

PHIL 243H1 S: Philosophy of Human Sexuality

 Winter Term 2024/ University of Toronto St. George Campus (3 credits)

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Instructor:	Natalie Helberg (Lecturer, Department of Philosophy)
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Email:	natalie.helberg@mail.utoronto.ca (email is my preferred contact method)
Office hours:	Thursday 1:00pm-3:00pm (or by appointment) *There will be no office hours the first week of class
Class schedule:	We 6:00pm-9:00pm in person; location: FE 114

Course description: We will consider human sexuality as a plastic phenomenon, a phenomenon subject to social and historical forces and imbued with the power to subvert these. The range of philosophical questions we will consider are directly related to sexuality's plasticity: How do heterosexist, misogynistic, racist, economic, and other norms shape contemporary sexuality? What is the relation between metaphysical thinking on the subject of sexuality and suppositions about anatomical sex and gender? What are the philosophical and political stakes of sexual experimentation? What is the relationship between sexual experimentation and experiments with sex and gender? How should we think about prostitution? What is problematic about pornography and can it be repurposed? How has monogamy been conceived? How has it been criticized? How have thinkers made the case for polyamory? What is love and how is it related to sexuality? Is love finite, or can love be 'true' if it lives and dies within the confines of a lifespan?

Required texts: Electronic versions of our readings will be available as PDFs or via links to resources in the UofT Library on our Quercus page. Consult the reading schedule for a comprehensive list of our readings.

How the course will run and expectations:

We will meet at our scheduled times in the room that has been assigned to us. Our time in class will involve a blend of lecture, discussion, and writing (we will have pop quizzes at the end of five of our lectures; the writing I just mentioned will simply involve responding to quiz-questions—for more information about the pop quizzes, consult the 'assignment' section of this syllabus). I will spend part of each class articulating key ideas and arguments advanced in our readings and part of the class posing questions about the readings designed to spur discussion. There will be one exception to this rule: On the date you write the midterm (for more information about the midterm, see the assignment section below), there will be no lecture and no discussion: you will simply focus on completing the midterm.

Make sure that you monitor Quercus for any announcements and keep apprised of any email communications from me. If ever an emergency constrains me to cancel class, I will notify you using Quercus.

Do your very best to complete the readings for the week in advance. We have quite a few readings and some are difficult. You will be learning how to read the more linguistically challenging texts on our reading list during lectures (I will give you the frameworks you need for the texts to become intelligible to you) and while engaged in your own reading practice (you do have to grapple with the texts on your own, too, to start to unlock them).

Informal reading policy: I will be working with an informal ‘reading policy’ as I run the course. I want the class to be maximally enriching, and so I’ve loaded it up with interesting texts. I realize, though, that this can set students up to feel overwhelmed by the course and perhaps unable to rise to its challenges; it can set students up to feel as if they are up against the impossible, or even to feel like abject failures. These feelings are among the worst the contemporary university can foster. How, then, to strike a balance between the desire to teach generously—to give students everything it is possible, as an instructor, to give them—while also refraining from subjecting them to the abuses of finitude that the contemporary university is already so primed and prone to inflict (e.g., acting like dense texts can be processed instantly, or in no time at all, or even acting as if ‘time,’ that precious resource, is evenly distributed across the student body, when the truth is that some students have more than others)? How, too, to offer resistance to a post-literate culture? Many students struggle with reading itself and with attention. I believe in the value of the activity that is reading, so the solution to the problem of stressing students out with more reading than they can do *cannot* be that of having no required readings or even a scanty number of them. I view the class as partly an opportunity for students to develop the reading muscles whose atrophy our culture encourages. It is imperative, then, for students in the class to read, and not only read, but read as much as they can—to exercise those muscles, in other words, and transform their limits by pushing them. What I would like students in the class to do, then, is to use the texts on our reading list to cultivate a reading practice guided by the following principles.

1. View the reading list as a challenge to push your reading capacities beyond their own bounds. Everyone will come to the class with different capacities. The point is not to feel that you’re competing with your peers; the point is to gauge where you as an individual are and to try to use the class, and the work you do in it, to move past that particular point. If, after the course ends, you’ve done this (your own reading limits have budged and you find yourself able to productively read more than you were able to before), then you’ve succeeded.
2. Make time every week to look at the readings for the following week. If we’re looking at a particularly long reading the next week, then try to tackle it over the course of a few days, instead of all at once. Even when I’m not ‘sitting down to read,’ I enjoy keeping the things I’m reading close to me and glancing at them in the little intervals of time I’m afforded throughout the day. When I’m reading this way (intermittently glancing at a

text), I find it changes the way I focus on and process the text. The smaller units of the text stand out to me more. I might only be looking at a sentence or a paragraph while I'm nibbling on some breakfast. The sentence, or the paragraph, isn't as prone to being swallowed up into the larger ocean of text it's a part of and I myself am more liable to remember it. Anyway: you're not obliged to fill every second of free time you find yourself with with our readings. Here, I'm just highlighting one technique among several that you might embrace as you develop your own reading practice.

