THE SELF: EAST AND WEST
Philosophy 435/635
Class location: Loria 258

Meeting time: Mondays 1:30-3:20
Instructor: Professor Kati Balog
Office: 406B, Connecticut Hall
Office hours: Mondays 4-5pm, or by appointment
email: katalin.balog@yale.edu

COURSE TOPICS:

This course is an investigation into how we do, and how we should conceive of ourselves as persons. The first is a question of psychology and of the cultural history of ideas; the second is primarily a metaphysical issue, but it also has connections with and implications for psychology and ethics. Though these questions are separate we will engage them simultaneously as we learn about the different traditions that will be our focus.

This course will cover a number of disciplines and approaches to the topic. In the first part of the course we will look at these issues from a Western philosophical and psychological perspective. We will discuss philosophical conceptions of the self (Locke, Hume, Reid on the historical side, Parfit on the contemporary side), religious conceptions of the self (Augustine, Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard), as well as more straightforwardly psychological/neuroscientific views on the self and bodily awareness. We will discuss views on the nature of persons and the self and the connected question of what makes someone the same person as time goes by. Does personal identity consist in the continuity of memories, beliefs and psychological traits? Or is it a matter of the continuity of the body? Or the persistence of an immortal and immaterial soul? Of particular interest to our discussions is the view that our commonsense conceptions of the self are somehow defective.

In the second part of the course we will look at Eastern and especially Buddhist conceptions of the self, or the doctrine of no-self. Since the aim of the course is to explore ideas and not to build Buddhist scholarship, we will mainly look at the Buddhist tradition from the Western point of view, exploring parallels between ancient Buddhist views on the self and modern Western philosophical conceptions of the self. Our main focus will be the idea that our ordinary conceptions of the self are in some crucial respect misguided. We will focus on Buddhism’s central claim that these misconceptions about the self lie at the heart of suffering and lack of psychological well-being.

TEXTS:
c) Augustine, Confessions (C)
d) Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Part 2

Both books are available at Labyrinth Books.
e) Online resources placed under Resources on the V2 server, or hyperlinked in this syllabus (to access some of the links you have to be on a Yale network computer, connect through Yale dial-up, or use a proxy server).

**Some good books on the self and personal identity to look at:**


**References:**

You might also come across issues in the reading that you don’t know about. If you are having any problems understanding anything, ask me. There are some reference works that you might also look at:

- [Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://www.routledge.com/encyclopaedia-of-philosophy)  
- [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://plato.stanford.edu/)

**ENROLLMENT:**

As with all philosophy seminars, this one requires instructor’s permission to enroll. Placement in the course will depend on qualifications in terms of previous coursework and status (grad/undergrad junior/senior).

I hope to sort these things out in the first meeting. If it looks like I cannot accommodate all qualified students, I will need you to email me with your information. You should include information about your background in philosophy and/or psychology/cognitive science. Philosophy classes that are especially relevant are courses in the philosophy of mind, metaphysics and epistemology, but feel free to list any courses or expertise you think relevant to the subject-matter of the course.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

**a) Response papers:**

Each week, at least 24 hours before class meets, submit a response paper (about one page, 450 words or so) which reflects your understanding of one of the readings for the week. Typically, you will give a concise summary of the reading, preferably pointing out problems or formulating counterarguments to the author’s arguments along the way. These assignments will not be graded but sometimes (though not always) you will get written feedback on them. Like all written
assignments in this course, the response papers will be submitted electronically via the Assignments page on V2. You may once or twice fail to turn in this paper 24 hours before class without hurting your grade; but if you fail more than three times you cannot pass the class.

b) Oral presentation:

5-10 minute oral presentation on one of the readings. The time limit (of 10 minutes) will be taken seriously; part of the exercise is to learn to pace yourself. A written draft of your presentation will be handed in at least 24 hours before the class.

c) Class participation:

Do all required readings, attend seminar, take an active part in discussion. While you might miss class once or twice, failing to attend more than three times will hurt your final grade irrespective of whether you have submitted all written assignments on time.

d) Term paper:

The final paper (about 15 pages) is due by the end of term (topics will be distributed 3 weeks before the end of semester). However, you are encouraged to submit a draft ahead of time.

It is expected that all students conform to the code of academic integrity and that any work submitted be one’s own. DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. All cases of suspected plagiarism will be vigorously investigated and all confirmed cases will be reported directly and immediately to University officials. Be safe: always properly cite quotations and acknowledge external sources you have consulted.

(Still somewhat) TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

Week 1 Jan. 11 Introduction (no reading)

Segment I: PERSONAL IDENTITY THROUGH TIME, NATURE OF SELF - ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

Week 2 (Notice that Monday classes meet on Friday Jan. 15) The memory theory and its critics (all of the readings for this week are to be found on the Resources page)

John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity", Ch. XXVII of Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding, 1694.


Thomas Reid, "Of Identity”, Chapter 4 from the third essay in Reid’s Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, 1785.

**Week 3** Jan. 25 Canceled

**Week 4** Feb. 1 **Abandonment of personal identity.**

David Hume, "Our Idea of Identity", part of “of Skepticism With Regard to The Senses,”, which is section 2 of part IV of Book I of Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739 (on Resources page)

David Hume, "Of Personal Identity", section 6 of part IV of Book I of the *Treatise*. (on Resources page)

David Hume, "Second Thoughts", part of the appendix to Book III of the *Treatise*, 1740. (on Resources page)

Derek Parfit, “Why Our Identity Is Not What Matters” (PI)

**Week 5** Feb 8 **Reductionism and anti-reductionism**

Derek Parfit, “The unimportance of identity” (PI)

**Week 6** Feb 15 **Self-awareness**


David Velleman, “Self to Self”, (on Resources page)

**Week 7** Feb. 22 **I and my body**

Daniel Dennett, "Where am I?"


**Segment II: SELF AS INWARDNESS**

**Week 8** March 1

Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X. Ch. 8-26.

**Week 9** March 22
Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Part II, "balance between the esthetic and the ethical"

**Segment III: Buddhism: no self**

**Week 10 March 29**

Siderits, Chapter 1 and 2 (on Resources page)

Chapter 23 (BP)

**Week 11 April 5**

Siderits, Chapter 3 and 4 (on Resources page)

Chapter 26 (BP)

**Week 12 April 12**

Galen Strawson “Self-awareness”, (on Resources page)

David Velleman, “*So it goes*”, (on Resources page)

**Week 13 April 19**

Raymond Martin, “Would it matter all that much if there were no selves?” (on Resources page)

John Dunne, “Reflexivity and Subjectivity: Views from Dharmakīrti and his Successors” (on Resources page)

**Make-up class April 29th, 3-5pm LC 104**

Professor Dreyfus’s Visit

Georges Dreyfus; “Self, Consciousness, and Subjectivity: A Preliminary Buddhist Account”, (on Resources page)