

MTWR 1800-1850
CON 301
CRN: 17567

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Office hours: T 3:30-5:30pm

Philosophy 170: Love and Sex

Course Description:

Love and sex are among the most meaningful and ethically significant phenomena in our lives. For many of us, our longing for genuine love and satisfying sex are so great that they equal or surpass our desires to become educated, find meaningful work, procure wealth and find spiritual fulfillment. Yet love and sex— and our beliefs about both— seem to cause us at least as much suffering as joy, and at least as much regret as satisfaction. Love and sex also tend to bring out the best and the worst in people, yielding acts of incredible generosity and astonishing violence. In public life, shared beliefs about sexual appropriateness often unite a diverse population, while differing beliefs about love and sex inspire some of the most hateful rhetoric. Paradoxically, then, love and sex are both the fundamental constituents of a good and happy life, and among the greatest causes of human wrongdoing and suffering.

Though popular cultural references to love and sex abound, most of us spend surprisingly little time reflecting on what they mean to us and what role we want them to play in our lives. This course assumes that serious reflection on love and sex can yield valuable insights, and that we should therefore think carefully and talk openly about the personal, political, ethical and philosophical significance of these incredibly important phenomena.

Please Note:

It is often difficult to think and talk about the intimate topics surrounding love and sex. Our feelings of embarrassment or shame regarding love and sex ought to be acknowledged and reflected upon. In all likelihood, contemplating these feelings will reveal important insights about our ethical, religious and cultural attitudes. This course asks students to join in discussion of some highly charged and deeply personal subjects. Although students are not required to share personal beliefs and experiences, those who elect to do so ought to be treated with respect and sensitivity. I ask that all students adopt an attitude of openness to experiences and beliefs that differ from their own.

Required Texts:

Course Packet

Lust, by Simon Blackburn (Oxford, 2004)

Both texts are available at the University of Oregon bookstore

Course Requirements:

Mid-term Quiz: 20%
Film Response, 3-4pp: 15%
Final Essay, 5-6pp: 25%
Final Exam: 20%
In-class Writings: 10%
Preparation/Active Participation: 10%

Course Policies:

Assigned Readings: Reading assignments should be completed by the day listed next to them on the schedule. Because this is a highly interactive course, it is essential that all readings be completed on time. Periodic in-class writing assignments will establish whether or not students have completed and/or understood the assigned readings.

Attendance: Regular attendance is vital to your success in this course. You will be allowed three absences without penalty, after which each additional absence will result in a 5% reduction to your final grade (for example, five total absences will lower an “A” to a “B”).

Participation: Class discussion will be an integral component of this course. Ten percent of your final grade will be based on the quantity and quality of your participation in small group activities and broad class discussions.

Academic Honesty: Intellectual honesty is expected. The stiffest punishments possible will be sought for those who plagiarize, fabricate, or cheat. The usual punishment is an “F” for the course. See “academic honesty policies” handout (available on Blackboard) for more information.

Access for Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability (physical, learning or psychological) that you think may affect your performance in this class, please see me during the first week of the term so we can make arrangements, if necessary, for your full access to all classroom activities.

Tentative Schedule:

Unit 1: Love and Sex in Historical Philosophy

Week 1: Love in a Word: *Eros, Philia, Agape*

M Course Introduction

T Read: Blackburn, *Lust: Introduction*

W Read: Plato, *Symposium* (part 1)

R Read: Plato, *Symposium* (part 2)

Week 2: Love and Friendship

M Read: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

T Read: Emerson: *Friendship*

W Read: Kant, *Lectures on Ethics: Friendship and ... Truthfulness*

R Read: Conlon: *Why Lovers Can't be Friends*

Week 3: Divine and Worldly Love

M Read: Augustine, *Confessions* and Blackburn, *The Christian Panic*

T Read: Pagels: *The Paradise of Virginity Regained*

W Read: Heloise and Abelard, *Letters*

R Read: Soble: *Sex, Love and Marriage*

Unit 2: Sexuality and Normativity

Week 4: Sexual Difference and Gender Norms

M Read: Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*

T Read: Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

W Read: Gilmore, *The Manhood Puzzle*

R Read: Ferguson, *Androgyny as an Ideal for Human Development*

Week 5: Natural and Good?

M Read: Blackburn, *What Nature Intended* and Kant, *Lectures on Ethics: Duties...in Respect of Sexual Impulse*

T Read: Nagel, *Sexual Perversion*

W Read: Soble, *Sexual Perversion*

R **Midterm quiz**

Week 6: Desire and its Consequences

M Read: Blackburn, *Lust: Desire, Excess and Two Problems From Plato*

T Read: Knobe, *In Search of the True Self*

W Burchard, *When Your Child's Desires are a Problem* (handout); Film: *The Woodsman, pt. 1*

R Film: *The Woodsman, pt. 2*

Week 7: A Few Wrinkles...

M **Film Response due**; Discussion: *The Woodsman*

T Read: Blackburn, *Lust: Hobbesian Unity, Disasters and Substitutions*

W Read: Mann, *Creepers, Flirts, Heroes and Allies*

R Read: Corvino, *Why Shouldn't Tommy and Jimmy Have Sex?* (handout)

Unit 3: Love! Love? Love.

Week 8: Ecstatic Passion and Romantic Delusion

M Read: Selected Love Poetry (handout)

T Read: Delahoyde, *Courtly Love* (handout)

W Read: Johnson and Holmes, *Contradictory Messages*

R Film clip/discussion: Love and Infatuation

Week Nine: The Politics of Love and Attraction

M Read Blackburn, *Lust: Evolution and Desire*, and Miller, *Bodies of Evidence*

T Read: Ben-Ze'ev, *Cyberlove*

W Read: Gibran, *On Marriage* and McMurtry, *Monogamy: A Critique*

R **-Class Cancelled for Thanksgiving Holiday-**

Week Ten: Dynamic Tension: Love Across Difference

M Read: Snow, *Empathy*

T Read: Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* and Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*

W Read: Blackburn: *Lust, Overcoming Pessimism* and *Farewell*

R Conclusions

Final Essay is due in class at 7pm on the day of the final exam.

Final exam: Monday, December 3rd, 7pm. (in regular classroom)