3. Make a concerted effort to do all of the readings assigned for a given week, BUT don't think you've 'failed' (or are not meeting expectations) if you don't manage to. *Try* to tackle our mountain of texts and then observe how far you were able to go. This is a way of learning about where your limits stand now. Track how they change over time (that is, track how they change during the time of the course and after the course is over).
4. If you don't have time to get to a given text on our reading list while the course is running, consider saving it for a rainy day in the future. The course is pointing you to interesting resources. We act as if learning can transpire in 12 weeks, but often it takes far more time. Don't be afraid to let the course exceed its own bounds and spill over into your post-course life.
5. You do have to read the texts you work with to produce your written assignments carefully. If you find yourself having to make hard choices about what to read and what to save for another day, prioritize the texts you think you might want to write on.
6. Do attend lecture. If you haven't had a chance to read a given text, you can still learn about it by listening to me discourse on it while taking notes. You will want to attend lecture to earn marks for your responses to pop-quiz questions, moreover (see the assignment section, below).

I will provide notes which indicate the core ideas I've discussed during a given lecture after the lecture via Quercus, as students often find them useful to have while studying the readings independently and while working on written assignments. Please also take your own notes (creating a personalized set of notes while engaged in a learning process is a special, enriching activity!). The lectures themselves will contain more detail than typed-up lecture notes can convey and you may want to capture some of it.

Evaluation/Assignments:

1) **Pop Participation Quizzes:** 5 in total (worth 4% each; worth a total of 20% of the final grade). These are pop quizzes, so they can happen during any of our scheduled lectures and will not be announced in advance.

*I will ask a question about material I presented during lecture at the end of that lecture. Your response for a given quiz-question should be between 3 and 5 sentences. You will have 10 to 15 minutes to formulate your response during a given quiz. I will gather the answers at the end of the lecture. The quizzes will be assigned a letter grade (A, A-, B+, B, etc.) which will then be converted to a number; note that the quizzes will also be graded relative to the other quizzes in the set: the strongest responses in the set will receive an A. Write something rather than nothing, even if you're not sure of the answer. If you attempt to answer the question, you can still earn some marks, even if your answer is wrong, and earning some marks for every quiz will help your overall participation grade.

2) **Short paper** (1000 words in length; worth 20% of the final grade). **Due Feb. 11th; submit via Quercus by 11:59pm.**

This paper will involve bringing at least two of our readings together to make a philosophical point.

3) **Midterm Exam** (worth 30% of the final grade). **The exam will run in class on Feb. 28th. You will have the full class to write.** The exam will consist of 4 short-answer questions on material explained in lecture in the weeks leading up to the midterm (each response should be a short paragraph) and 1 essay question requiring a response approximately 600 words in length.

3) **Final Paper:** 2000 words in length (worth 30% of the final grade). **Due during the exam period: April 20th**

*Consult the 'Essay-Writing Checklist' on Quercus to get a sense of the components of a strong philosophy paper.

Assignment Submission: All assignments should be submitted via Quercus by 11:59pm on the day they are due.

Extensions: Extensions may be permitted for valid reasons (emergencies, severe illnesses, etc.). Please request an extension before the day the assignment you are requesting an extension for is due. Retroactive extensions may be possible, depending on a person's reasons for requesting them. Getting in touch with me to explain your situation and see what accommodations are possible never hurts!

Late Policy: Late assignments for which an extension has not been granted will be penalized (2% of the grade will be subtracted each day after the deadline until the assignment is submitted).

Email Policy: If you have questions that require elaborate philosophical responses or detailed explanations, please come to my office hours or schedule a meeting with me to pose them (I

won't have time to write up a treatise for you by email, but I'm happy to speak with you and help you that way—I can answer questions much more efficiently using spoken language). For practical questions: First, make sure I haven't already answered the question (e.g., on the syllabus or on Quercus), then, if I haven't, feel free to reach out. You can email me to ask for extensions or to set up meetings. Email: natalie.helberg@utoronto.ca.

