

Sexual Ethics

Instructor: Joe Nelson

Course Description

Our culture has never before been so preoccupied with sex and its ethical ramifications. Thanks in part to feminism, movements for LGBT rights, and the internet, sex is more a topic of public discussion than ever, with much of this discussion focusing on morally complex questions of power, communication, and consent. Such questions present a distinctive intellectual challenge: to think clearly and carefully about issues that inspire some of our strongest and most irrational feelings.

In this course, we will face that challenge head-on. We will discuss provocative work, drawn from philosophy and the feminist movement, on the ethical dimensions of sex. We will read conflicting perspectives on the topics of casual sex, choosing sexual partners, consent, monogamy, pornography, and prostitution. And throughout, despite the controversial and often highly emotional nature of these issues, we will attempt to be resolutely philosophical: to be charitable and precise in our thinking, even about arguments that we find offensive, upsetting, or absurd.

This course will involve frank discussion of highly sensitive subjects. No one will be expected to divulge anything personal about themselves or their experiences.

Course Readings

1. The Moral Significance of Sex

- David Benatar “Two Views of Sexual Ethics: Promiscuity, Pedophilia, and Rape”, *Public Affairs Quarterly* (2002).
- Fiona Woollard, “Promiscuity, Pedophilia, Rape, and the Significance of the Sexual”, *Public Affairs Quarterly* (forthcoming, available online).

2. Choosing Sexual Partners

- Neil Sinhababu, “On Whom We Should Lust After”, *Off Topic* (2011).
- Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, “Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality”, in *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism* (1981).

3. Monogamy

- Harry Chalmers, “Is Monogamy Morally Permissible?”, *Journal of Value Inquiry* (2019).
- Bryan R. Weaver and Fiona Woollard, “Marriage and the Norm of Monogamy”, *The Monist* (2008).

4. Sexual Consent

- Carolyn Shafer & Marilyn Frye, “Rape and Respect”, in *Feminism and Philosophy* (1977).
- J.H. Bogart, “On the Nature of Rape”, *Public Affairs Quarterly* (1991).
- Robin West, “The Harms of Consensual Sex”, in *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, 5th ed. (2008).

5. Sexual Ethics on Campus

- bell hooks, “Passionate Pedagogy”, in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003).
- Alan Soble, “Antioch’s ‘Sexual Offense Policy’: A Philosophical Exploration”, in *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings, 5th ed.* (2008).

6. Prostitution

- O.M. Moen, “Is Prostitution Harmful?”, *Journal of Medical Ethics* (2014).
- Julia O’Connell Davidson, “The Rights and Wrongs of Prostitution”, *Hypatia* (2002).

7. Pornography

- A.W. Eaton, “A Sensible Antiporn Feminism”, *Ethics* (2007).
- Andrew Altman, “The Right to Get Turned On: Pornography, Autonomy, Equality” in *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics* (2014).