

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

Instructor	Course Info
Peter R. Murray	Philosophy 230
OH: Tues, Wed, Thur. 10am-11am	Tues, Thur. 11:10am–12:30pm
Ladd 108, 518-580-5401	Ladd 107
Email: pmurray@skidmore.edu	Spring 2016

Course Description

Philosophy is thinking in slow motion
– John Campbell

The fact that we are people or persons is central to the rights we enjoy and the responsibilities we bear, and it has far-reaching practical implications in discussions of animal rights, abortion rights, advanced directives and end-of-life care, and penal justice. But what is a person, and what about each of us makes it true that we are persons, and that we are different persons? Can only a member of the species *Homo sapiens* be a person? Can two people share the same body, as some argue can happen in cases of dissociative identity disorder or brain bisection, or can one person inhabit multiple bodies, either serially or simultaneously? Moreover, each of us has a past and, presumably, a future. But what makes each of us the same person we were ten years or ten minutes ago and will be ten years or ten minutes from now? For certainly science tells us that no atom now in our bodies was there ten years ago, and that none of the atoms making them up now will be there in ten years. Or if someone genuinely doesn't remember the events of what we would typically call "her" past, or if her personality or cognitive capacities change radically, as can happen in case of advanced dementia, is she still the same person as "she" was? Why or why not? And if not, would it be just to punish or reward someone who doesn't remember anything about the actions in question? Finally, what determines one's identity in the sense that answers the question "Who am I (really)?", as opposed to "What am I?" Is self-narrative essential to making us the particular person that we are? These and related questions are collectively referred to as questions of personal identity, and we will explore these and related questions in this course through classic and contemporary readings and through films and videos that raise these issues in particularly stark and provocative ways.

Course Objectives

The view of philosophy that will be central to our work in this class is that of philosophy as an activity, as something we do, rather than as a set of doctrines that we learn or memorize. As we will see, the heart of this philosophical activity consists in analyzing, evaluating, and critiquing the reasoning or argumentation that we present to persuade ourselves and others that certain conclusions are correct. The conclusions that we will be particularly interested in this course have to do with issue(s) of personal identity, but the argument- and reasoning-related skills that we will practice and develop in this course are of much broader application and utility in your other courses at Skidmore and elsewhere in your life.

Accordingly, the learning objectives in this course are for you to be able to:

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

- (1) Recognize, charitably reconstruct, and engage in productive ways with arguments in philosophical texts and with those of one's peers;
- (2) Develop, draft, revise, and polish a sustained, reasoned argument in a paper that addresses an argument presented in a philosophical text;
- (3) Work collaboratively with your peers to clarify your reasoning and writing by providing and incorporating feedback and suggestions on each other's work;
- (4) Describe the major positions and issues surrounding personal identity that we will cover in this course, the reasoning that various authors have presented for and against those positions, and the dialectical interrelations among those positions.

Course Materials

Personal Identity (edited by John Perry) (abbreviated "PI" in course schedule, below)

The PH 230 Readings page of the course *Blackboard* site has links to other works we read in this course. (abbreviated "BB" in the course schedule, below)

Course Requirements

There are 100 possible points in this course. Your final grade in this course is determined by your participation in class and your performance on your reading responses, your papers, and your feedback on your peers' paper drafts:

1. Participation (worth 10 points, i.e., 10% of course grade)

To participate successfully in this class, you must:

- Read the assigned texts before class, think about them, and bring them to class;
- Read your peers' Reading Responses for a given class meeting before that class meets;
- Come to class consistently and on time (I keep track of attendance). *In addition, students who miss more than four classes, for whatever reason, will fail the course;*
- Participate actively in class discussions (I note down who participated in each class, and we will discuss and practice how to do so productively);
- Bring questions to office hours, post questions or other issues for discussion to the Discussion Forum section of the course *Blackboard* site, and/or respond to questions and issues that other students have posted to the Discussion Forum.
- A course Q-and-A notebook will circulate continuously among the students at each class meeting. In it, each student must pose at least one question about something in that class meeting that they feel they are not fully understanding, or else provide at least one suggested answer to a question raised by a peer. Entries should be identified only by the

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

last four digits of your Skidmore ID, and answers should reference the ID number of the question(s) they are responding to. The notebook is turned in at the end of each class.

- Several films and videos will be an integral part of the material for this course. Attending the scheduled viewings is mandatory.

