

Philosophy
PHILOS 2ZZ3
Philosophy of Love and Sex
Fall 2025



HUMANITIES

Instructor Information

Dr. Allauren Samantha Forbes

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Office: UH 307A

Office Hours:

Tuesdays 16:30-17:30, Wednesdays 13:30-15:00, or by appointment.

Course Information

Location of lecture and tutorial is available on Mosaic.

Course Dates: 09/02/2025 - 12/04/2025

Units: 3.00

Course Delivery Mode: In Person

Course Description: An exploration of philosophical texts concerned with the nature of love and sex, including such themes as friendship, romance, perversity, intimacy, desire, sex and sexuality. Two lectures, one tutorial; one term Prerequisite(s): Registration in Level II or above

Instructor-Specific Course Information

One of the things that philosophy should do is help us understand the world and our experiences of and place within it. For many of us, love and sex play a crucial role in who we are, how we live, and what we value. This course will explore some of the core questions about love and sex – what is love? How do we recognize love as love? How does consent work? – and some of the more complicated social, political, and ethical

realities of love and sex – How are love and sex affected by race and racialized desires? Does polyamory challenge standard understandings of love and sexual relationships? Is it desirable or morally permissible to have sex with robots? Through these topics and many others, students will have an opportunity to reflect on and examine some of the most intimate relations and important values in society.

Important Links

- [Mosaic](#)
- [Avenue to Learn](#)
- [Student Accessibility Services - Accommodations](#)
- [McMaster University Library](#)
- [eReserves](#)

Course Learning Outcomes

- Reading: read philosophical texts for understanding and context
- Understanding: construct your own understanding of diverse contemporary perspectives in the philosophy of love and sex
- Communicating: communicate your understanding and interpretation of philosophical views and texts clearly
- Interpreting: develop your own interpretation of philosophical texts
- Applying: apply the concepts, theories, and ideas discussed in class to contemporary media
- Discussing: discuss philosophical views and texts with your peers and TA in class and in your tutorial in charitable and respectful ways, even when challenging one another

Required Materials and Texts

Please sign in with your MacID [here](#) to view your booklist

All readings are on Avenue as links/pdfs, per McMaster copyright policy.

Class Format

In Person

In person. Lecture in person only (not recorded) 2x/week, 1 tutorial/week.

Course Evaluation

Your grade in this course will be determined by the following:

Tutorials: 25%

- Participation: 15% **Due: Ongoing**
- Self-assessment of participation: 10% **Due: 3 December 2025**

Writing assignments: 40%

- Reflections: 15% **Due: Various**
- Philosophy in film paper: 20% **Due: 20 October 2025**
- Cumulative reflection: 5% **Due: 3 December 2025**

BAE (Build-an-Exam): 10% **Due: 20 November 2025**

Final exam: 25% **TBD by Registrar's Office**

Course Evaluation Details

Tutorials

Since philosophy is a fundamentally social activity, you will be expected to engage in charitable, respectful discussion with your peers and your TA. Attendance is a necessary but insufficient condition for full marks. I know that this is hard for some students, so the tutorial will begin with a 5-minute writing activity to get folks' thinking started and to have something already prepared which they can use in the larger group discussions and activities. The TA will collect these writing exercises and will use them to track attendance. They will then have a larger group discussion, activities, etc.

The TA will be tracking attendance and folks' participation. At the end of the semester, you will write a self-assessment, based on the metric posted to Avenue, of your own engaged participation. Things to consider here include the following: were you a present and engaged participant? What does that mean for you? Were you a collaborative and charitable co-inquirer? You will assess yourself, providing a careful explanation of your reasoning, and give yourself a score out of 10. The TA will similarly score you; should the two scores match, that is your grade. If the TA assesses your grade as higher than you graded yourself, then you will get the TA-assigned score out of ten. If your TA assesses your grade as lower than what you assigned yourself, the instructor will examine your and your TA's carefully reasoned explanations and determine the appropriate grade given the provided evidence.

