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RELS 232-03, Philosophical and Theological Perspectives on Sexuality, Spring 1999

Item Type	Syllabus
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Publisher	Memphis, Tenn. : Rhodes College
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Religious Studies 232

Philosophical and Theological Perspectives on Sexuality

Spring 1999
TTh, 9:40-11:10 A.M. (M Hour)

Professor Mark W. Muesse

In *The Uses of Pleasure*, philosopher Michel Foucault asks the following questions about human sexuality:

Why does sexual behavior, and why do the activities and pleasures which pertain to it, form the object of a moral preoccupation? Why this ethical concern, which, at least at certain moments, in certain societies, or in certain groups, appears more important than the moral attention paid to other domains equally essential to individual and collective life, such as the supply of provisions, or the accomplishment of civic duties?...Why this 'problematization'?

In his characteristic way, Foucault notes the intense interest ethics--and more generally, religion--takes in matters sexual. Whether or not religion and ethics primarily make sexuality a *problem*, Foucault is certainly right to call attention to the intimate relationship between religion and sexuality. In the modern west, sexuality and religion have been often regarded as opposites or as orders of existence that have no connection with one another. But such a view neglects the fact that religious institutions are extremely interested in human sexuality, even if they wish to negate it.

This course will explore the relationships among religion, philosophy, and sexuality. Our approach shall be both historical and systematic, descriptive and prescriptive. We will consider traditional views of sexuality and contemporary issues in sexuality that have theological, ethical, and philosophical relevance.

Texts

James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978.

James B. Nelson and Sandra Longfellow, eds., *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources*

for Theology

Plato, *Symposium*. Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989.

In addition, a collection of required readings will be available for purchase in the bookstore. You should also have access to a copy of the New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOAB).

Course Requirements

The final grade for this course will be comprised of these elements:

(1) Preparation and participation, 20%. Students are expected to read the day's assignment before class and to participate actively in class discussion. Assessment of this grade will be based on: (a) preparation for class, (b) the relevancy, insightfulness, and frequency of your comments in discussion, (c) your ability to listen thoughtfully and respectfully to the comments of others.

(2) Written assignments. You will be asked to submit 3 essays, approximately 3-4 pages, typed double-spaced, at various times during the semester. They are expected to be mechanically and grammatically correct. The essays are designed to give you an opportunity to respond critically and creatively to the reading material, lectures, and discussions. Each essay will count 15%.

(3) Class presentation, 10%. Students, in teams of two, will be responsible for initiating and leading discussion for one class. The discussion should be preceded by a 10-15 minute presentation introducing the day's assignment and raising critical issues for discussion. Students are encouraged to consult with the professor prior to leading the day's discussion and to be creative and innovative in their presentations.

(4) Term paper. A research paper approximately 8-10 pages in length, typed double-spaced, will be due in my office at 5:00 PM on 30 April. This paper may treat any of the issues or subjects covered in this course. The essay topic and a preliminary bibliography of at least 5 sources must be submitted *in writing* by 13 April. (The preliminary bibliography will be graded and calculated at 10% of the grade for the paper.) This paper itself is worth 25% of the course grade. More information on this assignment will be given in advance of the due-date.

This course is discussion- and writing-intensive; there will be no examinations.

Attendance Policy

Students will be permitted two absences during the semester. Absences beyond that, for whatever reason, will result in a reduction in the final grade.

Students with Disabilities

I will be happy to provide reasonable accommodations for students with documented psychological and physical disabilities. For further information, please speak to me or contact the Office of Disability Services, 424 Halliburton Tower.

Computers

I encourage you to check your e-mail frequently for announcements and other matters concerning this course. I will use the e-mail to communicate with you collectively and individually, and I hope you will use it to correspond with me. It is often easier to contact me through e-mail than by telephone.

