

Western, Indian, and African Philosophical views of The Self

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Textbook

No textbook is required for this course. Readings will be posted on the course website.

Course Description

Suppose you stepped into a tele-transporter that destroys earthly you and duplicates those cells on Mars. Is Mars you the same person as Earth you? In this course, we will explore solutions to his kind of question from Western, Indian and African philosophical traditions. Through the creation of visual aids, essays, and a podcast, we will examine these solutions. Each unit culminates in a debate connecting these philosophical issues to contemporary ethical issues such as abortion, designer babies, and physician assisted suicide.

Course Goals

- (1) Describe two accounts of the self each from a distinct intellectual tradition while comparing the strengths and weaknesses of both.
- (2) Identify the major issues at stake in debates about the self and how those apply to contemporary issues.
- (3) Defend and critique your favored view of the self in a variety of contexts including both formal and informal writing, as well as conversational performances.

Unit Goals

What are we even talking about?	<p>What are philosophers up to when they investigate the self? What tools do they use?</p> <p>Why is it valuable to examine this question across different intellectual traditions?</p>
Western Philosophy	<p>Describe and evaluate Dualism, Physicalism, and Parfit's account of the self.</p> <p>Identify what issues are at stake in Western philosophy's discussion of the self.</p>

	Defend and critique an assigned stance on a related contemporary issue.
Indian Philosophy	Describe and evaluate the Buddhist No-self view, the Nyaya view, and the Cavakra view. Identify what issues are at stake in Indian philosophy's discussion of the self. Defend and critique an assigned stance on a related contemporary issue?
African Philosophy	Describe and evaluate the Akan view of the self, and the Yoruba account. Identify what issues are at stake in African philosophy's discussion of the self. Defend and critique an assigned stance on a related contemporary case study.

READING SCHEDULE

Unit 1 What Are we Even Talking About?

Week 1 Introduction

Youtube – “Personal Identity: Crash Course Philosophy #19”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trqDnLNRuSc>

Youtube – “How to Argue – Philosophical Reasoning: Crash Course Philosophy #2”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKEhdsnKKHs>

Week 2 Methods

Selections from Doing Philosophy Comparatively by Tim Connolly

If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is by Jay Garfield and Bryan W. Van Norden (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/11/opinion/if-philosophy-wont-diversify-lets-call-it-what-it-really-is.html>)

Unit 2 Western Philosophy

Week 3 Dualism

2pg essay on Unit 1 DUE by the first class meeting of this week.

Substance Dualism – Descartes *Mediation VI*

Problems for Dualism – Unity of the Mind (selection from SEP
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dualism/#SubDua>)

Week 4 Physicalism

Ch 1 of *Physicalism (New Problems of Philosophy)* by Daniel Stoljar

Selections from Ch 10 & Ch 11 Arguments against and for physicalism

Week 5 Parfit

Visual Aid due at the start of the first class meeting of this week

Ch 10-13 Selections from *Reasons and Persons* by Parfit

Week 6

DEBATE: Should designer babies be permitted? Adopt the perspective of a Physicalist. The debate will take place in class. There are no additional readings for this week

Unit 3 Indian Philosophy

Week 7 Introduction to Indian Philosophy

10 Minute Podcast DUE at the start of the first class meeting of this week.

Selections from Perrett *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* Ch 1 & Ch 6

Week 8 Buddhist No-Self

World Religions Book Selection

Mark Siderits *Buddhism as Philosophy* Ch 3 “Non-Self: Empty Persons”

Week 9 Hindu Views

Visual Aid Due at the Start of the first class meeting of this week.

Ch 4 “Self” from The Nyaya-Sutra Translated by Matthew Dasti and Stephen Phillips

Carvaka Physicalist view of the self. -

<https://prevos.net/humanities/philosophy/self/#fn8-3431>

Week 10

DEBATE: Should abortion be permitted? Adopt the perspective of a No-Self Buddhist. The debate will take place in class. There are no additional readings for this week

Unit 4 African Philosophy

Week 11 Introduction to African Thought

3pg essay on Unit 2 DUE by the first class meeting of this week

Ch 1 “How is African Philosophy to Be Defined?” in *An Introduction to African Philosophy* by Samuel Oluoch Imbo

Podcast “Behind the Mask: African Philosophy of the Person” from History of Philosophy without any gaps <https://historyofphilosophy.net/african-person>

Week 12 Yoruba

“Personal Identity in African Metaphysics” by Adeofe

Week 13 Akan Conceptual Scheme

Visual Aid Due at the start of the first class meeting of this week.

“An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme” by Gyekaan

Week 14

DEBATE: Should physician assisted suicide be permitted? Adopt the perspective of a Yoruba. The debate will take place in class. There are no additional readings for this week

Week 15

Review Material – no additional reading

Students submit a full draft of their final paper by 9:00am Monday Morning. Each student is assigned a peer paper to read as homework. The peer pairs meet during the next class session after following precise marking guidelines. Then the class engages in speed peer-review where students rotate to get perspective on sections of their paper from a number of their peers.

FINAL ESSAY DUE – at our assigned finals time.

For specific dates, see the document entitled “Calendar Overview.” This document provides a calendar view of the entire course including assignment and essay due dates.

Assignments

Your grade in this course is based on 1) your understanding of the potential solutions to the nature of the self and 2) your philosophical skill. You will be awarded credit for demonstrating these different skills. Here is the breakdown of the different assignments you can use to demonstrate these two features. You have complete control over your grade in this class—the more assignments you work through and the more class activities you participate in, the more likely you are to earn a high grade. Conversely, if you miss class, do not complete the written assignments, or fail to be an active participant, then you are not likely to succeed.

