**PHILOSOPHY / SEXUALITY STUDIES 369 Kurt Nutting**

**PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN SEXUALITY Spring Semester 2014**

**FINAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT**

**TUESDAY, MAY 6, 2014**

**You are to write a medium-length (approximately six to seven (6-7) pages, typed, double-spaced) essay on the following question.**

**Be sure to make and keep a copy of your work, and be aware of the requirements of academic honesty in writing your paper. You will need to submit two copies of your essay: (1) A hard copy of your essay will be due in class two weeks from tonight, on Tuesday, May 20, 2014, or my mailbox (in the philosophy department office, Humanities 388) no later than 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 20, 2014. (2) An electronic copy of your essay must be submitted to the instructor via Turnitin by 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 20, 2014.**

**Look at the recommended book for this course, Vaughn’s *Writing Philosophy*, and the pamphlet by Bennett, et al., *Well-Reasoned Writing* (posted on the iLearn page) for some pointers on writing a philosophy essay, if you need further guidance.**

We end the semester by looking at several theorists who, in their varying ways, develop arguments to the effect that our beliefs, attitudes, and practices of sexuality have complicated psychological, cultural, social, political, and economic roots, oftentimes of which we are unaware. Freud, for example, holds that sexuality manifests itself differently (e.g., is explicitly expressed or is sublimated) to satisfy different social needs. Foucault's theory of sexuality is usually understood as social and historical, so that our very *concepts* of sexuality take quite different forms in different historical and social circumstances, and are shaped by various configurations of power.

Catharine MacKinnon's view, like Foucault's, might be broadly categorized as social-constructivist. MacKinnon starts with an understanding of feminism as a theory “of power and its distribution: inequality” or, more bluntly, “the relations . . . in which some fuck and others get fucked, are the prime moment of politics” (MacKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State,” *Signs* 1982, pages 516-517; the article is reprinted in the course reader). For her, this means that gender is defined in terms of power over sexuality: “What defines woman as such is what turns men on. . . . Gender socialization is the process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exist for me. It is that process through which women internalize (make their own) a male image of their sexuality *as* their identity as women. It is not just an illusion” (MacKinnon, *Signs* 1982, page 531, footnotes omitted). Similarly, men are to be understood “not as individuals nor as biological beings, but as a gender group characterized by maleness as socially constructed, of which this pursuit [i.e., the “male pursuit of control over women’s sexuality”] is definitive” (MacKinnon, *Signs* 1982, page 532).

1. In your own words, explain what MacKinnon is saying about gender here, relating it as appropriate to the views developed by Foucault in volume 2 of *The History of Sexuality*.
2. What follows from MacKinnon’s insight about what an earlier generation called “sexual liberation” for women? If MacKinnon is correct, is removing “the onus placed upon the sexual expressiveness of women” a “hollow victory” because “the sexuality they become freer to enjoy remains the old one that converts women into objects” (MacKinnon, *Signs* 1982, page 533, quoting the writer and critic Susan Sontag)? Discuss critically, and explain your answer.