**PHILOSOPHY 2ZZ3: PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE & SEX**

**Fall 2020**

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**Course Objectives** 

**Course Description**

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 and important values and relations in society.

**Course Learning Outcomes**

Over the course of this semester, you will learn how to:

* Critically read, analyze, and assess philosophical arguments;
* Discuss philosophical topics in a respectful, engaging, and constructive way;
* Engage in substantial self-reflection;
* Construct clear and persuasive arguments about topics in the philosophy of love and sex;
* Develop familiarity with philosophical views from a host of perspectives.

**Textbooks, Materials, & Fees**  
There are no required (physical) texts for this course. All readings will be provided via pdf on the course website.

**Method of Assessment**

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

Participation: 15% **Due: ongoing**

Tutorials: 15% **Due: ongoing**

Critical engagement/reflection papers: 50%

Critical engagement/reflection paper 1: 5% **Due: 20 Sept 2020**  
 Critical engagement/reflection paper 2: 10% **Due: 4 Oct 2020**

Critical engagement/reflection paper 3: 15% **Due: 25 Oct 2020**

Critical engagement/reflection paper 4: 20% **Due: 15 Nov 2020**

Final exam: 20%

Question creation: 10% -- **Due: 22 Dec. 2020**

Exam itself (take home): 10% -- **Due: 22 Dec 2020**

*All work is to be submitted by Avenue or your McMaster email. If turning work into your TA directly,* ***you must also cc the instructor*** *at forbeas@mcmaster.ca*

*Participation*

Participation is very important. Philosophy is something that we do; it is an activity. You need to attend class and be an active participant – this means listening carefully to the content of the lecture and to your classmates’ questions and comments, as well as contributing your own thoughts or concerns. While it can be intimidating to speak in class, remember that your peers probably feel the same way, and that we will be careful to maintain a friendly and open-minded attitude in order that all contributions will be welcome and treated with the principle of charity – that is, we will all try our best to understand what others say in the spirit of how it is intended.

**Because of covid-19**, this class is going to be entirely online. It will be asynchronous – you work through the material at your own pace – with the exception of tutorials, which may sometimes take place in real time. Even though participation is going to take place in perhaps non-standard ways, and may include new and/or unconventional practices, it is still important both for your grade and for your ability to flourish in the class. We’re going to work together to find strategies that work for everyone. If you have concerns or are facing barriers to participation of any kind, please speak with me so that we can find a solution for you.

Participation in the lectures means a) watching the videos / recorded lectures so that you can b) answer the mini-quizzes that follow them, and c) asking/responding to questions in the online discussion boards on Avenue.

Please note that there are two different discussion boards. There will be a weekly board for you to express your thoughts about the class material. This is a place for you to talk about things that didn’t make sense, were unclear, or specific arguments or claims that you found interesting/illuminating/frustrating/implausible/etc. This is the one that counts toward your participation grade. Questions in this section should be aimed at seeking clarity or opening discussion. Some (**non-exhaustive**) examples:

Seeking clarity:

1. *Particular claim:* In this kind of question, state what it is you don’t understand and why. E.g., “On page x of [paper], it sounds like [author] is arguing for [view], but then [author] says [seemingly contradictory thing]. What is [author] actually saying here?”
2. *Structure of argument:* In this kind of question, you are asking not *what* the argument or claim says, but *how* it works. Do the author’s claims actually support what they say they do? Does the argument build on its previous parts or does it make a leap?

Opening discussion:

1. *Disagreemen*t: In this kind of question, state what you disagree with from the text(s), why, and invite others to respond. E.g., “Author claims that it is morally permissible to have sex with robots, but I think Author is wrong because it is a slippery slope between how we treat things and people – if we treat robots like sexual objects, we will treat people as sexual objects, too.”
2. *Application*: In this kind of question, ask about how the claims/arguments in the text apply to other domains. What would happen if we applied the reasoning/claims in the paper to different areas of human life or thinking? What does this result show us and why does it matter?

