

# What am I?

## Personal Identity and the Self from a philosophical perspective

HUMA 2930

Prof. Jenny HUNG

Fall 2024



## Syllabus

### Course details:

Class times: Weds, Fri 3 pm - 4:20 pm

Course credit: 3

### Contact:

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### Course Description:

Most of us have a special interest in what will happen to ourselves. If you learn that someone will win a one-million lottery tomorrow, you feel happy for them. If you are then told that the someone is you, a new set of emotions arises. What am I?

The course discusses the possibility of life after death, the existence of a soul, the possibility and desirability of immortality, abortion, and euthanasia. These discussions greatly affect how one chooses one's religion and perceives the value of life. We will read classical and contemporary theories of the self, personal identity, afterlife, death, and will explore the relation between the self and its environment, the basis of (non)egoistic future concerns and responsibilities. By looking at different approaches and various (Eastern and Western) philosophical and religious traditions to answering fundamental questions, we learn to develop the habit of thinking in a critical way.

### **Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):**

*Students will learn to:*

- Develop a cross-cultural understanding of issues about the self in the history of philosophy
- Critically examine issues surrounding the relationships between what we are and our persistence conditions
- Enhance close reading and analytical thinking skills
- Develop the ability to formulate arguments in the format of an academic essay
- Develop skills of self-identification, judge current situation and evaluate the responsibilities of oneself
- Analyze life meaning and plan for the future and investigate beliefs about afterlife

### **Course Requirements (100 marks in total)**

- Midterm exam: 20 marks
- Final exam: 40 marks
- One written assignment (max. 1,000 words): 20 marks
- One presentation: 10 marks
- Course participation: 10 marks

#### *Midterm Exam:*

It is an in-class midterm exam with a duration of 1.5 hours.

Students are required to answer short and long questions that test understanding and their ideas.

#### *Final Exam:*

The final examination will last for 3 hours.

Students are required to answer short and long questions that test understanding and their ideas.

#### *Written assignment:*

Students are expected to write an essay of max. 1,000 words.

It should be a commentary on the teaching materials in the form of a thoughtful critique or interpretation of the readings.

#### *Presentation:*

Students can select any topics about personal identity or self to give a short presentation.

*Course participation:*

Students' participation in class will be evaluated based on how well you are prepared for each session and the quality and frequency of your contributions. Students are expected to participate actively in class and the tutorials.

There will be short debates in class on controversial issues on the self. Students with different positions are invited to speak aloud and provide justifications for their thoughts. Students are encouraged to help each other in formulating arguments and replying to opponents.

**Important Dates:**

- **Midterm Exam:** Oct 18 during class
- **Final Exam:** to be determined

**Course Materials:**

- There is no textbook.
- All readings will be uploaded to the course website.

**Tentative Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings and Activities</b>
<b>Initial survey</b>		
Sept 4	An Initial Survey	<i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• John Perry, The First Night, "A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality", pp. 1-9</li></ul>
<b>I am a Soul!</b>		
Sept 6	Descartes (1)	<i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• René Descartes, "Meditation II", pp. 7-17</li></ul>
Sept 11	Descartes (2)	No readings
Sept 13	Contemporary Soul Theories	<i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Roderick Chisholm, "On the Simplicity of the Soul", pp.167-181</li></ul> <i>Optional reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Richard Swinburne, "How to determine which is the true theory of personal identity", pp. 105-122</li></ul>
<b>Sept 18</b>	<b>No Class</b>	<b>Public Holiday</b>
Sept 20	Tutorial	<i>No Readings</i> <i>Psychology Experiment:</i>

		<p>Orangutan Recognizes Himself!  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Okmkn30D0NU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Okmkn30D0NU</a></p> <p><i>Documentary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kids' Past Lives:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq8l4XVfgPA&amp;t=1810s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq8l4XVfgPA&amp;t=1810s</a></li> <li>How to write a short philosophy essay?</li> </ul>
<b>I am a Person!</b>		
Sept 25	John Locke	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>John Locke, "On Identity and Diversity", pp. 1-19</li> </ul>
Sept 27	Reid's Reply to Locke	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thomas Reid, "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity", pp.346-348</li> </ul>
<b>I Do Not Exist!</b>		
Oct 2	Hume	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <p>David Hume, "Of Personal Identity", pp. 33-43</p>
Oct 4	Tutorial	<p><i>No Readings</i></p> <p><i>Documentary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Woman with 15 Personalities:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojzZ4L2rmSY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojzZ4L2rmSY</a></li> </ul> <p><i>Debate 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Am I all of the personalities or one of them?</li> </ul> <p>Student presentations</p>
Oct 9	Buddhist Theory of No-self (1)	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mark Siderits, "Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction" (Chapter 3), pp. 32-68</li> </ul>
<b>Oct 11</b>	<b>No Class</b>	<b>Public Holiday</b>
Oct 16	Buddhist Theory of No-self (2)	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Miri Albahari, "Nirvana and Ownerless consciousness", pp. 79 – 113</li> </ul>
<b>Oct 18</b>	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	
Oct 23	Tutorial	<p><i>TED talk:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My stroke of insight:  <a href="https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_my_stroke_of_insight">https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_my_stroke_of_insight</a></li> </ul> <p><i>Debate 2:</i></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the Buddhist theory of no-self helpful to our daily lives?</li> </ul> <p>Student presentations</p>
<b>We are Physical</b>		
Oct 25	We are Animals	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eric Olson, "What are we?", pp. 14-54.</li> </ul>
Oct 30	Physical Continuity	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future", pp. 161-180</li> </ul>
Nov 1	Tutorial	<p><i>Documentary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World of Cryonics - Technology That Could Cheat Death</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmWV_ongVel">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmWV_ongVel</a></p> <p><i>Debate 3:</i></p> <p>Will you choose Cryonics?</p> <p>Student presentations</p>
Nov 6	Physicalism and Death (1)	<p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dean Zimmerman, "Personal Identity and the Survival of Death", pp. 97-123.</li> </ul>
Nov 8	Physicalism and Death (2)	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lynne Rudder Baker, "Persons and the metaphysics of resurrection", pp. 1-29.</li> </ul>
Nov 13	Tutorial	<p><i>Documentary:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beyond Our Sight (Near Death experience)</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_mSPxColVI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_mSPxColVI</a></p> <p><i>Debate 4:</i></p> <p>Does resurrection make sense under physicalism?</p> <p>Student presentations</p>
<b>The Unity of Selves</b>		
Nov 15	The Phenomenal Self	<p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barry Dainton, "Selfhood and the Flow of Experience" (Sect. 4-5), pp. 186 – 198</li> </ul> <p><i>Psychology Experiment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Severed Corpus Callosum:</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zx53Zj7EKQE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zx53Zj7EKQE</a></p>
Nov 20	The Narrative Self	<p><i>Reading:</i></p>

		Marya Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View", pp. 155-178
Nov 22	The Minimal Self	<i>Reading:</i> Galen Strawson, "The Self and the SESMET", pp. 99-120
Nov 27	Tutorial	<i>Documentary:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Man With The Seven Second Memory: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_P7Y0-wgos">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_P7Y0-wgos</a></li> </ul> <i>Debate 5:</i> Is it good to experience one's life as a narrative? Student presentations
Nov 29	Course Summary	<i>Summary, questions, and discussion</i> Student presentations

**Bibliography:**

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