

**PHIL 5150**  
**Topics in Western Philosophy 西方哲學專題**

**Course Outline**

**Time : T 10:30am-1:15pm**

**Location : UCC 204**

**Course overview (as shown on CUSIS)**

This is a postgraduate seminar course devoted to examining selected topics in Western philosophy. The specific content of the course may vary from semester to semester. Students may repeat the course for credit, provided that two courses with identical course codes are not elected in the same semester.

**Learning outcomes (as shown on CUSIS)**

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the primary and secondary sources on the syllabus.
2. Gain competence in explaining and evaluating the key concepts and theories addressed in the course.
3. Be able to articulate and defend a philosophical thesis of their own concerning the issues discussed in the course.
4. Demonstrate progress in their papers toward mastering the expository and critical skills for argumentative writing.

**Additional learning outcomes**

5. Demonstrate proficiency in exploring connections between issues in value theory and in metaphysics.
6. Demonstrate proficiency in understanding difficult philosophical problems and evaluating, analyzing, and developing solutions to these problems.

**Topics**

*What matters survival*

The question of what matters in survival is, roughly, the question of what relation to a future individual I must stand in (a) for it to be rational for me to have a special, selfish interest in that individual's well-being and (b) for that individual to be morally responsible for my past deeds. Here's the standard answer to this question: *Identity* is what matters in survival, i.e., it's rational for me to have a special, selfish interest in a future individual's well-being – moreover, that future individual will be morally responsible for my past deeds – if and only if *I am* that individual. Not all philosophers accept the standard answer. Some philosophers say that what matters in survival is something besides identity.

In this course, we shall explore the question of what matters in survival, and in doing so we shall consider and evaluate some challenging arguments for different, competing answers to this question. We shall also explore some related questions. What kind of entity is a person? In virtue of what does a person persist? Is it always an objective fact whether a given person persists over a given period of time, or is the persistence of a person – at least in some cases – just a matter of convention? When does ethics depend on metaphysics, and when is it independent of metaphysics?

**Learning activities**

1. We shall read, discuss, and evaluate substantial portions of Derek Parfit's classic *Reasons and Persons* as well as Trenton Merricks's recent *Self and Identity*, along with a variety of important related articles. Active participation shall be expected.
2. Each student shall write a term paper that explores and makes an original contribution to philosophical discussion on our central topic.
3. Students shall present on readings, on class discussion, and on their term paper plans.

**Assessment scheme as prescribed on CUSIS (revise if necessary)**

<i>Task nature</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Term paper	3000-6000 words (in English)	60%
Paper presentation	In class during weeks 12 and 13	20%
Participation	In addition to active engagement in class discussion, participation may include small in-class presentations and/or occasional contributions to a Blackboard forum	20%

**Remarks on Assessment Scheme (if any)**

In the event that our seminar takes place online rather than in person, the paper presentations and participation activities will also take place online.

**Grade Descriptor**

Please refer to: [http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade\\_descriptors.pdf](http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf)

**Required reading**

Parfit, Derek (1984). *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Merricks, Trenton (2022). *Self and Identity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Both texts will be ordered through the University bookstore. Additional readings will be provided on Blackboard.

**Course schedule\***

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Required reading</i>
1	Introduction and metaphysical preliminaries	Selection from G.W. Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics"
2-3	Fission cases, permissivist ontologies, and what matters in survival	Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity"; David Lewis, "Survival and Identity"; Sydney Shoemaker, "Persons and their Pasts"
4-7	Parfit's reductionist project	Selections from Derek Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i>
8-11	Merricks's non-reductionist project	Selections from Trenton Merricks, <i>Self and Identity</i>
12-13	Student presentations	

**\*This schedule is unofficial and tentative.** It is also somewhat incomplete. I will likely add a few short readings to discuss alongside the book selections. These may include (some but not all of) the following: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "People and their Bodies"; John McDowell, "Reductionism and the First Person"; David Shoemaker, "The Insignificance of Personal Identity for Bioethics"; Laurie Paul, "What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting" and/or a selection from her *Transformative Experience*; Christine Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit". A complete, detailed course outline will be made available by the first week of class.

**Details of course website**

We will use Blackboard.

### Contact details for teacher

<b>Teacher</b>	
Name:	Rimell, Nicholas
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### Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.