

# CÉLINE LEBOEUF

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## EDUCATION

Harvard University  
Ph.D. in Philosophy, 2008 – expected in May 2016  
A.B. in Philosophy (cum laude), 2003 – 2007

## AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

20<sup>th</sup> Century French and German Philosophy (especially phenomenology and existentialism), Feminist Philosophy, Philosophy of Race

## AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Ethics, Metaphysics, Early Modern Philosophy

## DISSERTATION

Title: *The Social Constitution of the Body*  
Committee: Sean Kelly (Chair), Nancy Bauer, Tommie Shelby

How does living in society transform our bodies? It is natural to think that both the body's appearance and one's relation to it are shaped by social norms. I argue that the body is a locus of both social norms and resistance to them. I make the case that the constitution of the body is a matter of negotiating social pressures by illuminating three phenomena: (i) the tendency, inflected by gender norms, to identify with certain fetishized body parts and to modify one's body accordingly, (ii) the sense of alienation and the physical incapacitation that the gaze can provoke under race- and gender-based oppressions, and (iii) the bodily habits that marginalize members of minority racial groups. In each case, I highlight our capacity to respond to oppressive norms using our bodies.

## ACADEMIC AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Harvard Horizons Scholar, 2015  
Bok Certificate of Excellence and Distinction in Teaching, Fall 2014  
Bok Certificate of Excellence and Distinction in Teaching, Spring 2014  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Summer Pre-Dissertation Fellowship, 2010  
Phi Beta Kappa, November 2006

## PUBLICATIONS

### Forthcoming:

“‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’: The Sex-Gender Distinction and Simone de Beauvoir’s Account of Woman.” In *Feminist Moments*, an edited volume in the *Textual Moments* series, series editors J.C. Davis and John Morrow.

## TALKS

“Anatomy of the Thigh Gap,” Workshop on Feminist Ontology, MIT, October 2015

“Embodying Resistance to Oppression,” Harvard Horizons Symposium, May 2015

“Alienation and Objectification in the Works of Beauvoir and Fanon,” Diverse Lineages of Existentialism Conference, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, June 2014

“Alienation and Objectification in the Works of Beauvoir and Fanon,” European Philosophy Workshop, Harvard University, December 2013

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

### Primary Instructor for:

*Gender and Race*, Fall 2014

*Aristotle’s Ethics*, Spring 2014

### Teaching Fellow for:

*The Meaning of Life*, with Mathias Risse, Spring 2015

*Heidegger: Being and Time*, with Sean Kelly, Fall 2013

*Nature*, with Joyce Chaplin, Spring 2013

*Introduction to Early Modern Philosophy*, with Alison Simmons, Spring 2012

*Human Being and the Sacred in the History of the West*, with Sean Kelly, Fall 2011

*Plato*, with Russell Jones, Spring 2011

*Issues in Ethics*, with Thomas Scanlon, Spring 2011

*Introduction to the Problems of Philosophy*, with Bernhard Nickel, Fall 2010

### Grader for:

*Introduction to Ethics* (Extension School), with Lee McIntyre, Spring 2014

## DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

Committee Member, Minority Participation in Academic Philosophy (Harvard University), 2013 – 2014

Graduate Representative, 2011 – 2012 and 2013 – 2014

Assistant to the Head Tutor in Philosophy, 2011 – 2012

Summer Research Assistant for Sean Kelly (Department of Philosophy), 2011

Research Assistant for Richard Moran (Department of Philosophy), 2010 – 2011

Referee, Harvard-MIT Graduate Conference, 2010

## PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

*American Philosophical Association*, 2015 – present

*Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, 2014 – present

*The Merleau-Ponty Circle*, 2014 – present

## GRADUATE COURSEWORK

*Philosophy in Translation: German* (Bernhard Nickel)

*Philosophy in Translation: Latin* (Jeffrey McDonough)

*Aristotle* (Gisela Striker)

*Spinoza* (Herman De Dijn)

*Hegel and Kant* (Matthew Boyle)

*Heidegger: Proseminar* (Sean Kelly)

*Heidegger: Being and Time* (Sean Kelly)

*Pragmatism* (Peter Godfrey-Smith)

*Metaphysics* (Edward J. Hall)

*First Year Colloquium in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Edward J. Hall and Alison Simmons)

*First Year Colloquium in Ethics* (Douglas Lavin)

*Aesthetics* (Richard Moran)

*Self-knowledge and Self-consciousness* (Matthew Boyle)

*Topics in Intersubjectivity* (Douglas Lavin and Richard Moran)

*Philosophy, Literature, and Psychiatry* (Louis Menand and Alison Simmons)

## LANGUAGES

French (speaking, reading, writing)

German (reading)

Latin (reading)

## REFERENCES

Sean Kelly, [sdkelly@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:sdkelly@fas.harvard.edu)

Nancy Bauer, [nancy.bauer@tufts.edu](mailto:nancy.bauer@tufts.edu)

Bernhard Nickel (teaching reference), [bnickel@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:bnickel@fas.harvard.edu)

Tommie Shelby, [tshelby@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:tshelby@fas.harvard.edu)

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

My dissertation considers what it is to be embodied in a social world. How does living in a social world transform our bodies? I address this question by focusing on two dimensions of embodiment: gender and race.

My approach to gender and race is phenomenological. I seek to reveal the lived experience of gender- and race-based oppressions. My project belongs to the tradition of critical theories that seek to understand the nature of gender and race with an eye towards combating gender and racial oppressions.

My conclusions are these: the body is a locus of both social norms and resistance to them. The body is socially constituted, and the modes of social constitution are aptly described using the concept of *bodily alienation*.

To be alienated from one's body means that one feels divorced from it. I claim that bodily alienation is a central feature of the bodily experience of those oppressed on the basis of their gender or race. The concept of bodily alienation is both descriptive and normative. Applying this concept both describes someone's relation to their body and judges that relation as defective. Describing social practices as alienating entails that things are not as they should be. And that raises the question of how they should be changed.

I make the case that the constitution of the body results from negotiating social pressures by illuminating three phenomena. First, I consider the tendency, inflected by gender norms, to identify with certain fetishized body parts and to modify one's body accordingly. I take the recent obsession with the "thigh gap" as an instance of this tendency. In addition to charting the sources of this obsession, I consider ways to resist it: discourses that deconstruct beauty ideals provide one avenue, but engaging in physical activity for its own sake can itself help address the alienation these ideals perpetuate.

Second, I examine how being looked at by a member of a dominant group can provoke a sense of physical incapacitation in a member of an oppressed group. I describe the phenomenology of skillful movement and analyze the nature of the breakdown in skillful movement that the gaze of a dominant other can provoke. Moreover, I discuss ways in which oppressed persons can reestablish their sense of self in the wake of the other's gaze.

Third, I describe the personal transformations that Whites can effect when they undo bodily habits that marginalize members of minority racial groups. I argue that this transformation requires developing an awareness of one's body and an attentiveness to the effects of one's presence on others.

My use of the concept of bodily alienation for a critical project concerning gender and race sets this project apart from other forms of social critique. Social constructionists typically make descriptive claims about the relative naturalness of a state of affairs and then make the case for changing that state. For example, feminist social constructionist critiques move from the claim that gender roles are not dictated by biology and can be reformed, to arguments about why they *should* be reformed. My account avoids this two-step argumentative strategy. As a diagnostic concept, the concept of bodily alienation simultaneously uncovers and evaluates phenomena, while tying them to a conception of human flourishing as embodied.