



ETHICS: SEX

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

[SUMMER 2020]

« »

DESCRIPTION

In the word “sex” there is contained a twofold signification: the bifurcated biological nature of the individual and the complementary action toward which that bifurcated nature is ordered. This seminar will study both significations, as two parts of a continuous whole, within the existence of the human person. This examination of sex in the light of personhood will be guided by a reading of Saint John Paul II’s *Love & Responsibility*, written while he was serving as Auxiliary Bishop of Kraków in 1960.



Love & Responsibility is steeped in two philosophical traditions: the metaphysically-oriented wisdom of Thomism and the experientially-reflective practice of phenomenology. In the former, it is well-noted that the young Karol Wojtyła studied for two years under Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange at the Angelicum, receiving his doctorate in philosophy with a dissertation on the doctrine of Faith in St. John of the Cross. In the latter tradition, we find especially the influence of Max Scheler; Wojtyła wrote his doctoral dissertation in theology on the incorporation of Scheler’s thinking into Catholic ethics. Together, these two ways of thinking united in Wojtyła’s mind to form a notion of *Thomistic personalism*, a notion which permeates his approach to love and sex—and through which we will ourselves better understand these perennially-difficult topics ourselves.

Note that one need not be deeply familiar with either phenomenology or Thomism—though a passing familiarity with the latter is strongly recommended—to benefit from this seminar.

METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion sessions each week. Each discussion session is structured around a reading from *Love & Responsibility*. Participants are expected to have read the assigned reading and listened to the lecture prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor. While this may not always be

feasible in a given week, I *strongly* urge everyone to read as much as they can, as closely as they can. Additionally, conversations relevant to the reading and lecture will be had by text throughout the week; participation in these conversations benefits everyone, so this too is strongly encouraged.

READING

The primary text for this seminar is Karol Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility* (available [via Amazon](#)). We will be reading *most* but not all of the book during the eight weeks. Supplemental readings will be suggested and provided via Teams.

LECTURE

Each week there will also be a 20-40 minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also stray into related topics, or may use the reading as a launching point for addressing some related issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The primary (but not sole) purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments contained within the reading, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions.

There *may* be accompanying visual aids (not necessarily) in order to provide some clarity as to textual points, but one *should* be able, in most cases, to simply listen to the lecture (and perhaps consult the visual aids later). This should allow more flexibility: making the lectures suitable accompaniment for a commute, while doing chores, etc.

DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays at 3:00-4:00pm ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week's material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry.

CONTRIBUTION

It is hoped and expected that each participant in the seminar will provide a contribution: a piece of writing, recorded presentation, or something else, within one month of the seminar's conclusion, as a way of coalescing what has been learned in a demonstrative manner.

Topics are suggested, and the instructor is available for discussions and assistance in composing your contribution.

SESSION SCHEDULE

August 1	<p>Traditional Sexual Ethics</p> <p>Recording – Lecture 1: Traditional Thought and Contemporary Problems</p> <p>Reading – Summary; <i>Love & Responsibility</i> 15-18.</p>
August 8	<p>Utilitarian Sexuality</p> <p>Recording – Lecture 2: Objective Constitution of the Partner</p> <p>Reading – <i>L&R</i> 21-44.</p>
August 15	<p>Sexual Urge</p> <p>Recording – Lecture 3: Individual Sexual Development</p> <p>Reading – <i>L&R</i> 45-69.</p>
August 22	<p>Metaphysics and Psychology</p> <p>Recording – Lecture 4: Lived Human Experience of Love</p> <p>Reading – <i>L&R</i> 73-118.</p>
August 29	<p>Ethics of Love</p> <p>Recording – Lecture 5: Right Reason and Right Relations</p> <p>Reading – <i>L&R</i> 119-140.</p>
September 5	<p>Chastity</p> <p>Recording – Lecture 6: The Relational Nature of Chastity</p> <p>Reading – <i>L&R</i> 143-173.</p>
September 12	<p>Shame and Self-Control</p> <p>Recording – Lecture 7: Struggling for the Mean</p> <p>Reading – <i>L&R</i> 174-208.</p>
September 19	<p>Vocation</p> <p>Recording – Lecture 8: Faithfulness</p> <p>Reading – <i>L&R</i> 211-261.</p>