

Seminar in History of Philosophy (PHL401H1F): Love, sex, & sexuality in ancient Greek thought

Instructor: Willie Costello, willie.costello@mail.utoronto.ca

Meetings on Thursdays from 12:00 to 15:00 in HS 614. Office hours after class in JHB 424, or by appointment. Course website available through q.utoronto.ca. Course readings available through cr.library.utoronto.ca/studenthome/id/281458.

Course description

What is the nature of love? What is love's connection to sex and sexuality? Is there a proper form that love should take, and other forms it shouldn't? And how can we come to a philosophical understanding of love that transcends the opinions of our current time and place?

In this class we will investigate these and related questions through a historical lens, namely, that of the ancient Greeks, whose conception of love looks at once familiar and strange. We will focus in particular on Plato, whose writings on love are some of the most famous in the Western canon, yet whose understanding of love seems deeply informed by his specific cultural context, where love was epitomized by extrafamilial sexual relations between older men and younger boys. How do we evaluate a conception like this? What do we do about everything that it seems to leave out or get wrong? And most importantly, what does attending to the ancient Greek conception of love, sex, and sexuality reveal to us about our own?

Course learning objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to...

- appreciate the multifaceted nature of love, sex, and sexuality
- dissect your own and others' presuppositions about love, sex, and sexuality
- analyze and evaluate different possible conceptions of love, sex, and sexuality
- read philosophical texts carefully, charitably, and critically
- critique others' work with respect, charity, and encouragement
- cultivate a personally effective approach to academic research and writing

Course contract

This course is a collaboration between me, you, and your classmates. You will be regularly called upon to actively participate in class discussions and other activities, and your contributions will directly influence what we cover in class. **It is not necessary that you agree with everything I or anyone else says in this class, but it is necessary that you always listen and respond with respect.** With this in mind, I put forth the following “course contract”, applying to everyone in the class (students and instructor alike):

- we have the responsibility to **contribute** to the collective learning process (which includes asking questions when we’re not understanding something)
- we have the responsibility to **be receptive** to other points of view than our own
- we have the right to **dissent or differ** from the instructor and others in class
- we have the responsibility to **welcome challenges** to our own opinions, and to be willing to support our claims with further reasons (or to be honest when we don’t have any)
- we have the right to **personal dignity**, which at no point should be infringed upon in any way by the conduct of others

Evaluation

Your grade for the course will be determined by the following components: micro-assignments (informal reading exercises, done at home and submitted before each class meeting); exit tickets (informal writing exercises, done in class and submitted at the end of each class meeting); one in-class discussion lead; and a term paper on a topic of your choosing, preceded by a brainstorm assignment, a consultation with me, a pitch, and a peer review of another student’s pitch. The full grade breakdown is as follows:

<i>Component</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Due date</i>
Micro-assignments	10%	before each class
Exit tickets	10%	during each class
Discussion lead	5%	once during class
Term paper brainstorm	5%	9/27
Term paper consultation	5%	10/4
Term paper pitch (750 words)	10%	10/21
Peer review (750 words)	10%	11/4
Term paper (3000–4000 words)	45%	12/5

Texts

The only text that you are required to purchase for this course is:

- C. D. C. Reeve (ed.), *Plato on Love* (Hackett, 9780872207882) – \$22

All additional readings can be downloaded from: cr.library.utoronto.ca/studenthome/id/281458

Technology in the classroom

Use of portable electronic devices (laptops, smartphones, tablets, etc.) is generally discouraged in this class. Everyone's attention should be focused on what's happening in class, and the use of such devices can be distracting to those around you. If you're okay with it, I'd prefer for you to take notes in a paper notebook rather than on a laptop. You may have an electronic device available for the purpose of referencing points from the day's readings; but if you choose to do so, please keep the device closed or off at all other times.

Academic Integrity

One of the aims of this (and really, *any* university-level) course is to develop your ability to express yourself intelligently and responsibly. Part of what expressing yourself intelligently and responsibly involves is situating your own views in relation to others'. Plagiarizing others' views, or failing to acknowledge views you are drawing on, runs counter to this aim. Because of this, plagiarism and all other forms of academic dishonesty will be treated with the greatest severity in this course. Students should make themselves familiar with the University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters; see artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students.

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability and/or health consideration that may require accommodation, please approach me and/or Accessibility Services at 416-978-8060 or accessibility.utoronto.ca.

