

# Love

## Religious and Philosophical Perspectives

Georgia State University  
Fall 2009  
Freshman Honors Seminar

### DESCRIPTION:

Does love allow us to ascend to a higher reality, to come closer to God? Is true love possible in a “fallen” world? Are such questions tainted by theological assumptions – and, if so, is there a different way to think about (and practice) love?

Beginning with the *locus classicus* of philosophical discussions of love, Plato’s Symposium, we will explore the role of love in philosophical inquiry, and the philosophical significance of love. We will also think about how Plato’s account of love provides the foundations for the central role love plays in Christian theology. After the violence and destruction of the twentieth century, are Platonic or Christian accounts of love plausible? We will critically examine Georges Bataille’s proposal that Plato must now be inverted, that “eroticism” must be at the core of “a-theology.” In the final third of the seminar, we will explore a different response to violence and oppression. We will examine the connection between love and justice in twentieth century African American literature and politics, reading short stories by James Baldwin and speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Throughout the course, we will work on developing the ability to closely read different types of texts, critically engaging with their substance, carefully analyzing their style, and thinking about how substance and style are related. Students will be expected to actively participate in weekly class discussions, carefully listening to classmates and articulating their own views. Additionally, students will complete brief, informal weekly responses to the readings. One of these responses will be expanded into a modest research assignment that will proceed in stages through the second half of the semester.

## **SCHEDULE:**

*Week 1:* Introduction (readings from Augustine in class)

*Week 2:* Plato, *Symposium*

*Week 3:* Plato, *Symposium*

*Week 4:* Luce Irigaray, "Sorcerer Love"

*Week 5:* Martha Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades"

*Week 6:* Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, Introduction and Part 1/Chapter 1

*Week 7:* Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, Part 2/Chapter 5

*Week 8:* Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination"  
(optional: Georges Bataille, "Story of the Eye")

*Week 9:* Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression"

*Week 10:* Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, Chapter 1

*Week 11:* Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Part II

*Week 12:* James Baldwin, "The Outing" and "Going to Meet the Man"

*Week 13:* Martin Luther King, Jr., selected speeches from *A Testament of Hope*

*Week 14:* Rowan Williams, "The Body's Grace" and Joseph Ratzinger, "Letter to the Bishops..." both from Eugene Rogers (ed.) *Theology and Sexuality*

*Week 15:* Gillian Rose, Chapters 5, 7, and 8 of *Love's Work*