

## PHIL 290: Philosophy of Love, Sex, and Friendship

Instructor: Dr. Audrey Yap ([ayap@uvic.ca](mailto:ayap@uvic.ca))  
Office/Phone: CLE B307 (721-7510)  
Office Hours: Th 9:00–11:00 over Zoom, or by appointment  
Class Information: TWF 9:30–10:20, in COR B107  
Course Website: Through Brightspace. <http://bright.uvic.ca>

If you notice any general accessibility issues with respect to this class, please let me know and I will do my best to solve them, but I also encourage you to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning if you think you would benefit from their services:  
<https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/>.

**Course Description:** Chances are you've loved someone, something, or somewhere during your life. And chances are you've also been loved. But the nature of love raises a lot of philosophical questions. For something that seems to be so present throughout our society, it's not always so clear what love actually *is*, not to mention what its relationship is (and should be) to things like friendship and sex. This class will look at philosophical discussions of some questions that we might have about the nature of love, and get a better sense of what some philosophers have to say about it. For example, we'll look at some views about what love is, but also some challenges that standard views about love have to overcome. After all, we want a philosophical account of love that's true to what love looks like in our actual lives. We'll also look at some questions about the boundaries of love, and what kinds of entities we can be in loving relationships with. We'll also think about the role of love in society and in our political lives.

**Objectives:** It wouldn't be possible for this class to give you an exhaustive treatment of the philosophy of love, much less of the philosophy of sex and friendship as well. But my goal as your instructor is to help you achieve the following learning objectives during this semester together:

- Familiarity with a variety of philosophical views relating to sex, love, and friendship.
- The ability to understand and clearly explain philosophical ideas and arguments.
- The ability to write both sensitively and rigorously about topics that can be very personal, and relate to our everyday lives.

**Communication:** Email is my preferred method of communication, especially for any official requests. If you ask me a question over email, you can expect a reply within about 1 working day. If you don't hear back from me after that time frame, feel free to try again in case your message went astray. If you are ever nervous about sending me an email, or asking a question, feel free to include a picture of a puppy with your request. This will not affect whether or not I will be able to help you with your request, but will give you an excuse to look for pictures of puppies. Finally, my pronouns are she or they, and you can call me Professor (Prof.) Yap, Dr. Yap, or Audrey. Please don't use any of Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr,

for a variety of reasons. If you think I am unlikely to know the name you would prefer to be called, or the pronouns I ought to use for you through the entry that I will see for you through Brightspace, please don't hesitate to make me aware.

**Office Hours:** I will be available for one-on-one or small group office hours on Thursday mornings. My default platform for office hours will be Zoom, but if that does not work for you, please feel free to email me in advance to suggest an alternative. You will need to schedule an appointment beforehand using the following link: <https://calendly.com/ayap/office>. Appointments can be scheduled in 15 minute blocks but if you need more time, you are welcome to book something separately by emailing me.

**Course Logistics:** Philosophy isn't just something you learn by listening to a professor talk about it, or by reading a book, it's also something you need to *do*. As a result, your classes are going to be structured with a mixture of activities in mind. You can expect some classes to have more lecture-style content, while others will involve group activities, depending on what I think will help you best engage with the material. Room logistics allowing, I'll always record the lecture portions of class, but I won't record the in-class activities, so you won't have to feel like your questions and discussions are being recorded for posterity.

**Evaluation:** There will be two midterm assignments, each worth 25% of your grade, and a final assignment worth 40%. The remaining 10% will be based on regular engagement with the class material. This will typically take the form of in-class/synchronous activities, but there will always be a way to demonstrate your engagement even if you don't make it to class.

- Engagement: 10%

Each week you'll have the opportunity to earn an engagement point. Earning 10 of these points will get you full marks for engagement. There will always be an in-class/synchronous opportunity as well as an online/asynchronous opportunity, and you will only be given marks for one of these each week. The in-class/synchronous engagement points will be given for participation in specific in-class activities, such as small group discussion. Online/asynchronous engagement points will be given for participation in discussion boards about the course topics.

- Midterm Assignments: 25% (each)

Your midterm assignments will be primarily intended to help you practice and demonstrate your ability to understand and explain the philosophical arguments with which we will have been engaging. Several different assignment prompts will be given, and they will be released a minimum of 2 weeks before the due date for the assignment. Some of them will take the form of short explanatory essays (approx 750 words), while others will offer more creative options (such as video explainers or hypothetical dialogues), and specific grading criteria will be posted together with the lists of prompts.