**Please note that if you ask the questions from the tutorial discussion boards, you will not receive any points.**

If you find that you have no questions and/or have a pretty good understanding of the material, you may respond to your peers’ questions. Remember to apply the principle of charity and try to understand their questions as they were intended. Rudeness, condescension, and hate speech is not acceptable. Some examples of answers:

Seeking clarity:

1. “I think that Author was trying to argue for [claim x] – on p. x, Author suggests that they are also committed to [view y], which is compatible with [claim x] but not [claim z].”
2. “I agree that it seems like Author’s argument skips an important step. In order for Author to prove their point that [x], they would have to have shown how [claim a] and [claim b] are connected, but they don’t seem to do this.”

**Please note that there can only be two responses that agree to each ‘seeking clarity’ kind of question.**  For example,

**Question:** What does claim x mean? It is unclear because [reasons].

**Response 1:** I think [claim x] really means [abc] because [evidence 1].

**Response 2:** Yes, [claim x] means [abc] – we can also see that from [evidence 2]

**Response 3:** No, I don’t think that [claim x] means [abc] – I think it means [def] because [evidence 3].

**At this point,** if you agree with respondents 1 and 2, then you should find another question to respond to (or ask), but if you agree with respondent 3 you can say so and explain why.

Continuing discussion:

1. Disagreement:
   1. **Respondent 1**: I disagree that there is a slippery slope between how we treat objects and people because [explain reasons].
   2. **Respondent 2**: I’m torn between OP and Respondent 1 because I think there **could** be a slippery slope if there are certain conditions met – [explain what those are and why].

**Please be careful not to repeat the claims/reasoning of others in these threads, too. You can certainly endorse the same general position so long as you are bringing in new information/ideas that can further the discussion.**

Participation (watching lectures, doing quizzes, and posting on weekly discussion boards) will count for 15% of your final grade. Please see the rubrics on Avenue for details on how this is scored. **Please note that you do not need to ask/answer questions every single week, though you should aim to participate in at least half of the weekly discussion boards. As always, quality is preferable to quantity.**

*Tutorials*

Your attendance and participation in tutorials will be a further 15% of your grade. Since this course is asynchronous, this will take a different form than usual. Final details are TBD in coordination with your TAs, but a major component will be online group work in argument construction and defense based on discussion questions I will provide. Please see Avenue for the appropriate discussion boards and related information.

*Critical engagement / reflection papers*

These assignments should be approximately 3-4 pages, double spaced TNR or equivalent font. For each of these papers, your task is to pick one of the recent readings/topics, give an exegesis of it – demonstrate understanding of some position it holds – and then briefly critically engage with it – provide an argument about it, or an application of it in other domains (e.g., in day-to-day life, in other academic fields, etc.). The teaching team – the TAs and I – will provide lots of feedback so that you will have some opportunity to practice your philosophical skills and get good, developmental feedback. See Avenue for rubrics and further, more detailed instructions.

*Final exam / question creation*

During the exam period, you will complete a written exam that asks you to demonstrate your knowledge of the course material and apply it to a particular set of questions. The precise mechanics of how this will work are yet to be determined in light of conducting the exam virtually, but students should expect the questions to be drawn from the cumulative course material. This will be worth 10% of your final grade. Students will also be asked to provide some sample questions for future exams, given parameters detailed on Avenue. This will also be worth 10% of your final grade.

**Policy on Missed Work, Extensions, and Late Penalties**

My policy on late work is for every 24 hours after the deadline, you will lose one third of a letter grade. So, if you turn in a B+ assignment, after one day it is a B, after another it is a B-, etc. That said, I know that extenuating circumstances do occur. Should you find yourself in such a situation, please contact me as soon as possible, but keep in mind that this is no guarantee of an extension.

If you **anticipate** needing an extension, you must email me **at least 24 hours prior to the deadline** with your request. If **something comes up at the last minute**, send me an email with subject line **Urgent.** If you need an extension because of a diagnosis or disability, please see the section below on accommodations.

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 five-minute grace period after the deadline,** i.e., if the deadline is 12am, no late penalty will be applied up to 12:05am, though 12:06am and after **will be subject to the late penalty.** If it looks like there’s going to be a technical issue, email it to me before the deadline so as to ensure that your submission isn’t late.

