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Thinking about Love:  
Teaching the Philosophy of Love (and Sex)

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Teaching the Philosophy of Love (and Sex) can be an unnerving experience. Obviously, speaking about love at any level is bound to be an exercise in self-revelation, but the philosophical examination of love, in particular, relies on examples drawn from lived experience that help to clarify our thinking about what love is. Thus, on the one hand, anyone who teaches such a course is putting herself on the line, for there is an expectation of personal involvement that is not necessarily present when teaching logic, epistemology, or metaphysics. On the other hand, students are usually willing and often eager to relate their own personal experiences of love, and this makes it difficult to maintain a proper balance between the discussion of lived examples and the more philosophical examination of love that should proceed from this level. Another general point of concern involves the specific texts that can be taught in the Philosophy of Love (and Sex) classroom. There are, of course, a few classic philosophical accounts of love that would probably be read in most classes on the Philosophy of Love (and Sex). Plato's *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*, for example, Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and some recent feminist works by Simone de Beauvoir or Luce Irigaray that encourage us to be more critical of the accepted models of love. But the idea of only reading philosophical texts in a class on the Philosophy of Love (and Sex) seems perverse and self-defeating. Practically all of the images and ideals of love that inform our culture are most clearly presented in non-philosophical works, such as novels, films, poems, songs and even essays in psychology. This means that whoever teaches a class in the Philosophy of Love (and Sex) must also be willing to go beyond the "safety" of ordinary philosophical texts

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