- Final Assignment: 40%

Your final assignment, like the midterm assignments, will also be primarily intended to demonstrate your ability to understand and explain the philosophical arguments throughout the semester, but options for this assignment will be designed to allow you more of an opportunity to critically engage with them. This critical engagement might take the form of arguing for opposing positions, against the views we have read, but it might also take the form of applying the views, concepts, and frameworks, to novel situations or extending them to ordinary life. Some final assignment options will take the form of short essays (approx 1500 words), but others will offer more creative options. Specific grading criteria will be posted together with the list of options. Assignment prompts for the final will be released a minimum of 3 weeks before the due date for the final assignment.

**Academic Integrity:** You are welcome and encouraged to discuss course material with others in your class, and work through material and ideas together. That’s just part of the learning process. However, the grade I assign at the end of the semester is for your work only. As such, you are not allowed to provide answers to anyone else, copy someone else’s answers to any assignments, or use AI tools like ChatGPT to write your assignments. If you are ever unsure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, more information is provided on the University Calendar: <http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html>.

**Numerical and Letter Grades:** Grades will be given as percentile marks. The percentile mark for the course will be converted to a letter grade in the following manner: A+ = 90 - 100, A = 85 - 89, A- = 80 - 84, B+ = 77 - 79, B = 73 - 76, B- = 70 - 72, C+ = 65 - 69, C = 60 - 64, D = 50 - 59, F = 0 - 49. The A range means exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance. A grade in the B range means a very good, good and solid performance. A grade in the C+ or C range means satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory, performance. A grade of D or D- indicates merely passable or marginal performance. An F indicates unsatisfactory performance.

### Schedule:

- Week One: Short week — Sep 6–10  
Topic: Why Talk about Love?  
Reading: Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”
- Week Two: Sep 11–17  
Topic: Love as a Union  
Reading: Robert Nozick, “Love’s Bond”, in *The Examined Life*  
Marilyn Friedman, “Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy”
- Week Three: Sep 18–24  
Topic: Love and Social Expectations  
Reading: adrienne maree brown, “The Pleasure Dome”

Carrie Jenkins: “Love is as Love Does: Love’s Dual Nature”, in *What Love is and What it Could Be*

- Week Four: Sep 25–Oct 1

Topic: Love and Perception

Reading: Iris Murdoch, excerpt from “The Idea of Perfection” (16–23) in *The Sovereignty of Good*

Maria Lugones, “Playfulness, World-Traveling, and Loving Perception”

- Week Five: Oct 2–8

Topic: Queer Love and Desire

Reading: Sara Ahmed, excerpt from “Sexual Orientation” (79–92) in *Queer Phenomenology*

Maren Behrensen, “Queer Bodies and Queer Love”

- Week Six: Oct 9–15 (Oct 9 is a holiday)

Topic: Sex, Marriage, and Desire

Reading: Ela Przybylo, “Introducing Asexuality, Unthinking Sex”

Elizabeth Brake, “Amatonormativity: How Marriage Threatens Care” (88–102) in *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law*

- Week Seven: Oct 16–22

Topic: Who Do We Love? Companion Animals and Significant Others

Reading: Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 6–14, 26–39

Alexis Shotwell, “Ethical polyamory, responsibility, and significant otherness”

- Week Eight: Oct 23–29

Topic: Love and Animals

Reading: Elisa Aaltola, “Love and Animals: Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch and Attention as Love”

Lori Gruen, “Entanglements”, in *Entangled Empathy*

- Week Nine: Oct 30–Nov 5

Topic: What Can We Love?

Reading: Thich Nhat Hanh, “Please Call Me By My True Names”

Myōe Shōnin, “Letter to the Island”

Chris Goto-Jones, “Visions of Myōe Shōnin in the Forest of the World”

- Week Ten: Nov 6–12

Topic: Love and Queer Kinship

Reading: Zoe Todd, “Fish, Kin, and Hope”

Heather Davis, “Queer Kin” in *Plastic Matter*

Assignment Two Due Nov 14

- Week Eleven: Nov 13–19 (Reading Break is Nov 13–15)  
Topic: Love and Religion  
Reading: Martin Luther King Jr, “Loving Your Enemies”
- Week Twelve: Nov 20-26  
Topic: Love in Political Life  
Reading: Barrett Emerick, “Love and Activism”  
Myisha Cherry, “Love, Anger, and Racial Injustice”
- Week Thirteen: Nov 27-Dec 3  
Topic: Wrap-Up Week  
Reading: Class choice of topics, or anything we want to revisit  
Final Assignment Due Dec 10