

Philosophy 285

Special Topics

Self/No Self

(Fall 2018)

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Thurs 1:00 – 3:50
Office Hour: F 1:00-2:00

If there is one thing of which we are prephilosophically certain, it is that we have (or are) a *self*— or so it initially seems. The idea that we possess a self appears to be enshrined philosophically in the celebrated *cogito* (I think therefore I am). But the very idea that there is a self has arguably been an object of philosophical scepticism in both Western and Eastern philosophy. The aim of this seminar is to address the question of the nature and reality of the self, focusing on cutting-edge contemporary discussions of the topic: the recent debate between the (Indian) Buddhist *denial* and the (European) phenomenological *defense* of the existence of the self. We will thus make a foray into the burgeoning field of cross-cultural philosophy (also known as comparative philosophy) and the renaissance of phenomenology—all the time remaining squarely in analytical philosophy. We will also examine Galen Strawson’s account of a “minimal self,” a self that purports to be “thin” enough to escape Buddhist objection while thick enough to be a self “worthy of the name.” And we will close with a discussion of Tyler Burge’s “deduction” of the first-person concept, a defense of our right to use the pronoun ‘I’.

No prior acquaintance with the philosophy of the self, Buddhist philosophy or phenomenology is presupposed. The course can serve as an introduction to any or all of these fields. It satisfies the Philosophy Department distribution requirements for the philosophy of mind and metaphysics. Students who took Matt Fulkerson’s seminar on the self (which focused on the use of the concept of the self in the psychological and behavioral sciences) may take this seminar for credit. Graduate students from other departments are welcome.

(1) **September 27.** Introductory Class.

John Barresi and Raymond Martin. “History as Prologue: Western Theories of the Self.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*.
Anthony Kenny. *The Self*.
Eric Olson. “There is no Problem of the Self” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*.
Nāgārjuna. Chapter XVIII “Examination of Self and Entities.” *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)*.

(2) **October 4.** The Western Rationalist Conception of the Self.

René Descartes. First, Second and Sixth Meditation. *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

John Carriero. Chapters 1, 2, and 6. *Between Two Worlds: A Reading of Descartes Meditations*
Introduction,

(3) **October 11.** The Western Empiricist Conception of the Self.

David Hume. Section VI. Chapter 6 “Of Personal Identity.” *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Donald Ainslie. Modern Philosophy: Person’s and Perceptions.” *Hume’s True Scepticism*.

Galen Strawson. Chapter 13 ‘When I Enter Most Intimately What I Call Myself: Hume on the Mind 1.’
The Subject of Experience.

(4) **October 18.** The Philosophically Reconstructed Theravadin Buddhist Case for No Self (1).

Miri Albahari. Preface – Chapter 5. *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self*.

(5) **October 25.** The Philosophically Reconstructed Theravadin Buddhist Case for No Self (2).

Miri Albahari. Chapter 6-9. *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self*.

(6) **November 1.** The Western Phenomenological Reply (1).

Dan Zahavi. “The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications.” *Self, No Self: Perspective from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*.

----- . “Unity of Consciousness and the Problem of Self” *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*.

----- . Chapters 1-3. *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective*.

(7) **November 8.** The Western Phenomenological Reply (2).

Aaron Henry and Evan Thompson. “Witnessing from Here: Self-Awareness from a Bodily Versus Embodied Perspective.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*.

Evan Thompson. “Memory and Reflective Awareness” *Self, No Self?*

Jay L. Garfield. “The Conventional Status of Reflective Awareness: What’s at Stake in a Tibetan Debate?” *Philosophy East and West*, 56, 2006

(8) **November 15.** The Buddhist Case: An Alternative Formulation.

Guy Armstrong. Chapters 1-5. *Emptiness: A Practical Guide for Meditators*.

(9) **November 22.** Thanksgiving. **No Class**

(10) **November 29.** A Minimal Self?

Galen Strawson. “The Self and the Sesmet.” In *The Subject of Experience*.

(11) **December 6.** Rationalism Revisited

Tyler Burge “Reason and the First-Person” In *Knowing Our Own Minds*.

Course Requirements

A meditation practice (½ hour per day) for the duration of the course, Regular attendance and full participation. 2-3 minute report on meditation practice at the beginning of each class. One seminar presentation. One short (5-page) paper due Friday October 26th. One longer (10-12 pages) final paper due, Wednesday, December 12.

Texts, Primary*

Miri Albahari. *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self*. (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave. 2006).

Guy Armstrong. *Emptiness: A Practical Guide for Meditators*. (Somerville, MA: Wisdom: 2017).

John Barresi and Raymond Martin. "History as Prologue: Western Theories of the Self." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*. Edited by Shaun Gallagher. (Oxford, Oxford U Press: 2011).

Tyler Burge "Reason and the First-Person" In *Knowing Our Own Minds*. Edited by Crispin Wright, Barry C. Smith, Cynthia Macdonald (Oxford: Oxford U Press: 1998).

René Descartes. *The Philosophical Writing of Descartes*. Volume 1. Edited and Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Douglas Murdoch. (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1985)

Jay L. Garfield. "The Conventional Status of Reflective Awareness: What's at Stake in a Tibetan Debate?" *Philosophy East and West*, 56, 2006.

Aaron Henry and Evan Thompson. "Witnessing from Here: Self-Awareness from a Bodily Versus Embodied Perspective." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*. Edited by Shaun Gallagher. (Oxford, Oxford U Press: 2011).

David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. L.A. Selby-Brigg and P.H Nidditch (Oxford, Oxford U Press: [1739-40]1972).

Anthony Kenny. *The Self* (Milwaukee: Marquette U. Press, 1988).

Nāgārjuna. Chapter XVIII "Examination of Self and Entities." *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)*. Translation and Commentary by Jay L. Garfield. (New York: Oxford, 1995).

Eric Olson. "There is no Problem of the Self" *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. 5, No 5-6, 1.

Galen Strawson. "The Self and the Sesmet." In *The Subject of Experience*. (Oxford, Oxford U Press: 2017).

Dan Zahavi. "The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications." In *Self, No Self: Perspective from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*. Edited by Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi. (Oxford: Oxford U Press: 2011).

-----, "Unity of Consciousness and the Problem of Self" In *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*. Edited by Shaun Gallagher (Oxford, Oxford U Press: 2011).

-----, Chapters 1-3. *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

Texts, Secondary

Donald C. Ainslie. Hume's True Scepticism. (Oxford, Oxford U Press, 2015).

John Carriero. *Between Two Worlds: A Reading of Descartes Meditations*. (Princeton: Princeton U Press: 2009).

Galen Strawson. "When I Enter Most Intimately What I Call Myself: Hume on the Mind 1" In *The Subject of Experience* (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 2017).

*All texts will be made available electronically,