

**PHIL5150/ PHIL7150**  
**Topics in Western Philosophy**

**Course Outline**

**Time : Wed 14:30-17:15**

**Location : Wong Foo Yuan Building 107B**

**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 texts 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 among a variety of issues in metaphysics – e.g., issues involving numerical identity, material composition, time, change, and personhood.
6. Demonstrate proficiency in understanding difficult philosophical problems and evaluating, analyzing, and developing solutions to these problems. Gain competence in explaining and evaluating the key concepts and theories addressed in the course.

**Topics**

*Identity and Persistence*

In this seminar, we will explore, primarily, two questions:

- A. How do ordinary material objects persist?
- B. What are the criteria of personal identity over time (i.e., what are the criteria of identity over time *for us*)?

These questions, traditionally, have different sorts of answers: endurantism, perdurantism, or stage theory for the former; psychological continuity theory, biological continuity theory, and so on for the latter. But these questions – along with their answers – are closely related. Indeed, according to many philosophers (but not all), persistence just is identity over time, and persons are ordinary material objects (of a certain sort). These two questions are also related to several other questions, including (but not limited to):

- C. In what circumstances do certain objects compose another object?
- D. Are there objective facts about what is past, what is present, and what is future? Or is *what is now* just a matter of perspective, just like *what is here* is?
- E. Are there past-located or future-located objects?
- F. What are we? Are we biological organisms? Material beings constituted by (but not identical to) biological organisms? Immaterial souls? Composites of temporal parts, suitably related?
- G. Could we survive fission or fusion, and – if so – how?

In the service of exploring our two primary questions, we'll explore these other questions as well.

### Learning activities

1. We shall read, discuss, and evaluate a number of texts making significant contributions to philosophical discussion over our two primary questions. Active participation will be expected.
2. Each student shall write a term paper that explores and makes an original contribution to philosophical discussion over our two primary questions.
3. Each student shall present on their term paper plan near the end of the term.
4. Each student shall make regular contributions to a Blackboard forum.

### Assessment scheme

<i>Task nature</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Term paper	3000-5000 words (in English)	60%
Paper presentation	In class during weeks 12 & 13	20%
Participation	In addition to active engagement in class discussion, participation will include regular contributions to a Blackboard forum.	20%

### Remarks on Assessment Scheme

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

Weekly attendance is mandatory, barring special circumstances (e.g., sickness).

If the term paper is submitted late, there will be an initial deduction of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a letter grade, plus a deduction of an additional 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a letter grade for every additional 24 hours past the deadline.

### 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 readings

Olson, Eric Todd (1997). *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology*. New York, US: Oxford University Press. [**THA**]

Sider, Theodore (2001). *Four Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*. Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press. [**4Dism**]

*Both of these books will be available for purchase in the University Bookstore. Both are also available electronically through the University Library. All other required readings (as indicated below on the course schedule) will be posted to Blackboard.*

### Recommended learning resources

Baker, Lynne Rudder (2007). *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kim, Jaegwon; Korman, Daniel Z. & Sosa, Ernest (eds.) (2011). *Metaphysics: An Anthology*, 2nd Edition. Wiley-Blackwell.

Merricks, Trenton (2001). *Objects and Persons*. New York: Oxford University Press.

van Inwagen, Peter (1990). *Material Beings*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, especially the following entries: "Time" (Emory, Markosian, and Sullivan), "Temporal Parts" (Hawley), and "Personal Identity" (Olson)

**Course schedule\***

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Required reading</i>
1 6 Sep	Introduction	Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity"
2 13 Sep	Persistence, Time, and Material Objects	<i>4Dism</i> , chapters 1-3
3 20 Sep	Persistence, Time, and Material Objects (continued)	<i>4Dism</i> , ch. 4; Trenton Merricks, "Composition and Vagueness"
4 27 Sep	Persistence, Time, and Material Objects (continued)	<i>4Dism</i> , chapter 5
5 4 Oct	Persistence, Time, and Material Objects (continued)	<i>4Dism</i> , chapter 6; John Copeland, Heather Dyke, and Diane Proudfoot, "Temporal Parts and their Individuation"
6 11 Oct	Persistence and Change	Selection from David Lewis, <i>On the Plurality of Worlds</i> ; Sally Haslanger, "Persistence, Change, and Explanation" and "Endurance and Temporary Intrinsic"
7 18 Oct	Persistence and Change (continued)	Josh Parsons, "Must a Four Dimensionalist Believe in Temporal Parts?"; Kristie Miller, "Ought a Four Dimensionalist to Believe in Temporal Parts?"
8 25 Oct	Personal Identity	<i>THA</i> , Introduction and chapters 1-2
9 1 Nov	Personal Identity (continued)	<i>THA</i> , ch. 3; Katherine Hawley, "Fission, Fusion, and Intrinsic Facts"; Eugene Mills, "Dividing without Reducing: Bodily Fission and Personal Identity"
10 8 Nov	Personal Identity (continued)	<i>THA</i> , ch. 5; Eric Olson, "What Does it Mean to Say that We are Animals?"
11 15 Nov	Personal Identity (continued)	Trenton Merricks, "The are No Criteria of Identity over Time"
12 22 Nov	Student presentations	No new readings
13 29 Nov	Student presentations	No new readings

**\*This schedule is tentative. For example, I may make small changes to the reading schedule for our final topic (personal identity) to accommodate student interests and/or our pace.**

**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.