Art Museum to view paintings and sculptures of the Madonna and Child.

**Reading:** Students will read between 100–150 pages per week from a combination of primary sources (i.e. texts written by historical figures in the past) and secondary sources (i.e. scholarly books and articles). All of our readings are available online, either via the Firestone library's digital subscriptions or via our course Blackboard.

**Evaluation & Grading:** Attendance and participation in our seminar discussions is mandatory. Grades will be awarded according to History Department criteria, reproduced at the end of the syllabus. More than one absence from class sessions without contacting the instructor and providing explanation (and documentation of illness, when necessary) will result in 5 point reduction from your final grade for every class period missed.

Class Participation:	25%
In-class presentation (10-minute)	10%
Response papers (2–3 pages, 3x)	30% (or 10% each)
Final research paper (10–12 pages)	35% total, comprised of:
Primary source description	5%
Annotated bibliography	5%
Final paper	25%

**Participation:** Participation is a critical component of this course. Students are expected to come to class having done the reading and ready to engage in class discussion. Engagement includes both active listening to your fellow students' viewpoints and careful articulation of your own ideas. If you tend to be a talker, please share your thoughts but be sure to make room for others. If you tend to be quiet, know that your voice is essential in our classroom. You will always show respect for your fellow students, even when you disagree with their ideas.

**Response Papers:** Students will choose three topics/readings to which they will respond in a short (2–3 page) essay. This essay should briefly summarize the secondary reading, relate the reading to the primary source, and pose questions or problems that arise from a juxtaposition of the two readings. These papers do not require outside research or reading beyond that assigned in the syllabus. Though students will only present on one of these papers to the class, the student should be prepared to share problems or questions developed in their response paper over the course of that class's discussion.

**In-class presentation:** Students will choose one of their response paper topics/readings and create a ten-minute presentation for the class based on the issues raised within their response paper. The presentation should, first, situate the readings within the context of the other readings done thus far in the semester, looking for ways to draw connections between past readings and the current one. The student should be prepared with two or three topics to discuss with the class from the readings, and ideally, these topics should be approached through focused discussion questions. In addition, if background knowledge is necessary to understand the reading (i.e. terminology needs defining, a particular argument needs contextualizing), the student should have done whatever minor outside research is necessary to engage the class. Only one student may present at each class meeting, and presentations will be chosen on the first day of class.

**Research Paper:** Each student will produce a research paper of 10–12 pages at the end of the semester in lieu of a final exam. Throughout the semester, graded benchmark assignments (i.e. a source description and annotated bibliography) will keep students on track to completion. Students may select one of the primary sources already listed on the syllabus as a jumping-off point for selecting a research topic, or may consult with the instructor directly to discuss other topics of interest. Students will meet with the instructor during office hours at least once to discuss paper topics before week 5. Research paper topics and a description of the primary source chosen are due in week 6. A preliminary annotated bibliography with at least five secondary sources is due in week 10. The final paper is due on Dean's Date.

**Late Work:** Ten points will be deducted from the final grade of an assignment for every day the assignment is late. Assignments more than three days late will not be accepted. If you have an emergency or extenuating circumstance that may prevent you from completing your work on time,

you should be sure to communicate these concerns with me well in advance of the assignment's due date.

**Honor Code:** All student work should meet the requirements of the University's Honor Code, and all papers will include the honor pledge on the title page, signed by the student.

**Accommodations for Disabilities:** Students must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) ([ods@princeton.edu](mailto:ods@princeton.edu); 258-8840) for disability verification and determination of eligibility for reasonable academic accommodations. Requests for academic accommodations for this course need to be made at the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible for newly approved students, and again at least two weeks in advance of any needed accommodations in order to make arrangements to implement the accommodations. Please make an appointment to meet with me in order to maintain confidentiality in addressing your needs. No accommodations will be given without authorization from ODS, or without advance notice.