This course also utilizes the Academic Volume for the distribution of larger documents and papers. All course handouts will be available to you in the “Religion and Sexuality” folder, located in the “Muesse” folder on the Academic Volume. -

Office Information

I am happy to meet with you for any reason, and I hope that you will stop by my office at least once during the semester. My office is located in 203 Clough. You may drop in during office hours, which are as follows: MWF, 10:00-11:00 A.M.; TTh, 2:45-3:30 P.M. If these times are not convenient for you, please call or e-mail me to make an appointment for another time. My campus extension is 3589, and my home number is 278-0961.

Course Outline

Date *Topic and Assignment*

INTRODUCTION

14 January **Introduction to the course**

19 January **Sex, sexuality, and religion**
Nelson, *Embodiment*, pp. 11-36.

21 January **Sex, sexuality, and religion**
Franklin, “Basic Concepts Related to the Male Sex Role,” pp. 5-11.
(Readings)

CONTEMPORARY SEXUAL ARRANGEMENTS

26 January **The cultural construction of gender**
Heyward, “Notes on Historical Grounding: Beyond Sexual Essentialism,”
pp. 9-18 (*Sexuality and the Sacred*).

28 January **The cultural construction of gender**
Dobson, “Biology Determines Gender Roles,” pp. 32-39 (Readings).

2 February **Femaleness and femininity**
Kolbenschlag, “The Legend” and “Sleeping Beauty at Seventeen,” pp. 1-
28
(Readings).

4 February **Femaleness and femininity**
Kolbenschlag, “The Legend” and “Snow White and Her Shadow,” pp. 29-

9 February **Femaleness and femininity**
Mowery, “The Accommodating Other: Masculinity and the Construction
of
Feminine Identity,” pp. 118-130 (Readings).

Second essay due

- 25 March **Sex and singleness**
Lebacqz, "Appropriate Vulnerability," pp. 256-261 (*Sexuality and the Sacred*).
Gustafson, "Celibate Passion," pp. 277-281 (*Sexuality and the Sacred*).
- 30 March **Marriage and fidelity**
Embodiment, pp. 130-158.
- 1 April **Marriage and the ethics of divorce**
Stafford, "Christians Should Renounce Divorce," pp. 67-72 (Readings).
Gregg, "Christians Should Sometimes Accept Divorce," pp.73-78
- 6 April Easter Break
- 8 April **Homosexuality and the Bible**
Embodiment, 180-210.
Film: "Priest" (evening showing, TBA)
- 13 April **Homosexuality and Religious Life**
Boswell, "Homosexuality and Religious Life: A Historical Approach,"
pp. 361-373 (*Sexuality and the Sacred*).
Brantley, "The Thunder of New Wings: AIDS-A Journey Beyond Belief,"
Term Paper Topic/Bibliography due

ISSUES IN SEXUAL ETHICS

- 15 April **Pornography**
Embodiment, pp. 163-168;
F. M. Christensen, "Pornography is Not the Cause of Sexual Violence,"
Marx, "Pornography Will Destroy Christianity," pp. 162-166 (Readings).
Weaver, "Christianity Provides a Foundation for Pornography," pp. 167-
- 20 April **Sexual abuse and theology**
Bloomquist, "Sexual Violence: Patriarchy's Offense and Defense," pp.
62-69 (Readings);
Fortune, "Violence against Women," pp. 326-334 (*Sexuality and the Sacred*)
Third essay due
- 22 April **AIDS as a theological issue**
Nelson, "Illness as Body Interpretation: HIV and AIDS," pp. 165-179
Jantzen, "AIDS, Shame, and Suffering," pp. 305-313 (*Sexuality and the Sacred*)

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF THE EROTIC

27 April

Sexuality as spirituality

Embodiment, pp. 236-274;

Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," pp. 75-79 (*Sexuality and the Sacred*);

Tisdale, "The Purpose of Sex is Sensual Pleasure," pp. 40-45 (Readings).

Gramunt, "The Purpose of Sex is Spiritual Enlightenment," pp. 46-53

29 April

Conclusions

30 April

Term Paper Due