Email

Questions should ideally be brought to me in person, either at lecture or during my office hours. If you would prefer to correspond via email, my email address is willie.costello@mail.utoronto.ca. I will respond to emails within two business days.

Schedule

Readings marked “[online]” can be found on the Quercus course webpage. All other readings can be found either in the course text or on the library course reserves webpage.

DATE	TOPIC & READINGS
9/6	What can (the history of) philosophy teach us about love? Plato, <i>Alcibiades</i> (recommended for those new to Plato)
9/13	In praise of love (pt. 1) – the common views of antiquity Plato, <i>Symposium</i> (start–198a); Dover, ‘Classical Greek Attitudes to Sexual Behaviour’
9/20	In praise of love (pt. 2) – a philosophical defence Plato, <i>Symposium</i> (198a–end)
9/27	Term paper brainstorming session no required readings; TERM PAPER BRAINSTORM DUE at the start of class
10/4	Platonic love & interpersonal love Nehamas, ‘Only in the Contemplation of Beauty’; Sheffield, ‘A Misguided Debate’
10/4	TERM PAPER CONSULTATION DUE , to be scheduled outside of class hours
10/11	Love & sex Plato, <i>Laws</i> [in Reeve] & <i>Republic</i> v (449a–462a) [online]; Halperin, ‘What Is Sex For?’
10/18	Love, reason, rationality, & madness Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i> (start–257c)
10/21	TERM PAPER PITCH DUE
10/25	Love & (homo)sexuality Skinner, ‘Why Ancient Sexuality?’ (pp. 1–19); Halperin, ‘100 Years of Homosexuality’
11/1	Love & the feminine Hobbs, ‘Female Imagery in Plato’; Halperin, ‘Why is Diotima a Woman?’
11/4	PEER REVIEW DUE
11/15	Love, gender, & women Primary sources by Greek women [online]; Davidson, <i>Courtesans & Fishcakes</i> , ‘Women and Boys’; Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i> , ‘Sexual Initiation’, ‘The Woman in Love’ [online]
11/22	Love & friendship Plato, <i>Lysis</i> ; Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> VIII.1–6 & IX.1,8–12 (selections) [online]
11/29	Wrap-up no required readings
12/5	TERM PAPER DUE

Further information on course assignments

- » **Micro-assignments:** Before each class you are to complete an exercise relating to the day's required reading – a “micro-assignment”. The purpose of these micro-assignments is: (a) to deepen your appreciation of the readings; (b) to enhance our classroom discussions of the readings; and (c) to help you develop ideas for your term paper.

Micro-assignments must be completed and submitted online by 11:00 A.M. before each class meeting. Micro-assignments submitted after this deadline will receive no credit. **Each micro-assignment counts for 1% of your final grade, up to 10%.** You will have, in total, eleven opportunities to submit micro-assignments over the course of the term (there is no micro-assignment for the first class). This means that **you can skip one micro-assignment without penalty.** (You do not need to tell me when you're choosing not to submit a micro-assignment.) Full credit for micro-assignments is awarded when the student has made a honest attempt to complete the task; determination of this criterion is at the discretion of the instructor.

- » **Exit tickets:** At the end of each class you will be asked to write (on an index card that will be provided to you) a short reflection relating to the day's discussion – an “exit ticket”. The purpose of these exit tickets is: (a) to provide you an opportunity to review and reflect on what you've learned; and (b) to maintain a record of class attendance.

Exit tickets must be handed in to me at the end of each class meeting. You will have, in total, twelve opportunities to hand in exit tickets over the course of the term (one for each class), and each exit ticket counts for 1% of your final grade, up to 10%. This means that **you can skip two exit tickets without penalty.** Full credit for exit tickets is awarded when the student has made a honest attempt to respond to the assigned prompt; determination of this criterion is at the discretion of the instructor.

- » **Discussion lead:** Once during term you will be called upon to take my place and lead our in-class discussion. This will involve briefly summarizing the highlights from one of the day's readings, raising some open-ended questions about the reading, and guiding the class in discussing those questions. The day on which you'll do this will be arranged with you in advance. I will model how to do these discussion leads in our first few meetings, before passing the responsibility off to you and your peers. The purpose of these discussion leads is: (a) to give you some practice at leading a discussion, an essential skill for pretty much anyone to have; and (b) to give everyone the benefit of listening to someone other than me lead the day's discussion for a while.
- » **Term paper:** The major assignment for this course is a term paper. This is an opportunity for you to think about a philosophical question (of your choosing) about love, sex, and/or sexuality

that can be fruitfully investigated in light of the ancient Greek material we'll be looking at. Your term paper should be a focused, argumentative essay defending a specific and original thesis, between 3000 and 4000 words in length.