Re-marking Policy: When a graded assignment is returned to you, please consider the feedback provided on it carefully. If, after careful consideration of this feedback, you feel that your grade is unfair, you can reach out to your TA and request a re-evaluation. In the email you send your TA, you must explain your reasons for thinking the initial grade is unfair. Your TA can then decide whether a re-evaluation is warranted. There are three possible outcomes of a re-evaluation: the grade may remain the same, the grade may be adjusted upwards, or, in cases where the TA feels they were initially too generous, the initial grade may be lowered. I will support the TA's judgement. I will only step in if there are assignments that are particularly difficult to re-assess.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is not mandatory. You will want to attend regularly so that you can earn marks on the quizzes that will run at the end of 5 of our lectures, though. Again, these are pop quizzes, so they can happen during any of our scheduled lectures.

Missed Test Policy: If you have a valid reason (emergencies, severe illness, etc.) for missing lecture on the day of a pop-quiz and have documentation, I may allow you to do a make-up quiz during my office hours. Reach out by email to see what is possible.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:

Plagiarism (misrepresenting the work of others as one's own, or failing to cite one's sources properly) and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will not be tolerated. Offenses of this kind run counter to the aims of education and evaluation: Skill acquisition (one becomes a better reader, writer and thinker because one does the work) and fair assessment (one's grades should reflect one's actual capacities; competition in the academic environment should be fair). In order to avoid inadvertent acts of plagiarism, students should familiarize themselves with the following resources: <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai> (the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters: a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations) and <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>. Reach out to me or your TA for advice on anything you find unclear.

Accessibility:

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Accessibility-related concerns should be communicated to me. I will do my best to accommodate students who require accommodations. Depending on the nature of the accommodation, students requiring accommodations may also need to contact accessibility services: www.accessibility.utoronto.ca

Reading Schedule

*Note: Our reading schedule isn't set in stone and we will be free to adjust it as the course progresses if we need to. Some topics may require slightly more time to cover than our reading schedule indicates, in which case we will allow them to spill over into subsequent weeks. Think of the course, of our thinking in the course, as an organism developing, rather than as a body of pre-partitioned information whose delivery is rigidly determined in advance. The metaphor of a 'developing organism' suggests that you can think of the course as a unified entity as well: the links between the readings will ramify as we move through them, so we will be calling back to past readings as the course progresses, refreshing and transforming them in the context of the newer readings.

<i>Weeks</i>	<i>Readings</i>
<p>1 <i>Sexuality and Social Constructivism</i> <i>Jan. 10/2024</i></p>	<p>Introduction to the class and first lecture.</p> <p>Butler, Judith. 1999. "Subjects of Sex / Gender / Desire." <i>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity</i>. New York: Routledge. 2-46. (Available online through the UofT Library; link on Quercus)</p>
<p>2 <i>Queer Sexuality</i> <i>Jan. 17/2024</i></p>	<p>Sara Ahmed. 2017. "Lesbian Feminism." <i>Living A Feminist Life</i>. Durham; London: Duke UP. 213-234.</p> <p>Adrienne Rich. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." <i>Signs</i> Vol. 5, No. 4 (1980): 631-660.</p> <p>Michel Foucault. "Friendship as a Way of Life." <i>Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth</i>. New York: New Press. 135-140.</p> <p>Bruce Boone. 2017. "David's Charm." <i>Writers Who Love Too Much</i>. Ed. Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian. New York: Night Boats. 257-264.</p>
<p>3</p>	

<p><i>Sexuality, Limit-Experiences and Self-Overcoming</i></p> <p>Jan. 24/2024</p>	<p>Michel Foucault. "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act." <i>Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth</i>. New York: New Press. 141-156.</p> <p>Ladelle McWhorter. 1999. "Self-Overcoming through Ascetic Pleasures." <i>Bodies and Pleasures</i>. Bloomington: Indiana UP. 176-192.</p> <p>Georges Bataille. 1991. Selections from <i>The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy</i> (Volume 2: The History of Eroticism). New York: Zone Books. 61-66, 89-94, 103-157.</p> <p>(Titles of selected sections from Bataille: From Part Three: "Sexuality and Dejecta"; from Part Four: "The Festival, or the Transgression of Prohibitions," "Desire Horrified at Losing and at Losing Oneself," and "The Object of Desire and the Totality of the Real"; from Part 5: "Marriage," "Unlimited Fusion, the Orgy," "The Object of Desire," and "Nudity").</p>
<p>4</p> <p><i>Plasticity of Gender and Sexuality</i></p> <p>Jan. 31/2024</p>	<p>Continue with the Bataille readings from last week.</p> <p>Michelle O'Brien. "Trans Work: Employment Trajectories, Labour Discipline, and Gender Freedom." <i>Transgender Marxism</i>. Ed. Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke. 47-61.</p> <p>Paul B. Preciado. 2013. Selections from <i>Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era</i>. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York. TBA.</p>
<p>5</p> <p><i>Sex Work</i></p> <p>Feb. 7/2024</p>	<p>Martha Nussbaum. 1998. "Whether from Reason or Prejudice: Taking Money for Bodily Services." <i>The Journal of legal studies</i>, Vol.27 (S2). 693-723.</p> <p>Jean-Luc Hennig. 2009. Selections from <i>The Little Black Book of Grisélidis Réal: Days and Nights of an Anarchist Whore</i>. Ed. Ariana Reines. TBA.</p>