**Other Course Information**

*Behaviour*

It is deeply important that we maintain an attitude of respect for one another and for the subjects we cover in this class, especially because many of them are quite personal/sensitive/important. Philosophy is, at its core, a practice of critical thinking. This often consists in making arguments and responding to one’s interlocutors in ways that interrogate their positions and claims; we will consider reasons for and against views in a way that incorporates an underlying commitment to trust, empathy, and cooperative inquiry. Throughout our discussions of some sensitive issues and concerns, we will maintain an attitude of respect even – especially – when we disagree with the views at hand. We will discuss specific practices of class conduct in the first class.

*Electronic Devices*

I would usually include a section here on the evidence that suggests that distractions via one’s devices undermine academic success through interference with attention, learning, participation, etc. Since we are meeting exclusively online, there are fewer ways for me to notice if you are distracted. Ultimately, it is up to you whether you TikTok or send memes or whatever else in class, but I hope that you focus on the work at hand. These are strange times and we are all still acclimating to a new learning environment. Let’s work together.

*Email*

I will communicate with you via email and Avenue, particularly if something changes in the course – unexpected cancellation, new or additional readings, etc. Please ensure that you are receiving these notifications. My general policy is to respond to emails within 24 hours of receiving them; however, I will not discuss grades over email, and would prefer that longer questions about assignments are addressed in virtual office hours. **Please check the syllabus and the (forthcoming) detailed instructions on assignments, etc. before emailing me about them**.

*Grades*

I am committed to a fair and unbiased grading process. As such, all assignments must be submitted with no identifying information other than your student number. This allows the teaching team to grade anonymously. If you have concerns about this process, please contact me and we will discuss possible solutions. If you are unsatisfied with your grade and would like to appeal it, the process is as follows. Between 24 and 72 hours after the grades are posted, explain in writing – in a way that responds to each of the comments – how you think the grade/comments are inappropriate for your assignment. I promise to consider these appeals and to re-examine your assignment. Please note, however, that a request for regrading can result in your mark going up or down.

*Accessibility and Support Services*

I want all of you to succeed and flourish philosophically. There are, of course, many ways to learn; I will strive to adapt to your needs, but this means that you must tell me how you learn best. Please feel free to contact me via email or in office hours to let me know what works for you.

Students with disabilities or relevant diagnoses are strongly encouraged to make use of services here at the University. If you require any accommodations in light of any diagnoses or disabilities, please contact Student Accessibility Services. You do not need to disclose any details of any of these matters with me; once you’ve been in contact with SAS, we will only discuss how to accommodate your needs given practical details of the class.

*Covid-19*

These are obviously strange, scary, and frustrating times. This semester will be challenging for all of us. When we do meet, it will be via Zoom (provided by McMaster). You do not need to have your cameras on in large group meetings, though it would be nice to be able to see you when we meet privately in office hours. Please make note of the degree of privacy afforded by Zoom virtual backgrounds.

## Please Note the Following Policies and Statements:

### Academic Dishonesty

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.

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.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### Email correspondence policy

It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from each student’s own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student.  Instructors will delete emails that do not originate from a McMaster email account.

### Modification of course outlines

The University reserves the right to change dates and/or deadlines etc. for any or all courses in the case of an emergency situation or labour disruption or civil unrest/disobedience, etc. If a modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with an explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. Any significant changes should be made in consultation with the Department Chair.

### McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF)

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work. Please note these regulations have changed beginning Fall 2015. You can find information at [mcmaster.ca/msaf/](http://mcmaster.ca/msaf/). If you have any questions about the MSAF, please contact your Associate Dean's office.

### Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca). For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicAccommodation-StudentsWithDisabilities.pdf).

### Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religion and spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the Course Calendar or by their respective Faculty. In most cases, the student should contact his or her professor or academic advisor as soon as possible to arrange accommodations for classes, assignments, tests and examinations that might be affected by a religious holiday or spiritual observance.