1. ESSAYS [5,000]: These essays are an opportunity for you to demonstrate your mastery of the potential solutions to the nature of the self. You will only need to draw on the homework assignments and class materials to complete these assignments. Late essays will be deducted 25% of the total points possible for each 24 hour period which passes from the deadline. Essays should be uploaded to [The Course Website](#). In total, essays are worth 5,000 points:

- ESSAY 1 – 500 points
 - Length = 2 page double spaced
 - **DUE: Middle of First Full Month of Course**
- PODCAST – 500 points
 - Length = 10 minutes
 - **DUE: Middle of Second Full Month of Course**
- ESSAY 3 – 1,500 points
 - Length = 3 pages double spaced
 - **DUE: Middle of Third Full Month of Course**
- ESSAY 4 – 2,500 points
 - Length = 5 pages double spaced

- **DRAFT DUE: Two weeks prior to the final due date**
- **DUE: Whenever the Final happens for the course**

NOTE: You are welcome to send drafts to me up to one week prior to the essay due date. This will give me sufficient time to generate comments, and you sufficient time to modify your work accordingly.

- 2. HOMEWORK [1,500 points]:** For each day of class, you will have a reading assignment. You are to complete that assignment by the time class meets on the day it is assigned.

In addition, 3 days of the week (**SPECIFIC DAYS DEPEND ON WHEN CLASS MEETS**), you are required to upload a handwritten¹ 3 paragraph philosophical reflection. Each day's assignment must be submitted to the class **google folder by 11:59pm on the day it is due**. For example, the Aug 27th 3 Paragraphs must be uploaded by 11:59pm on Aug 27th.

On the days that the class meets, your reflection will be guided by specific prompts released at the end of that day's lecture. For the day that class does not meet, you are to write 3 paragraphs that engage in philosophy in some way. These are called free form 3 paragraphs. It is the student's responsibility to write such that the work can be read.

- Prompt Guided 3 paragraphs are worth **40** points each
- Free Form 3 paragraphs are worth **30** points each

All 3 paragraph assignments are graded as either no credit or full credit. Feedback on 3 paragraph assignments will be given to the class as a whole. No written feedback will be given for 3 paragraph assignments. The student's **two lowest scores on the 3 paragraph assignment will be dropped** from the final grade calculation.

- 3. VISUAL AIDS [2,500 points]:** Throughout the semester you are required to develop 3 visual aids². The goals of these is to somehow illustrate at least one of the concepts that we have studied up to that point in the course. Within the visual aid, words should be kept to a minimum. Students must, in addition to submitting the visual aid itself, include a single paragraph explaining the visual aid. Examples of visual aids include but are not limited to: a single powerpoint slide, a hand drawn image, a piece of digital art, or a diagram.
- The first visual aid is worth **500** points

¹ If you have a learning difference or need an accommodation regarding hand writing 3 paragraphs, please come see me immediately.

² If you have a learning difference or need an accommodation regarding the development of a visual aid, please come see me immediately.

- Visual aids two and three are each worth **1000** points
- 4. PARTICIPATION [1,000 points]:** Students are expected to attend class, and actively engage. This course is largely activity based, so it is critical that all class members work together to master the material. In total, participation is worth 1,000 points. The student's **two lowest participation scores will be dropped** from the final grade calculation.
- Each day of class is worth **36** points for participation

Grades and Grading Policies

Your grade will be determined by total points earned out of a potential 10,000 points. There are no comparative assessments in this class; it is entirely up to you how well you perform. As you'll see, strong participation and regular writing can make up for your less-than-stellar performance on the essays. There are many routes to a good grade.

A (9,500+): This student has demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the various potential solutions to the nature of the self and their philosophical skill. The student is able to both discuss and write about these topics in a sophisticated and persuasive way by exercising their philosophical abilities, apply elements of them in novel ways, and is an active and supportive citizen of the class.

A- (9,000-9,499)

B+ (8,500-8,999)

B (8,300 – 8,499): This student has demonstrated competent knowledge of the material covered in both the lectures and readings, is able to analyze arguments and present objections and replies, writes clearly, and actively participates in class activities. The student may show some difficulty in applying elements of the Buddhist philosophical system in new contexts, chose not to pursue some opportunities to develop writing and critical thinking skills, or struggled with one or two particular units in the course.

B- (8,000 - 8,299)

C+ (7,500 -7,999)

C (7,300-7,499): This student shows understanding of most of the material covered in the lectures and readings, demonstrates an ability to analyze arguments from the Buddhist philosophical tradition as well as consider objections, and participates in class activities from time-to-time. However, the student does not demonstrate competency in some topics of the course, has missed or poorly composed assignments, or is unable to apply the material in new contexts.

C- (7,000-7,299)

D (6,000-6,999): This student shows understanding of some but not all of the material; serious deficiencies in writing, and may have missing or incomplete work

F (5,999 or fewer): This student failed to show understanding of the Buddhist philosophical tradition and may have substantial missing or incomplete work.

Academic Integrity [Modify by Institution]

All students must abide by the Notre Dame Honor Code: “As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty.” Details are available can be found [here](#). Please note that academic dishonesty (including plagiarism and unauthorized multiple submissions of work for assignments) will not be tolerated and will be punished severely.

Students with Disabilities [Modify by Institution]

I am strongly committed to working with students who have any disability recognized under the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure that they are able to fully participate in class activities. If you feel you require a reasonable accommodation, please follow the process described [here](#).

Email Policy

I check my email once every weekday. That means I may not respond to your inquiry for up to 24 hours during the week. Please plan accordingly.