Phil 170 Philosophy of Love and Sex

Summer 2014

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Office/hrs: SC 158 MW 1-2 and by appointment

Course Description:

Philosophy is not particularly known for being concerned with love and sex, despite the fact that the very term “philosophy” in its Greek origin translates to English as “love of wisdom.” What is the relation between love and wisdom? How is it that this relation has been rendered tenuous, unlikely, or unexpected, verging on the unintelligible? In this course, we will look at the history of western thought wherein a separation between reason and emotion has been established, making the question of “philo-sophia,” or love's relation to wisdom, obscure. We will not only look at love and sex philosophically, but we will also attempt to look at philosophy “erotically,” that is, to form a passionate relation to thought. We will explore the ways in which this history of thought has direct bearing on not only the ways in which we think, but also in how and what we feel and experience. Thus we have a very intimate relation to this history, albeit concealed.

We will begin by parsing the relation between and love and wisdom, and looking at the difference between three Greek notions of love: eros, agape, and philia. We will read about the unison theory of love, a very popular theory of love today, and read its feminist critique. We will also look at some other theories of love and think about love’s relation to the political.

We will then turn to our conceptions of sex and sexuality, as well as understandings of normalcy and perversion. We will trace the historical constructions of these notions and how they shape reality today. We will look at normative models of sexuality, including the conquest model, which is the driving force of rape culture. We will discuss how our understanding of sex and desire may be unwittingly contributing to the deep seated problem of sexual violence in this society (as well as on this campus). Lastly, we will look at ways to affirm sex and desire against the pitfalls of normative sexuality.

An important goal for this course is that students be able to think about love and sex as historically shaped notions and interrogate the presuppositions that underlie particular conceptualizations of love and sex as rooted in the particular western historical lineage that this course traces.

Learning Goals:

1) Exploring the philosophical tradition that begins with love of wisdom but then expels love, the body, and emotion, for the sake of disinterested knowledge.
Problematizing this tendency by bringing eros back into the classroom and embracing passion as a pedagogical tool.

2) Re-reading the history of philosophy through the lens of passion as the pre-condition of reason (rather than passionless reason).

3) Becoming fluent in various theories of love and sex and getting into the habit of thinking love and sex philosophically and critically.

4) Historically situating our conceptions and practices of love and sex, and pondering their social and political dimensions (and implications), as the conditions of possibility of the personal dimensions.

5) Problematizing normative accounts of sexuality by way of re-thinking the relation between our normative conceptions of sexuality and rape culture. Exploring different possibilities of affirming sexuality that would in turn challenge this link.

6) Acquiring a nuanced sense of “consent,” not as a simple lack of “no,” but as a complex phenomenon that requires ongoing care and attentiveness.

7) Becoming a better writer and a thoughtful thinker.

Course Requirements:

Discussion Board Posts (Response Papers and a Movie Reflection Paper): 6 in total. 300 words each + 100 word response to 2 other posts. 40%

Argumentative Paper: 3-5 pages. Prompts will be provided. Due 7/18 (Friday of Week 5) 20%

Group Presentation: Proposal (5%), Outline (5%), Presentation (10%), Collective Paper (2-3 pages) (10%). Due last week of classes 30%

Participation: Based on preparedness (having read, underlined, and thought about the material and brought it to class) and frequency and quality of contribution 10%

Grading:

What kind of paper deserves an “A,” “B,” etc.? The following rubric reflects the general standards of the Philosophy Department at the University of Oregon.

A - excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.

B - good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.

C - OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.

D - poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.

F - failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a complete lack of effort.

Possible Topics for Group Presentations: marriage, sexual violence, domestic violence, pornography, Disney conceptions of love, monogamy and non-monogamous relationships, use of sexuality in advertisement, love and sex in a particular movie, poem, novel, etc.
The purpose is to take up an issue related to love and sex by making a contribution to the debates that you are entering, that is, by establishing a position within those debates and arguing for that position. In your presentation, you will be presenting the debates (by reviewing the literature that provides the theoretical ground for your position) and you will be arguing for your position by providing reasons for your claim and considering possible objections. The paper that you collectively write should be an outcome of this process.