2. Reading Responses (worth 30 points, i.e., 30% of course grade)

- Beginning in week 2, you will post a 250- to 500-word response to the readings for one class each week on the Reading Responses page of the course *Blackboard* site. Reading responses for a given class must be posted to the Reading Responses page by 7pm the day before the class meets. See the PH 230 Assignments page of the course *Blackboard* site for guidelines on writing reading responses.
- For one class meeting during the semester, you will each summarize your peers' responses to the readings for that class meeting, and come up with two questions with which to launch discussion for that class. See the Assignments page of the course *Blackboard* site for guidelines for reading responses presenters.

3. Papers (worth 40 points, i.e., 40% of course grade)

- You will write two five-page papers in this course. Each paper will count for 20 points (20% of your course grade).
- You will have two weeks to complete each paper. The first week, you will complete a draft of your paper, which you will turn in for feedback and suggestions for improvement from a peer in the class, based on guidelines that I will provide. Your peer reviewer will have two days to return your draft to you with their feedback and suggestions, and you will have the remainder of the two weeks to make revisions to your paper before turning in the final draft to me. Your Skidmore student ID number should be the only identifying information on both your first and final drafts.
- Late papers are accepted up to one week after the deadline, but they lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day. So, if a paper is of A- quality, but it is turned in an hour after the deadline, it will receive a B+. If the same paper is turned in 25 hours after the deadline, it will receive a B, and so on. Papers more than seven days late will not be accepted.

4. Peer Feedback on Paper Drafts (worth 20 points, i.e., 20% of course grade)

- For each of the two papers in this class, you will provide one of your peers with feedback and suggestions for improvement on their draft, using guidelines that I will provide. Each peer review will be worth 10 points (10% of the course grade).
- Your feedback will be graded on its helpfulness and level of engagement with the paper you review. See the Assignments page of the course *Blackboard* site for guidelines on providing peer feedback and a rubric for assessing the quality of their draft.
- To ensure that your peer has time to incorporate your feedback into her final draft, peer feedback on paper drafts may not be turned in late.

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

5. Academic Integrity

- Your work in this course is governed by the Skidmore College Honor Code and Code of Conduct (https://www.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.php).
- Violations of the Honor Code and/or Code of Conduct will result in your failing this course. If you have any questions regarding whether particular actions constitute violations of the Honor Code or Code of Conduct, please see me to discuss them.

6. Extra Credit

There are two opportunities for extra credit in this class, each of which is worth a possible 6 points (i.e., 2/3 of a letter grade):

- After consulting with and receiving the approval of the instructor, students may write a three- to four-page paper or do an in-class presentation connecting a movie, TV show (episode), novel, article, short story, or personal experience to our readings and discussion in this course;
- With the approval of the instructor, students may sign up to give more than one reading response presentation.

Final course grades are determined according to the following scale:

F = below 60 pts	D+ = 67–69 pts D = 63–66 pts D- = 60–62 pts	C+ = 77–79 pts C = 73–76 pts C- = 70–72 pts	B+ = 87–89 pts B = 83–86 pts B- = 80–82 pts	A+ = 97–100 pts A = 93–96 pts A- = 90–92 pts
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Academic Resources

Skidmore College has a variety of resources available to support your work in this and other courses. Please seek them out and let me know if you have any questions about them. An online listing of available resources is at <https://www.skidmore.edu/advising/support.php>. I have already contacted Student Academic Services about arranging a peer tutor for this course, and I will let you know if we are able to identify someone who can fill that role.

Skidmore is also committed to supporting your mental health and wellbeing. If you—like many college students—are experiencing depression or anxiety, suffering from an eating disorder, struggling with some other psychological difficulty or trauma, or if you just need someone with whom to talk, the Counseling Center is an excellent place to get the help you need. More information is available online at <https://www.skidmore.edu/counseling/services.php>. If you need immediate assistance at any time of the day or night, call Campus Safety at 518-580-5567, and they can connect you with the counselor on call.

Furthermore, Skidmore College is committed to providing a learning, working, and living environment that reflects and promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect. We

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

have the right to be free from all forms of abuse, assault, harassment, and coercive conduct, including sexual and gender-based misconduct. Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of our personal integrity and our right to a safe environment and violates Skidmore's values. Skidmore College will not tolerate sexual or gender-based misconduct in any form. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal Title IX regulations.

I, like the rest of the Skidmore College faculty, am committed to supporting you and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. Therefore, you should know that, if you choose to confide in me or another member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an occurrence of sexual or gender-based misconduct, we are obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist you in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. If you wish to report or discuss an occurrence of sexual or gender-based misconduct confidentially or anonymously, I can help direct you to the appropriate resources on campus where you can do that.