	<p>Vednita Carter and Evelina Giobbe. 2006. "Prostitution, Racism, and Feminist Discourse." <i>Prostitution and Pornography: Philosophical Debate About the Sex Industry</i>. Stanford UP. 17-39.</p> <p>bell hooks. 1981. "Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience." <i>Ain't I a Woman?</i> Toronto: Between The Lines Press. 15-49.</p> <p>Julian Marlowe. 2006. "Thinking Outside the Box: Men in the Sex Industry." <i>Prostitution and Pornography: Philosophical Debate About the Sex Industry</i>. Stanford UP. 349-357.</p>
<p>6</p> <p><i>Wrap up last week's readings, if need be, and new topic: Pornography</i></p> <p><i>Feb. 11/2024</i></p> <p><i>Feb. 14/2024</i></p>	<p>Due: Short Paper (20%); submit via Quercus by 11:59pm.</p> <p>Catherine A. MacKinnon. 1989. "Sexuality, Pornography, Method: 'Pleasure under the Patriarchy.'" <i>Ethics</i>, Vol.99 (2): 314-346.</p> <p>Nancy Bauer. 2015. "How to Do Things with Pornography." <i>How to Do Things with Pornography</i>. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 52-86.</p>
<p>7</p> <p><i>Feb. 21/2024</i></p>	<p>Reading Week</p>
<p>8</p> <p><i>Feb. 28/2024</i></p>	<p>In-class midterm exam (30%).</p>
<p>9</p> <p><i>Heterosexual Sex Under the Patriarchy</i></p> <p><i>March 6/2024</i></p>	

	<p>Sandra Bartky. 1990. “Feminine Masochism and the Politics of Personal Transformation.” <i>Femininity and Domination: Studies in Psychological Oppression</i>. New York; London: Routledge. 45-62.</p> <p>Naomi Wolf. 1997. “Skipped Homework: Our Bodies” and “Skipped Homework: Our Pleasure.” <i>Promiscuities: The Secret Struggle for Womanhood</i>. 139-161.</p> <p>Kate Manne. 2021. Selections from <i>Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women</i>. New York: Crown. 33-74.</p> <p>(Section titles from Manne selections: “Unexceptional—On the Entitlement to Sex” and “Unwanted—On the Entitlement to Consent”)</p> <p>Ariana Reines. 2019. “Mosaic.” <i>A Sand Book</i>. Portland: Tin House Books. 357-396.</p>
<p>10 <i>Polyamory</i></p> <p><i>March 11/2024</i></p> <p><i>March 13/2024</i></p>	<p>.</p> <p>Last Day to Drop Courses</p> <p>André Grahle. 2022. “Love Without Possession.” <i>Philosophy of Love in the Past, Present, and Future</i>. New York: Routledge. 179-197.</p> <p>John McMurtry. 1972. “Monogamy: A Critique.” <i>The Monist</i>, Vol.56 (4): 587-599.</p> <p>Christine Overall. 1998. “Monogamy, Nonmonogamy, and Identity.” <i>Hypatia</i>, Vol.13 (4): 1-17.</p>
<p>11 <i>Love & Finitude</i></p> <p><i>March 20/2024</i></p>	<p>Søren Kierkegaard. 2013. <i>The Seducer’s Diary</i>. Princeton: Princeton UP. (Available online through the UofT Library; link on Quercus).</p> <p>Roland Barthes. 2002. Selections from <i>A Lover’s Discourse</i>. London: Vintage. TBA.</p>
<p>12 <i>Love & Finitude</i></p>	

<p><i>March 27/2024</i></p>	<p>Mari Ruti. 2011. <i>The Summons of Love</i>. New York: Columbia University Press. (Available online through the UofT Library; link on Quercus)</p> <p>Gillian Rose. Selections from <i>Love's Work</i>. New York: NYRB. 59-75. 96-106. 140-144.</p> <p>Dodie Bellamy. 2021. "Chase Scene." <i>Bee Reaved</i>. South Pasadena: semiotext(e): 187-249.</p>
<p>13</p> <p><i>April 3/2024</i></p>	<p>Last day of class. No new readings. Wrap up 'love and finitude' topic.</p>
<p>14</p> <p><i>April 10-30/2024</i></p> <p><i>April 20/2024</i></p>	<p>Exam Period</p> <p>Due: Final Paper (30%). Submit via Quercus by 11:59pm.</p>