**Laptop Policy:** Students may bring laptops to class and use them to refer to our course readings, nearly all of which are available in digital editions. However, I ask that students disconnect from the Princeton Wifi network, and students must close their laptops during student presentations. If laptop use becomes distracting or disruptive at any point, I reserve the right to ask you to close your laptop and, if necessary, leave the classroom.

## Course Schedule

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### UNIT ONE: Ancient Medicine and Philosophy

#### Day 1: Ancient Philosophy and Generation

Syllabus discussion; selection of paper and presentation topics

1. Nicholas Hopwood, Rebecca Flemming, and Lauren Kassell, "Reproduction in History," in *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present* [hereafter *Rep:AP*], (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 3–17. [[Cambridge Core Online](#)]
2. Excerpts from Plato, *Symposia* [in-class]
3. Excerpts from Plato, *Republic* [in-class]

#### Day 2: Greek Gynecology and Generation of Seeds

1. Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*, pp. 21–39. [[ProQuest E-Book Central](#)]
2. Ann Ellis Hanson, "Hippocrates: 'Diseases of Women 1.'" *Signs* 1, no. 2 (1975): 567–84. [[JSTOR](#)]
3. Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, Book I, pp. 49–127 (facing page translation). [[Loeb Classical Library](#)]

#### Day 3: Roman Medicine and the One-Sex Body

\*\*Mandatory Office hours to discuss final paper topics this week & next\*\*

1. Thomas Laqueur, "Destiny is Anatomy," *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 25–62. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
2. Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body, Vol. II*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca, 1968), pp. 620–654. [Blackboard]

Day 4: The Infant and the Soul

1. Marie-Hélène Congourdeau, “Debating the Soul in Late Antiquity,” in *Rep: AP*, pp. 109–21. [[Cambridge Core Online](#)]
2. Porphyry, *To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled*, trans. by James Wilberding (New York, 2011), pp. 31–56. [Blackboard]
3. *Soranus’ Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin, pp. 3–7, 62–68, 79–80. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

**UNIT TWO: Theology and Motherhood**

Day 5: To Marry or to Burn

\*\*Mandatory office hours continue this week to discuss final paper topics\*\*

1. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 5–32, 140–59. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
2. *The English Bible, King James Version: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. Gerland Hammond and Austin Busch (New York, 2012), 1 Corinthians 7: 1–40; Ephesians 5: 1–33. [Blackboard]
3. In class: Watch “From Jesus to Christ: Pt. 2” [53:00–1:18:00]

Day 6: Augustine and Original Sin

1. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 366–408. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
2. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 95–110, 133–154 [Blackboard]
3. St. Jerome, Excerpts from *Contra Jovinianus* [Blackboard]

Day 7: Jesus as Mother

1. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, pp. 110–170. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
2. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love Recorded by Julian, anchoress at Norwich*, ed. Grace Warrack (London, 1901), Chapters 58–62. [Blackboard]

Day 8: The Virgin Mary [Class visit to the Art Museum]

1. Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 101–131. [[JSTOR](#)]
2. *The English Bible, King James Version: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. Gerland Hammond and Austin Busch (New York, 2012), Matthew 1: 1–25; Luke 1–2: 23 [Blackboard]
3. Anselm of Canterbury, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, “A Letter to Gundolf,” “Prayer to St. Mary (1),” and “Prayer to St. Mary (2),” pp. 106–114. [Blackboard]
4. Jacobus de Voragine, “The nativity of our lady,” in *Here begynneth the legende named in latyn legenda aurea, that is to say in englyshe the golden legend*, STC (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) 24875, Westminster: Wynkyn de Worde, 1493. [Blackboard; a modern transcription is available alongside this 15<sup>th</sup> c. version]

Day 9: Holy Mothers in the World

1. Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 144–193. [[JSTOR](#)]

2. Bridget Morris, ed. *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 4: The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings, The Rule, and Minor Works*, trans. by Denis Searby (Oxford, 2015), Book I: Chapters 1–2, 9–11, 20, 26. [[Oxford Scholarship Online](#)]
3. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, “The Patient Griselda,” (London, 1903). [Blackboard]

