**PHILOS 2ZZ3: Philosophy of Love & Sex**

*Fall 2020*

**Instructor:** Allauren Samantha Forbes, forbeas@mcmaster.ca

**Course Meetings:** Mondays and Wednesdays 8:30-9:20am (**we won’t be meeting in real time**)

**Office Hours:** xxxxx, or by appointment

**Teaching Assistants:** xxxxxxx and xxxxxxx and xxxxxxxx

**Tutorial meetings:** xxxxxx xxxxxxx xxxxxx xxxxxx xxxxxxx

**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 what we value, how we live, and who we are. 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 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 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;

**Required Texts**

There are no required texts for this course. All readings will be provided via pdf on the course website.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

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

Participation: 10%

Tutorials: 20%

Critical engagement/reflection papers: 50%

Critical engagement/reflection paper 1: 5%  
 Critical engagement/reflection paper 2: 10%

Critical engagement/reflection paper 3: 15%

Critical engagement/reflection paper 4: 20%

Final exam: 20%

Question creation: 10%

Exam itself: 10%

*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 will 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 watching the videos / recorded lectures and completing the mini-assignments and participating in the online discussion boards on Avenue. It will count for 10% of your final grade. Please see the rubrics on Avenue for details on how this is scored.

*Tutorials*

Your attendance and participation in tutorials will be a further 20% of your grade. How precisely this is carved up is to be determined by your TA.

*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.

**Course Expectations**

*Behaviour*

It is deeply important that we maintain an attitude of respect for one another and for the subjects we cover in this class. 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 – and perhaps especially – when we disagree with the views at hand. We will discuss specific practices of class conduct in the first class meeting.

*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 sometimes communicate with you via email, 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 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 me 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 my 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.

*Late Work*

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.

*Academic Integrity*

It is very important that you are graded on your own contributions rather than those of others. If you are drawing from other work, please be sure to cite it appropriately. Familiarize yourself with the University’s Academic Integrity Policy – see [here](https://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/students/whatis.html) for a definition – because this determines how cases of plagiarism or other academic misconduct will be handled. Since philosophy is an activity that we do together, feel free to discuss things with your peers, friends, etc. Just be sure that what you hand in for grading is reflective of your position on things.

**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 are strongly encouraged to make use of services here at the University, and, if you feel comfortable with it, to let me know how I can make the course more accessible to you.

**Schedule and Readings**

I may change the readings, depending on student interest, and if so I will email you in advance. Further, I have included extra readings with an asterisk (\*). These are not required, but may be helpful if you are puzzled or find yourself curious about the topic.

**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**

* Maren Behrensen, “Queer Bodies and 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 Kukla, *fka* Rebecca 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**