Writing Assignments

Weekly Reflections (15%)

The purpose of this assignment is to help you work out your own views about the topics and questions we address in lecture, in the readings, and in the tutorial discussions. Does something we read seem obviously wrong to you? Did somebody miss some kind of important consideration? Were you shocked at how intuitively right something seemed? I will post some starter questions, but the point is that you are engaging with the material in a way which is useful/meaningful to you. You should be writing **approximately 500 words** for each reflection. This assignment is to be submitted on Avenue by **Tuesday at 11:59pm** of each week and can address any of the following: conversations in tutorial, the readings, the lectures. It must, however, concern your own views on what was covered in these contexts. This will be assessed on the basis of a good-faith effort on a pass-fail basis. **Note that you can complete this assignment on 11 weeks, but since each is worth 3%, you need only submit (and receive credit for) five.** That means you can submit

reflections on pretty much whatever week works for you - whatever week you have the time and energy, or you find the material particularly interesting, etc.

Please note that since this assignments has a flexible deadline, no accommodation is necessary for illness, disability symptoms, etc. Make sure that you manage your schedule such that you haven't left all of them to the end, for you will not be able to receive an accommodation if you fail to submit assignments for the first 9 weeks of the semester given the flexibility built in to the assignment.

Please also note that if you are found to have used generative AI, or if you have not demonstrated sufficient philosophical engagement, you will not receive credit for your submission. I encourage you to submit reflections early in the semester so that you can calibrate your approach and receive guidance if you have missed the mark. I want you to succeed, and success (in this instance) means thinking deeply about the material as it is meaningful to you. Feel free to drop by my office hours with further questions.

Philosophy in Film Paper (20%)

Love is something we see in many – perhaps most – movies, in one form or another, whether it is romance, love of friends, of family, of pets, of country, or some other kind of love. Indeed, there are so many iterations of love we could not hope to cover them all in a single course! Because philosophy of love and sex is not merely theoretical – because what we are discussing here really matters for how we think about and live our lives – your task in this assignment will consist in applying the theory discussed in class to film. See Avenue for the assignment instructions. For now, consider the following questions: What does this film tell us about what it is to love, to be loved? Does love corrupt, constrain, liberate? This assignment should be **1500-1750** words. See Avenue for the rubric and some prompting questions/suggestions. It will be graded out of 20 for 20% of your final grade.

BAE (Build-an-Exam)

Is this assignment just because Dr. Forbes likes silly puns? Not exclusively, no (though that does explain the title). For this assignment, your task is to create multiple choice / short answer **questions** for a theoretical exam for this course, based on the content covered so far. See Avenue for detailed instructions. This assignment will help you to start preparing your study notes for the exam and will teach you how to think about how I think about exam writing (therefore preparing you to write the final exam, both in content and in

method). While I do not intend to use any of the questions gathered from you in the final exam, there is a non-zero chance that the questions I come up with and the questions you come up with are similar or perhaps even the same. So, I encourage you to take this assignment seriously as a means of prepping for the exam.

Final Exam

The final exam will be a cumulative overview of all course material. It will assess students' knowledge and ability to apply the concepts discussed in class. It will have three sections and will be graded out of 50 points for 25% of students' final grade. Further details will be provided on the last class meeting of the semester.

Undergraduate Grading Scale

The grades breakdown for McMaster's 12-Point Grading Scale

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
A+	12	90-100
A	11	85-89
A-	10	80-84
B+	9	77-79
B	8	73-76
B-	7	70-72
C+	6	67-69
C	5	63-66
C-	4	60-62
D+	3	57-59
D	2	53-56
D-	1	50-52
F	0	0-49

Course Schedule

1. Sept 2/3: What is love? Also, who cares?

1. bell hooks, *All About Love* (excerpt)

2. Irving Singer, "Appraisal and Bestowal"

2. Sept 9/10: What is love?

1. Brook J. Sadler, "Love as Emotion and Social Practice: A Feminist Perspective"
2. Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond"

3. Sept 16/17: What is love for?

1. J. L. A. Garcia, "Love and Moral Structures: How Love can Reshape Ethical Theory"
2. Myisha Cherry, "Love, Anger, and Racial Injustice"

