

Love: A Moral-Psychological Perspective from the West

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Course Meetings: This is an upper-level course designed with two meetings/week, 13 weeks/semester timeframe in mind that fits a class size of about 20 students (adjustable to fit other timeframes & larger class sizes).

Office Hours: T/Th 9am-10:20am (sign up in Google doc).

Course Description

The focus of this class is on the question of what it is to love another person. This question is one that connects closely to our daily lives and our personhood. We love our friends, our family, our partner(s), among others. But what is it that we do, or what kind of state are we in, when we love them? Moreover, what are the differences between these kinds of love, or are they essentially the same? This course will survey these questions by reading philosophers in the Western tradition who wrote on the subject matter. We will begin the course with the writings of the Ancient Greeks, particularly Plato and Aristotle, and then we will move to recent discussions among contemporary ethicists and moral psychologists.

Course Goals

This course will proceed in a conversational manner. This means that your questions, confusions, perspectives, insights, and reflections on the readings will be the starting point of our conversations. This should help us with the three general goals of this class:

The first of these goals is for us to closely read the texts and try our best to engage with them. What are the claims made in the texts? How does the author argue for the claims they make? Why does the author take the particular strategy they do in arguing for that claim? How plausible is their argument? The second of these goals is for us to put ourselves in conversation with the authors. This is the point where we start to reflect on our own perspectives and experiences in relation to the texts. We will often find ourselves in need of refining, and developing the perspectives we are familiar with, and often also in need of challenging the beliefs and assumptions that we hold dear and thought unquestionable.

The third of these goals is, on the basis of the first two, to develop an ability for us to take a step back and reflect on our way of approaching philosophical questions. Is the way we engage with the reading and the question helpful for *you*? Does our conversation help *you* learn things, even if it hasn't answered your question satisfactorily yet? Do the things you learn, and if so how, help answer the question(s) that brought you to this class? This ability to reflect is not only a skill useful in philosophy but also in your intellectual life in the future.

Course Materials

All readings will be made available electronically on Canvas.

Learning Activities & Assignments

The assignments for this course consist of the following three things.

Weekly Response Piece

As a weekly assignment, you are required to write either one response piece to one of the two readings of your choice or a response to one of your classmates' response piece. A response piece should be

between 200-300 words, submitted through Canvas under the Discussion post section. Response pieces are meant to be short notes to help you keep in mind what the structure of the text is and the question(s) you have regarding the text. It should be something that, once you look back at it during class, it can help you have something to say, or some questions to ask, about the text.

If you are writing a response to someone else's response piece, you are likely to do something different. In that case, if you find the point they made appealing, or that you share the questions they had, you can support them by saying your reasons for finding their point appealing, and saying why you think these questions matter. It would also be great if you could offer a potential answer to their questions. On the other hand, if you find that their understanding of the structure of the text differs from yours, you could compare the two readings and see which one is better supported. Or if you have an objection to a point they made, you can do that.

Doing these may take a little time at first. However, I will guide you by providing extensive feedback. As the course progresses and you become more familiar with the reading and reflective processes, writing this will become more comfortable and rewarding.

Papers

Students will be required to write three papers throughout the semester:

- Mid-Term paper: 4-6 pages.
- Final Paper Proposal: 3 pages max.
- Final Paper: 8-10 pages.

In addition to the provided guidelines on how to write a philosophy paper, there will be a class session dedicated to that.

Grades Breakdown

Grades will be based on classroom participation, response pieces, and the three papers. Here's the weight each of these carries:

Classroom participation: 10%

Response Piece: 30%

Mid-Term Paper: 15%

Final Paper Proposal: 15%

Final Paper: 30%

Attendance Policies

It is expected that you will be present at all course meetings. Please contact me if you cannot make it to class; students may have up to three such excused absences with no effect on the contributions to the participation grade (even without completing any additional work). Beyond three such absences, you will need to contact me to work out alternative arrangements for contributing to our collective work and class conversation (generally, additional comments in the Google Doc, but other options may be available). If you are more than ten minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent.

Diversity, Accessibility, and Accommodation

I strive to make this course a welcoming place for all perspectives, where all students are treated as valued and respected members of the class community regardless of gender, sex, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual identity, socioeconomic background, or ability. Please reach out to me early in the term if you have a condition, religious commitment, or extenuating circumstance that might require accommodations or modification of any of the course procedures.

Reading Schedule and Important Dates

Week 1: Introduction & Preparation

Tuesday

- Introduction (no reading).

Thursday

- Watch the movie “The Banshees of Inisherin,” directed by Martin McDonagh.
- Complete the Welcome Survey.

Week 2: Plato on Love

Tuesday

- Plato, *Symposium* (172a-201c).

Thursday

- Plato, *Symposium* (201d-223d).

Week 3: Plato on Friendship

Tuesday

- Plato’s *Lysis* (203a-214a).

Thursday

- Plato’s *Lysis* (214b-223b).

Week 4: Aristotle on Friendship

Tuesday

- Aristotle, Book VIII, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Thursday

- Aristotle, Book IX, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Week 5: Love and Care I

Tuesday

- *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, Lecture 1, Wolf.

Thursday

- *The Reasons of Love*, Ch.2, Frankfurt.

Week 6: Love and Care II

Tuesday

- “Impersonal Friend,” Whiting.

Thursday

- “Against Beneficence,” Ebels-Duggan.
- Mid-term paper assigned.

Week 7: Love and Respect

Tuesday

- “Love as a Moral Emotion,” Velleman.

Thursday

- “On Benevolence,” Arpaly.
- Mid-term paper due.

Week 8: Love and Self-Interest

Tuesday

- *The Reasons of Love*, Ch.3, Frankfurt.

Thursday

- “Love and Attachment,” Wonderly.

Week 9: Attentive Love

Tuesday

- “The Idea of Perfection,” Murdoch.

Thursday

- “Grace and Alienation,” Yao.

Week 10: Love and Autonomy

Tuesday

- “The Woman in Love,” Beauvoir.

Thursday

- “Love and Autonomy,” Kreft.
- Final paper proposal due.

Week 11: Agapic Love

Tuesday

- “Love and the Value of a Life,” Setiya.

Thursday

- “Love First,” White.

Week 12: Loving the Dead

Tuesday

- “Real (and) Imaginal Relationships with the Dead,” Norlock.

Thursday

- “Love’s Stance,” Wang (draft).
- Final paper due by the end of next week.