- » **Term paper brainstorm:** A few weeks into the term you are to prepare a “brainstorm”: a list of possible topics for your term paper. (You will be given specific instructions on how to prepare this list separately.) On the day it is due, you will bring your brainstorm in with you to class and then workshop your ideas with me and your peers. The purpose of this brainstorm is: (a) to help you come up with ideas for your term paper; and (b) to give you some early guidance on those ideas.

Your brainstorm must be submitted in person at the start of class on the day it is due. Late submissions will be accepted.

- » **Term paper consultation:** A week after your brainstorm, you are to meet with me for a one-on-one consultation about the topic you plan to write on. The consultation will be approximately 10 minutes in length, and have the format of an informal conversation. The purpose of this consultation is: (a) to help ensure that you've chosen an appropriate topic for your term paper; and (b) to give you some practice at having a live philosophical dialogue.

The precise time of your consultation will be arranged with you in advance. **You must arrive to your consultation at the arranged time.** Failure to do so will result in an automatic o.

- » **Term paper pitch:** Midway through term you are to hand in a “pitch”: a proposal for the topic you intend to explore in your term paper. Your pitch should be at least 750 words in length. It should clearly communicate three things: the question that you intend to investigate, what evidence you will need to provide an answer to that question, and why anyone else should be interested. Your pitch should not be merely an outline of your term paper. The purpose of this pitch is: (a) to give you a head-start on your term paper; and (b) to give you some early feedback on your ideas, so that you have some guidance on how to develop them in the weeks to come.
- » **Peer review:** After submitting your own pitch, you are to write an (anonymous) peer review of another student's (anonymized) pitch. Your peer review should provide constructive, formative feedback on the pitch you have received, presenting two developed responses to the pitch's thesis. It should be approximately 750 words in length. The purpose of this peer review is: (a) to develop your ability to charitably and constructively respond to others' ideas; and (b) to provide you, in return, with some ideas for how you might think to develop your own pitch.

- » **Your pitch, peer review, and term paper must be submitted online by end of day on the day they are due** (or, for all you night owls, by 8 A.M. the following morning at the latest), in PDF format. **Late papers will be docked 5% for each 24 hour period between the due date and when they are handed in** (unless accompanied by valid medical documentation). Late papers may be submitted up to 7 days after the due date; any papers not received by this time will automatically receive a 0. Assignment instructions and formatting guidelines will be provided along with assignment prompt.
- » **In-class participation:** You are expected to be an active participant in our seminar meetings. One (obvious) way to be an active participant is by asking questions and sharing your thoughts with the class; but this is not the only way, nor will it necessarily be the way that works best for you. Other ways to be an active participant include: attentively listening to classroom discussions; participating in break-out discussion groups with your classmates; and/or coming to talk to me after class or during office hours.

Bibliography of assigned readings

- Davidson, J. N. (1998). *Courtesans & Fishcakes: The consuming passions of classical Athens*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- de Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The Second Sex (translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier)*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Dover, K. J. (1973). 'Classical Greek attitudes to sexual behaviour.' *Arethusa* 6(1): 59–73.
- Halperin, D. M. (1990a). 'One Hundred Years of Homosexuality.' In 'One hundred years of homosexuality : and other essays on Greek love,' 15–40. New York: Routledge.
- Halperin, D. M. (1990b). 'Why Is Diotima a Woman?' In 'One hundred years of homosexuality : and other essays on Greek love,' 113–151. New York: Routledge.
- Halperin, D. M. (2016). 'What Is Sex For?' *Critical Inquiry* 43(1): 1–31.
- Hobbs, A. (2006). 'Female Imagery in Plato.' In J. H. Lesher, D. Nails, and F. C. C. Sheffield (eds.) 'Plato's *Symposium*: Issues in Interpretation and Reception,' 252–271. Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies.
- Nehamas, A. (2007). "Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living": Plato, *Symposium* 211d.' *European Journal of Philosophy* 15(1): 1–18.
- Sheffield, F. (2012). 'The *Symposium* and Platonic Ethics: Plato, Vlastos, and a Misguided Debate.' *Phronesis* 57(2): 117–141.
- Skinner, M. B. (2013). *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*. Wiley Blackwell.