4. Sept 23/24: Friendship

1. Cathy Mason, "Epistemic Partialism"
2. Jen Nguyen, "A True Friend Stabs You in The Front"

5. October 1: Queer love

1. David Halperin, "Queer love"
2. E. Díaz-León, "Sexual Orientation, Sexual Desires, and Choice"

6. Oct 7/8:(Non)Monogamy

1. Justin Leonard Clardy, "Monogamies, Non-Monogamies, and the Moral Impermissibility of Intimacy Confining Constraints"
2. Kyle York, "Why Monogamy is Morally Permissible"

7. Oct 21/22: Consent

1. Tom Dougherty, "Sex, Lies, and Consent"
2. Quill R. Kukla "That's What She Said: The Language of Sexual Negotiation"
3. OPTIONAL: Ann Cahill, "Recognition, Desire, and Unjust Sex"

8. Oct 28/29: Desire

1. Tressie McMillan Cottom, "In the Name of Beauty"
2. Tom O'Shea, "Sexual Desire and Structural Injustice"

9. Nov 4/5: Racial Fetishization

1. Robin Zheng, "Why Yellow Fever Isn't Flattering"
2. Raja Halwani, "Racial Sexual Desires"

10. Nov 11/12: Porn

1. Amia Srinivasan, "Talking to my students about porn"
2. Robin Zheng, "Race and Pornography: The Dilemma of the (Un)Desirable"
3. A. W. Eaton, "Feminist Pornography"

11. Nov 18/19: Incels & sexual entitlement

1. Video: ContraPoints, "Incels"
2. Amia Srinivasan, "Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?"
3. Filipa Melo Lopes, "What Do Incels Want?"

12. Nov 25/26: Sex and technology

1. Laura Bates, "The Trouble with Sex Robots"
2. Aksel Sterri and Brian Earp, "The Ethics of Sex Robots"
3. Brian Earp, "Love and Enhancement Technology"

13. Dec 2/3: TBD + Exam review

The last day of class will be exam review. The penultimate class will concern material determined by a student vote (to take place in the latter half of the semester).

Late Assignments

Extensions can be granted by the instructor or your TA, and will be granted at their discretion. To request one, email more than 24 hours in advance of the deadline. You must email Dr. Forbes to implement SAS accommodations.

If you want to use an MSAF, recall that they must be filed within three days of the deadline. An MSAF will not excuse you from the work. All MSAFs will result in a seven-day extension from the original due date.

Late penalties:

When uploading assignments to Avenue, make sure to allow a couple of minutes before the deadline in case of internet/Avenue issues. **Everyone receives a 24-hour flexible deadline on all assignments without needing to email for an extension.** If it looks like there's going to be a technical issue with Avenue, email it to Dr. Forbes before the deadline to ensure that your submission isn't late.

Otherwise – that is, when no extension has been obtained in writing, and no MSAF has been filed – every 24 hrs after the flexible deadline you will lose 5% off the top of the final grade of the paper. So, if you turn in a paper that scores an 83% two days late, it becomes a 73% paper. There is no upper limit on this penalty.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Absences:

If you are sick, do not come to class/tutorial. Email me (or your TA for tutorial) saying that you are ill and cannot attend. There is no need to provide details or documentation on this matter. If your absence impedes your ability to turn work in on time, please email Dr. Forbes to discuss an alternate timeline or submit an MSAF for an automatic seven-day extension.

Missed work:

Any work which does not have an extension or accommodation obtained in writing (via email)/SAS-approved accommodation, and which remains unsubmitted more than 5 calendar days after the deadline, will receive a zero.

Turnitin.com

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Generative AI: Use Prohibited

Students are not permitted to use generative AI in this course. In alignment with [McMaster academic integrity policy](#), it “shall be an offence knowingly to ... submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source”. This includes work created by generative AI tools. Also state in the policy is the following, “Contract Cheating is the act of “outsourcing of student work to third parties” (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016, p. 639) with or without payment.” Using Generative AI tools is a form of contract cheating. Charges of academic dishonesty will be brought forward to the Office of Academic Integrity.

APPROVED ADVISORY STATEMENTS

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-proceduresguidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. Avenue to Learn, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn, LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the [Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](#).

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous, or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office ***normally within 10 working days*** of the

beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, Avenue to Learn and/or McMaster email.