**Schedule of Readings and Assignments**

\* *indicates a suggested though not required reading. These readings are subject to change in light of student interests.*

**Week 1, Sept. 9: Introduction; what is love?**

No required reading, but watch this [video](https://www.ted.com/talks/skye_c_cleary_why_do_we_love_a_philosophical_inquiry) on why we love.

**Week 2, Sept. 14 & 16: What is love?**

* Irving Singer, “Appraisal and Bestowal”
* David B. Wong, “The Confucian and Daoist Traditions on Love”

**Week 3, Sept. 21 & 23: What is love?**

* Niko Kolodny, “Love as a Valuing Relationship”
* Brook J. Sadler, “Love as Emotion and Social Practice: A Feminist Perspective”

**Week 4, Sept. 28 & Sept. 30: Queer love**

* David Halperin, “Queer love”
* Maren Behrensen, “‘Born That Way?’ The Metaphysics of Queer Liberation”
* \*Raja Halwani, “Essentialism, Social Constructionism, and the History of Homosexuality”

**Week 5, Oct. 5 & 7: Polyamory**

* Natasha McKeever, “Is the Requirement of Sexual Exclusivity Consistent with Romantic Love?”
* Carrie Ichikawa Jenkins, “Modal Monogamy”
* \*Elizabeth Brake, “Do Subversive Weddings Challenge Amanormativity? Polyamorous Weddings and Romantic Love Ideals”

**[Fall break Oct. 12-16]**

**Week 6, Oct. 19 & 21: Love and race**

* Grant J. Silva, “Racism as Self-Love”
* Charles Mills, “Do Black Men Have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women?”
* \*Joy L. Hightower’s [Op-ed](https://hjaap.hkspublications.org/2016/04/25/where-are-the-brothas/?fbclid=IwAR1Z_HYBX_ZijzxRcYamzhgLA5VEX_P3Upqw_urAMb1VajhZ4MPb_G39oGM), “Where are the Brothas?”

**Week 7, Oct. 26 & 28: Consent**

* Tom Dougherty, “Sex, Lies, and Consent”
* Talia Mae Bettcher, “Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion”
* Ann J. Cahill, “Recognition, Desire, and Unjust Sex”
* \*Quill R. Kukla “That’s What She Said: The Language of Sexual Negotiation”

**Week 8, Nov. 2 & 4: Porn & perversion**

* A. W. Eaton, “A Sensible Antiporn Feminism”
* Thomas Nagel, “Sex and Perversion”
* \*Rae Langton and Caroline West, “Score-keeping in a Pornographic Language Game”

**Week 9, Nov. 9 & 11: Sex work & sex robots**

* Susan Brison, “Contentious Freedom: Sex Work and Social Construction”
* Jeffrey Gauthier, “Prostitution, Sexual Autonomy, and Sex Discrimination”
* Laura Bates, [“The Trouble With Sex Robots”](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/17/opinion/sex-robots-consent.html)
* David Graham, “[What Interacting With Robots Might Reveal About Human Nature"](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/06/kate-darling-robots-aspen/532194/)

**Week 10, Nov. 16 & 18: Sex and race**

* Robin Zheng, “Why Yellow Fever Isn’t Flattering”
* Raja Halwani, “Racial Sexual Desires”
* \*Angela Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist”

**Week 11, Nov. 23 & 25: Sex and entitlement**

* Amia Srinivasan, “[Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?](https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n06/amia-srinivasan/does-anyone-have-the-right-to-sex)”
* ContraPoints, “[Incels](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fD2briZ6fB0)”
* Jia Tolentino, “[Rage of the Incels](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-rage-of-the-incels)”
* D. A. Wolf, “[Do We Owe Our Spouses Sex?](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/do-we-owe-our-spouses-sex_b_927484)”
* \*Kristen Roupenian, “[Cat Person](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/cat-person)”

**Week 12, Nov. 30 & Dec. 2: Marriage and divorce**

* Excerpts from Elizabeth Brake’s *Minimizing Marriage*
* Daniel Nolan, “Temporary Marriage”
* \*Elizabeth Brake, “Is Divorce Promise-Breaking?”
* \*Raja Halwani, “Virtue Ethics and Adultery”

**Week 13, Dec. 9: TBD by student interest**