Day 10: Jewish and Muslim traditions

1. Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe*. (Princeton, 2007), pp. 21–54. [[Pro-Quest E-Book Central](#)]
2. Avner Gil'adi, *Muslim Midwives: The Craft of Birthing in the Premodern Middle East* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 18–56. [[Cambridge Core Online](#)]
3. Primary sources TBD

### UNIT THREE: Medicine and the Secrets of Women

Day 11: The Mother of Women's Medicine

\*\*Research Paper Topic & Primary Source Description Due\*\*

1. Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 1–69. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
2. Monica H. Green, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, “Book on the Conditions of Women,” pp. 70–115 (facing page translation). [[JSTOR](#)]

Day 12: The Making of a Profession

1. Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 118–62. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
2. Monica H. Green and Daniel Lord Smail, “The Trial of Floreta d'Ays (1403): Jews, Christians, and Obstetrics in later medieval Marseille,” *Journal of Medieval History* 34, 2 (2008): 207–211. [[Science Direct](#)]
3. In-class: Watch

Day 13: Holy Dissection

1. Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, pp. 9–57. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
2. Primary source TBD

Day 14: What's in an Anatomy? [Class Visit to Special Collections]

1. Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, pp. 161–260. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

### UNIT FOUR: Reformation & the Supernatural

Day 15: The Reformed Womb

1. Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England*, pp. 1–52. [[Pro-Quest E-Book Central](#)]
2. Kathleen Crowther-Heyck, “‘Be Fruitful and Multiply’: Genesis and Generation in Reformation Germany,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 55 (2002): 904–35. [[JSTOR](#)]
3. Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry Weisner-Hanks, eds., “Childbirth,” in *Luther on Women* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 171–185. [[Cambridge Core Online](#)]

Day 16: Recipes for Reproduction

1. Peter Murray Jones, "Generation between Script and Print," in *Rep: AP*, pp. 181–94. [[Cambridge Core Online](#)]
2. Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan. "Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89, no. 3 (October 27, 2015): 406–33. [[ProjectMUSE](#)]
3. Excerpts from Eucharius Roeslin, *The Byrthe of Mankynde*, trans. Thomas Raynalde (London: 1545). [Blackboard]
4. Transcription/translation work on charms and prayers for fertility and childbirth from English manuscripts [in-class]

#### Day 17: Monstrous Births

1. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, "Monsters: A Case Study," in *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York, 2001), pp. 173–214. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
2. Selection of monstrous birth broadsides. [Blackboard]
3. Pseudo-Aristotle, *Aristotle's Masterpiece, or The Secrets of Generation Displayed in All Parts Thereof* (1684), Chapter 5 "Of Monsters and monstrous Births," pp. 47–59 and final pages (after p. 190) with depictions of monstrous births [<https://digitalcollections.nyam.org/Aristotle>]

#### Day 18: Witchcraft and Inverted Motherhood

1. Lyndal Roper, "Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany," in *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Religion, and Sexuality in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1994), pp. 200–227. [[Pro-Quest E-Book Central](#)]
2. David Harley, "Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-Witch," *Social History of Medicine* 3, no. 1 (1990): 1–26. [[Oxford Academic](#)]
3. Excerpts from Reginald Scot, *The discoverie of witchcraft, Wherein the lewde dealing of witches and witchmongers is notablie detected* (London, 1584) [Blackboard]

### UNIT FIVE: Reproduction and State Power

#### Day 19: Midwives & State Authority

1. Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2009), pp. 1–16, 149–176. [Blackboard]
2. James Hitchcock, ed., "A Sixteenth-Century Midwife's License," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 41 (January 1967): 75–76 [[JSTOR](#)]
3. Excerpts of various "English Poor Laws" [In-class]

