

Sex & Values

PHIL 219 (HCD2)

Fall 2011: 3 hours

MWF 10:00 – 10:50 p.m., Davidson 205

Instructor: Avery Kolers

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Hours: MF 11:00 – 12:00 & 1:00 – 2:00
and by appt.

<https://blackboard.louisville.edu>

Course Description: Critical studies of the treatment of sex in various moral philosophies, including a survey of classical viewpoints, but emphasizing contemporary writings.

Required Texts:

[RH] Raja Halwani, *Philosophy of Love, Sex, and Marriage: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2010)

TBD Further book(s) or set of articles to be determined based on class interest

Technology:

This course will make significant use of the Blackboard platform, including (*inter alia*) as a site for links to required readings. If you have not used Blackboard previously you should familiarize yourself with it. Also, I will use email to contact you if I need to. I will normally send email **only** to your U of L (cardmail) account. If you do not usually check that account, you should set it to forward to your preferred account. Also, I have a spam filter on my email account and so if you use email to turn in assignments you should send them **from** your U of L account (or Blackboard) to ensure that my spam filter doesn't block them.

Curricular Profile: This course satisfies two general education requirements for undergraduate degrees: Humanities (H) and Understanding Cultural Diversity (CD2).

Purpose and Aims of the Course:

As a topical philosophy course satisfying two GERs, this course has **four** purposes. First, every philosophy course has two basic aims:

1. to teach particular content, and
2. to teach a particular method of interacting with content.

The **content** of the course is: moral assessments of sexual practices, broadly understood to include marriage/family and reproduction. A moral assessment is one that first tries to clarify what a given practice or phenomenon *is*, and then asks whether it can be defended or condemned from a moral standpoint. A moral standpoint is one that assesses conduct and character by appeal to whether it a) has tolerable consequences, b) gels with basic, rationally derived norms of conduct regarding how we should treat one another, c) flows from a virtuous character, or d) constitutes a form of relationship that affirms our humanity and equality.

The **method** is philosophical. Philosophy tries to understand the nature of reality by articulating and clarifying basic concepts, and using canons of reasoning to assess arguments about those concepts. We recognize that reality does not especially care to be

understood, and so we pay special attention to achieving clarity in our thinking, as well as avoiding unnoticed assumptions and common errors of reasoning. Philosophy is difficult, and yet it is not uncommon for people to suppose that it is easy – anything you happen to think counts as “a philosophy”. Hence an appreciation of that difficulty is a central element of this course.

Assessment of these aims: all written work in the course, as well as every contribution to class discussion, will be assessed on the basis of its achievement with regard to each of these aims.

3. As a Humanities GER, this course is concerned with understanding texts of philosophy. Students who satisfy this requirement will demonstrate that they are able to do all of the following:
 - a. Communicate an understanding of vocabulary, concepts, materials, techniques, and methods of intellectual inquiry within the humanities;
 - b. Describe and evaluate texts using primary and secondary materials;
 - c. Analyze and synthesize texts, recognizing the diversity of cultures and historical contexts.

Assessment of these aims: the summaries and response papers, as well as written exams, will test each of these skills. Grades will depend on careful reading with high comprehension and critical writing about complex concepts and moral theses.

4. As a CD2 course, this course contributes to students’ broad exposure to a variety of social systems, cultures, and subcultures, both within the United States and the rest of the world. This portion of the curriculum encourages an appreciation of the realities of a racially and culturally diverse world. Students who satisfy this requirement will demonstrate that they are able to do all of the following:
 - a. Recognize that social and cultural systems develop out of adaptation to environmental and historical circumstances;
 - b. Communicate an understanding of the ways in which race, ethnicity, and/or gender are socially constructed;
 - c. Communicate an understanding that different cultures may hold different views of the same issues;
 - d. Evaluate pertinent information and assertions for relevance, bias, stereotyping, manipulation, and completeness.

Assessment of these aims: the content of the course involves discussion and written work requiring students to consider the moral aspects of behavior rather than merely revert to stereotypes or assumptions. Course readings and short essays emphasize the contingency of particular social forms including contemporary marriage and family structure, and demand that students assess these practices in light of moral considerations rather than in light of their prevalence here or anywhere. That said, it is not assumed that mere variability of social forms or “views” is evidence that no view is in fact correct, or that all views are “equally good”. Various practices are clarified and assessed precisely for the purpose of understanding and evaluation.

Certitude is the enemy of philosophy. Memorization and absorption of facts are *useful* for philosophy, for the sake of informing our philosophical reflection, but do not themselves constitute philosophy. But at the same time, pure speculation and rumination, detached from any purpose, also do not constitute philosophy. Finally, philosophy is not debate. We are here to

reach the truth. That is the only way to “win.” In philosophical arguments, there is absolutely no value to *being* right, the only value is in *getting it* right.

Evaluation:

1. Summaries	20%
2. Response papers	30
3. midterm exam	15
4. final exam	25
5. Participation:	<u>10</u>
Total	100%

1. *Summaries.* Whenever we read a chapter of **RH**, you may write a summary of one significant section of that chapter, to be submitted the day that chapter appears for the first time on the syllabus. A summary lays out an argument in your own words without assessing it. You must do **two** altogether. Summaries should be somewhere around 3 pages.
2. *Response papers.* Most **Mondays**, I will distribute one or more critical reading questions. You will have until **that Friday** to turn in a paper of about 3 pages on one question. You must do this 3 times during the semester, and at least once before fall break. Response papers should reflect your best effort to articulate a controversial thesis and defend it, or to clarify an unclear concept. Although these are short, they are formal papers and should be professionally written.
3. *Midterm exam.* An in-class written exam testing your understanding of, and ability critically to engage with, the material from the first half of the course. Questions will be drawn from the critical reading questions distributed each week, as well as other questions developed specially for the exam.
4. *Final Exam.* A cumulative written exam testing your understanding of, and ability critically to engage with, the material from the whole semester (though with an emphasis on section IV). Again, some questions will be drawn from critical reading questions used throughout the semester.
5. *Participation.* Participation is essential to succeeding in this class. I will expect you to contribute actively to class discussions and activities. To the extent possible, I will try to use discussion and questioning, rather than lecture, as methods of instruction.