Attendance Policy:

This class has mandatory attendance policy. Class discussion is an indispensable component which cannot be made up in the case of absence. If you miss class more than five times, you cannot get a grade higher than a C. If you miss class more than ten times for any reason, you cannot get a passing grade. Three times late equals an absence. If you are, however, late more than 15 minutes, you will be counted as absent.

A is an exceptional grade that requires exceptional performance. One is expected to have a (near) perfect attendance record and frequent helpful contribution to class discussion in order to get an A for participation.

Late Assignments:

You will lose 10% of the credit for a given assignment for each day that you fail to submit after the deadline.

Electronics:

No electronics. No exceptions. If I warn you to put an electronic device away, expect it to reflect on your grade. If I have to warn you a second time, I will ask for you to leave and/or you will be marked absent for that day.

Please come and talk to me for disability accommodations.

Academic Honesty:

If you are not doing the work yourself, it is plagiarism, cheating, or some other form of academic dishonesty. Any act of plagiarism will be reported to the university and will result in an automatic F. If you are unsure about what counts as plagiarism or academic dishonesty in general, come and talk to me first so that we make sure that we are on the same page.

*** I will do my best to create a productive environment and inspire free thinking throughout the course. I will treat everyone fairly and with respect. In return, I expect you to do your best and treat everyone with respect. I want all of us to hold each other accountable. For this, communication is the key. Please come and talk to me if anything is bothering you. The subject matter will at times be sensitive and the discussions may be heated – and this is quite alright, as long as we don’t stop communicating. We shall build our classroom community together and contribute in our own unique way.
Class Schedule:

Week 1 (6/23-6/27) Philo-sophia (love of wisdom), Eros, Agape, and Philia

6/23 M: Introductions, course overview.


6/26 R: Nussbaum, “Constructing Love, Desire, and Care.”

6/27 F: Nussbaum, cont.

6/29 U: Response Paper Due by 5pm

Week 2 (6/30-7/4) Love as Union


7/1 T: Plato, cont. (32-46)

7/2 W: Plato, cont. (46-76)

7/3 R: Solomon, “The Self in Love”

7/4 F: July 4 Holiday

7/6 U: Response Paper Due by 5pm

Week 3 (7/7-7/11) Other Theories of Love


7/8 T: Badiou, In Praise of Love (1-52)

7/9 W: Badiou, cont. (53-104)

7/10 R: Kipnis, “Love’s Labors” in Against Love (11-51)

7/11 F: Kipnis, cont. Paper Prompts Assigned

7/13 U: Response Paper Due by 5pm

Week 4 (7/14-7/18) Normative Sexuality: Normality and Repression

7/14 M: Reich, Prefaces to the 2nd and 3rd editions of The Sexual Revolution, Film Screening: “Do Communists Have Better Sex?”

7/15 T: Reich, cont.

7/16 W: Freud, “Sexual Aberrations”
7/17 R: Foucault, “The Incitement to Discourse,” “The Perverse Implantation” in *History of Sexuality v1*

7/18 F: Foucault, “Domain,” “Periodization” in *History of Sexuality v1*  
Argumentative Paper Due


7/22 T: Foucault & Butler, cont.

7/23 W: Butler, “Undiagnosing Gender”

7/24 R: Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone”

7/25 F: Butler, cont.

7/27 U: Response Paper Due by 5pm

Week 6 (7/28-8/1) Normative Sexuality: The Conquest Model

7/28 M: Dworkin, “Possession”

7/29 T: Dworkin, cont. Screening: *Flirting with Danger*

7/30 W: Dworkin, “Occupation/Collaboration”

7/31 R: Dworkin, cont.

8/1 F: Discussion on rape culture. Presentation Proposal Paragraphs Due

8/3 U: Response Paper Due by 5pm

Week 7 (8/4-8/8) Positive Sexuality and Sexual Liberation


8/5 T: Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” “Poetry is not a Luxury,” Aurora Levins-Morales, “Radical Pleasure, Sex and the End of Victimhood”


8/7 R: *Head-On*, cont.

8/8 F: *Head-On*, cont. Film Discussion.

8/10 U: Film Reflection Paper Due by 5pm

Week 8 (8/11-8/13) Student Presentations

8/11 M, 8/12 T, 8/13 W: Group Presentations