**PHIL 306 – Philosophy and Sexuality**

**First Position paper Due by email by 10AM, Monday, March 9**

**General Directions:**

Write an essay explaining and supporting your views on one of the topics listed below. (There are several to choose from.) Write a total of 4-6 pages, typed, double-spaced. (Note: it seems to me very likely that an ‘A’ paper will be closer to the upper end of the page range for this assignment than to the lower end.) Write as clearly and concisely as you can. Explain any technical terms you use. Pretend that, instead of being read by a teacher who has read all the class readings, your essay will be read by an intelligent and well-informed person who has read no such material, and who needs to have the issues explained in a way that does not assume any acquaintance with academic writing about philosophy or sexuality or about the issues you are discussing.

Answer mainly in your own words. Put quotations in quotation marks (and use quotes sparingly). When you borrow a phrase or argument or idea from another writer, give them credit.  You may use any system for referring to other people's work that you find convenient: footnotes, endnotes, names and page numbers in parentheses (APA style).  My only requirement is that your reader should be able to easily locate any passage that you quote or paraphrase and that it should be very clear which ideas are your own and which are someone else's.

Make sure that your paper has a clear thesis and that it provides reasons to support that thesis. Devote some of your space to explaining and responding to opposing views. (Since these topics are controversial, there are almost certainly people who would disagree with your position. Probably, one or more of the authors we have read in this class has expressed or described views that are different from yours.  What arguments would proponents of those views be likely to make? How might they criticize your position and your reasoning? How could you respond to these criticisms?)

See the paper writing guide by Jim Pryor of NYU linked on our class website for lots more guidance. The URL: http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html

Save your paper as a Word document (or other, compatible file type – not PDF) and send it to me as an attachment to an email by the due date and time listed above.

**Topics to choose from**:

1.  Are Greta Christina and her client in the peep show in “Are We Having Sex Now, or What?” actually engaged in sex? Why or why not? Discuss how your view on this question does or doesn't line up with one or more of the accounts of the nature of sex provided by Christina herself or by any of the other writers we have read, like Nagel or Augustine.

2.  We read several writers (Nagel, Augustine, two statements from the Catholic Church) who developed accounts of the difference between ‘natural’ or ‘proper’ sex acts and ‘perverted’ or ‘unnatural’ or ‘intrinsically disordered’ acts. Which of these accounts seems best to you, or are they all wrong?  Why?

2 b. Alternatively, pick just one of these accounts and give it a more thorough discussion/assessment.

3.  Is it possible that a person could be making a mistake by choosing to alter their body with hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery in order to ?  Explain your answer in relation to various possible accounts of the nature of sex/gender identities.

4. In “Trans 101” Talia Mae Betcher examines several accounts of gender identity and argues that none of them gives us a good explanation of the fact that some people experience intense discomfort with the gender identity that they have been assigned by society. Explain and assess her reasoning.

5.  Describe at least three ways that allegedly scientific results have been used to support ‘gender essentialism’ and/or ‘biodeterminism’. Explain why feminist critics of these views think that the science does not actually support them (i.e., does not really support essentialism or biodeterminism). Which side in this debate has the better arguments?

5b. Alternatively, describe the exchange between Cordelia Fine and Simon Baron-Cohen in *The Psychologist* and try to determine who has the better of the argument. (Note: you’ll need to look at Fine’s discussion of Baron-Cohen’s work in the selection from her book in order to do justice to this topic.)

6. What sort of evidence would it take to prove that sex and/or gender are ‘biological’ and not ‘social’?

**If you want to write on a topic that is not listed here, please clear it with me first (and do that soon).**