#### Day 20: The Family-State Compact

1. Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 3–16, 41–77. [[Oxford Scholarship Online](#)]
2. Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Disorderly Families: Infamous Letters from the Bastille Archives*, pp. 158–170. [[JSTOR](#)]

#### Day 21: Midwifery to Save a Nation

1. Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifery: Childbirth in England, 1660–1770* (London, 1995), pp. 65–118. [Blackboard]
2. Excerpts from *Lettre d'un Citoyen* concerning Madame du Coudray, Royal Midwife of France. [Blackboard]



## UNIT SIX: Science and the Discovery of Difference

### Day 22: Harvey and the Egg

1. Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 94–113. [[Pro-Quest E-Book Central](#)]
2. William Harvey, *Disputations Touching the Generation of Animals*, trans. and introd. Gweneth Whitteridge (Oxford, 1981), pp. TBD. [Blackboard]
3. George Garden, “On the Modern Theory of Generation,” in *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Vol. III: From 1683 to 1694*, ed. Charles Hutton, Richard Pearson, and George Shaw (London, 1809), pp. 431–35. [Blackboard]

### Day 23: Racialized Reproductive Bodies

1. Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 237–268. [[Pro-Quest E-Book Central](#)]
2. Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, “Theories of Gender and Race,” pp. 143–183. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]
3. Transcriptions of the court case to free Sartjie Baartman [Blackboard]
4. Excerpts from Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (Philadelphia, 1788) [Blackboard]

### Day 24: ‘Generation’ to ‘Reproduction’ Revisited

#### Presentations of final paper projects

1. Nick Hopwood, “The Keywords ‘Generation’ and ‘Reproduction’,” in *Rep:AP*, pp. 287–304.
2. Thomas Laqueur, “Discovery of the Sexes,” *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, pp. 149–92. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

**\*\*\*Dean’s Date: Final Paper Due\*\*\***

### Department of History Grading Policy

#### *Participation*

A student who receives an **A** for participation in discussion in precepts or seminars typically comes to every class with questions about the readings in mind. An ‘A’ discussant engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others, and consistently elevates the level of discussion.

A student who receives a **B** for participation in discussion in precepts or seminars typically does not always come to class with questions about the readings in mind. A ‘B’ discussant waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some discussants in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.

A student who receives a **C** for discussion in precepts or seminars attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion.

A student who fails to attend precepts regularly or to adequately prepare for discussion risks the grade of **D** or **F**.

#### *Papers*

An **A** or **A-** thesis, paper, or exam is one that is good enough to be read aloud in a class. It is clearly written and well-organized. It demonstrates that the writer has conducted a close and critical reading of texts, grappled with the issues raised in the course, synthesized the readings, discussions, and

lectures, and formulated a perceptive, compelling, independent argument. The argument shows intellectual originality and creativity, is sensitive to historical context, is supported by a well-chosen variety of specific examples, and, in the case of a research paper, is built on a critical reading of primary material.

A **B+** or **B** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates many aspects of A-level work but falls short of it in either the organization and clarity of its writing, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the quality of research. Some papers or exams in this category are solid works containing flashes of insight into many of the issues raised in the course. Others give evidence of independent thought, but the argument is not presented clearly or convincingly.

A **B-** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates a command of course or research material and understanding of historical context but provides a less than thorough defense of the writer's independent argument because of weaknesses in writing, argument, organization, or use of evidence.

A **C+**, **C**, or **C-** thesis, paper, or exam offers little more than a mere a summary of ideas and information covered in the course, is insensitive to historical context, does not respond to the assignment adequately, suffers from frequent factual errors, unclear writing, poor organization, or inadequate primary research, or presents some combination of these problems.

Whereas the grading standards for written work between A and C- are concerned with the presentation of argument and evidence, a paper or exam that belongs to the D or F categories demonstrates inadequate command of course material.

A **D** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates serious deficiencies or severe flaws in the student's command of course or research material.

An **F** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates no competence in the course or research materials. It indicates a student's neglect or lack of effort in the course.