A note on grading: My classes usually have an average grade between about 78 and 82 percent, which is C+/B-. I will guarantee that, unless something unpredictable happens, the course average will be no lower than a C+.

Handing in assignments:

Presentation. Summaries and response papers should be double-spaced and typed in normal fonts with normal margins. If you have any questions about what this entails, ask me. I will expect all work to be spell-checked and proofread; writing will be one criterion of evaluation. Handwritten exams should put a premium on penmanship, since, if I can't read what you've written, that will be your problem. All assignments should be submitted using the minimum of paper and frills—double-side if possible, no folders, etc.; just a single staple in the top-left corner as needed. **Always keep a copy** of your assignments when you hand them in, and do not throw

them away after I've returned them to you. If there are any discrepancies, I will assume my records are accurate unless you can provide me with documentation.

Summaries and response papers may be submitted electronically in the following formats **only**: .doc, .docx, .odt, or .rtf. **If I can't open the assignment then it has not been submitted.** Your best bet is to submit such assignments through the "send email" function on Blackboard, but whatever you do **always use your U of L email account** and cc yourself on the email to ensure that the attachment was included. Then, keep that email at least until you have a grade for the relevant assignment. If there is any discrepancy, my records will be decisive unless you can show me **the original email with a date stamp and the correct document attached.**

Deadlines: With the exception of exams, all assignments are due by the beginning of class on the day listed in the schedule below. Late assignments will be penalized one grade per school day late, beginning at 10:15 a.m. If you cannot hand in an assignment on time, you must communicate with me *beforehand*. In general, unforeseeable physical impossibility and deaths in the family are the only valid excuses for late assignments.

Disabilities: The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate in and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact the Disability Resource Center (119 Stevenson Hall, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

Academic Integrity: Cheating and plagiarism are immoral because a) they are *dishonest* (to me and others), in that the cheater/plagiarist presents as her/his own something that is not; b) they are *unfair* (to classmates), who work hard to meet requirements that the cheater/plagiarist circumvents; c) they violate *academic obligations* (to the university) that students voluntarily accept upon enrollment; and d) they may violate *self-regarding duties of self-development or self-perfection* (if such duties exist).

They can also get one in serious trouble. According to the University of Louisville's *Code of Student Conduct*, Section 5, "Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty." It is your responsibility to know this code and comply with its requirements. If I discover violations of this policy I will pursue the required disciplinary channels, which normally involve communicating with the dean for undergraduate affairs. If you have any questions about how to comply with this policy, ask me *in advance*.

Schedule of topics

[subject to change if we fall too far behind or get far ahead]

Date	Topic	Reading	Due today	Notes
M 8/22	Introduction			
W 8/24	Values			

F 8/26	Continued			
Part I: Love				
M 8/29	The basis of romantic love	RH chap 3		
W 8/31		Continued		
F 9/2	Love and morality	RH, 89-102		
M 9/5	Labor	Day	No	Class
W 9/7		RH, 102-120		
F 9/9		Continued		
Part II: Sex				
M 9/12	What is Sex?	RH, chap. 5		
W 9/14		Continued		
F 9/16		Continued		
M 9/19	Sex, Pleasure, and Morality	RH, chap. 6		
W 9/21		Continued		
F 9/23		Continued		
M 9/26	Sexual Objectification	RH, chap. 7		
W 9/28		Continued		
F 9/30		Continued	Last day to do first Response Paper.	
M 10/3	Perversion	RH, chap. 8		
W 10/5		Continued		
F 10/7	Midterm Exam		Midterm exam	Decision Day on Part IV
M 10/10	Fall	Break	No	Class
Part III: Marriage				
W 10/12	Marriage	RH, chap. 9	Last chance to do summary 1	
F 10/14		Continued		Thurs is last day to withdraw
M 10/17	Same-Sex	RH, chap. 10	Last chance to	

W 10/19	Marriage	Continued	do summary 2	
F 10/21		Continued		
Part IV: Focus & Current Controversies				
10/24 – 12/5	Readings	And	Topics	TBD
	Key Dates			
F 11/4	Class meets in HUM 300 to attend Humphrey Colloquium			
W-F 11/23-25	Thanksgiving Break – No Class			
T 12/6	Reading	Day	Nothing	Scheduled
12/7 8:00 – 10:30 a.m.			Final exam	

Book/topic suggestions for Part IV

Decision date is 10/7 in class. Check these out online to get a sense of what's inside.

- Brenda Almond, *The Fragmenting Family* (on marriage & the family)
- David Archard and David Benatar, eds., *Procreation and Parenthood*
- Martha C. Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law*
- Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*
- Raja Halwani, unread chapters from **RH** (on love), plus Plato's *Symposium* and perhaps some secondary essays on it.
- Catharine MacKinnon, *Only Words* (on the law and ethics of pornography)
- Bonnie Steinbock, *Life Before Birth: The Moral and Legal Status of the Fetus*
- Mary Warnock *Making Babies* (on assisted reproductive technologies)
- Mark Wicclair, *Conscientious Objection in Health Care*