If you are a student with a disability and you require academic accommodations for this course, please contact the Coordinator of Student Access Services (Meg Hegener, 518-580-8150, mhegener@skidmore.edu) to arrange your accommodations.

You may also find the following specifically philosophy-related resources to be useful regarding how to read, and how to write, philosophy:

The Pink Guide to Philosophy

<https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>

Jim Pryor's Guidelines on Writing Philosophy Papers

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Peter Horban's "Writing a Philosophy Paper"

<http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/resources/writing.html>

UNC-Chapel Hill's Writing Center Guide for Philosophy

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/philosophy/>

David Concepcion (2004) "How to Read Philosophy" (*Teaching Philosophy* 27:4, 358-68)
(handout, also available on Course Resources page of Blackboard site)

Angela Mendelovici's annotated sample philosophy paper (Prezi)

https://prezi.com/z4h1_fwilbxi/a-sample-philosophy-paper/

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

Strategies for Success

Engaging well in the activity of philosophy is an acquired skill that improves with practice, and the assignments in this class have been organized to provide you with a series of scaffolded opportunities to practice that skill. The readings have been pared down as much as possible to allow you to focus directly on the relevant arguments without losing sight of their context. The reading responses give you an opportunity to reconstruct the argument for a particular view and to begin to think about how that argument might be critiqued and how it is related to other arguments we are addressing in this course. This prepares you for our in-class discussions, in which we will clarify and refine our understanding of the material in the course, and each of you will have a chance to shape our discussions through the questions you come up with to launch them. The papers build on the preliminary work you have done in your reading responses and in-class discussions and allow you to extend and bring further clarity to your thoughts in a sustained piece of reasoning on a single topic. Finally, your peer reviews give you the opportunity to use your own emerging expertise and proficiency with argumentation to help someone else improve their work, to benefit in your own work from the expertise and proficiency of someone else in the class, and to make sure that you are writing for the correct audience in your papers: your peers, rather than for me. So, trite as it may sound, my best advice for how to succeed in this class is really for you to do the assigned work.

Though each student is required to do his or her own work, I highly encourage you to work on and discuss the readings in pairs or groups in preparation for writing your reading responses and papers. Often, a breakthrough in your own understanding of the argument for a view is as close as another student working on the same thing. Also, please do come to my office hours to talk through any difficulties you are having with the course material. I've been where you are, and I am here and want to help. The week of 3/28-3/31 we're going to have instructor-student midterm status meetings in my office hours to make sure we're all on the same page regarding how you're doing in the course, and I encourage you to fill out the Instructor Feedback Form that is linked from the course *Blackboard* site to let me know how I can help you better.

Recent scientific studies show that multitasking, e.g., checking email or texting in class or while doing homework, makes us dramatically less productive, leads to problems with concentration, organization, and attention to detail, and is associated with short-term drops in IQ of up to fifteen points (Ophir, Nass, and Wagner (2009). "Cognitive control in media multitaskers". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, September 15, 2009, vol. 106 no. 37, 15583-15587; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4471607.stm). A single-tasking technique that I recommend is to work in 25-minute units, during which you do only one thing, e.g., your personal identity reading, with a 5-minute break between units to do whatever you want (eventually you can work up to 45-minute units, with 15-minute breaks between units). I also recommend that you set a timer to keep track of your units and breaks and that you use an internet blocker like Freedom to help keep distractions at bay while you're doing a unit. See the Course Resources page of the course *Blackboard* site for links to various apps and services that you might find helpful to help you focus and be more productive.

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

A final, related note on using computers and other technology in class: There is a burgeoning body evidence to suggest that using computers or other devices to take notes in class, rather than writing notes by hand, leads to decreased retention of course material and poorer performance on tests (Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014). "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking". *Psychological Science*, June 2014, vol. 25 no. 6, 1159-1168). However, I have generally taken my class notes on a computer, and I will allow you to do so in this class, subject to the following condition: you may only use your computer or other technology in class to take notes. Students who check email, text, or surf the internet during class are not only doing themselves a disservice, their activities are highly distracting to those around them, and I have a responsibility to maintain a learning-conducive environment in my classroom. Using an internet blocker like Freedom during class time can be highly effective for avoiding temptation.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

[iCalendar link for papers and paper draft reviews available on the course *Blackboard* site]

Unit	Topic	Reading for Class
Introduction	1/26: Course overview, discussion of cases, arguments	NO READINGS
Dualism and the question of what one is: Learning to do philosophy	1/28: Plato and the immortality of the soul [focus on discussing philosophy]	• <i>Phaedo</i>, 78a-94e (BB) • Graff and Berkenstein, "I take your point" (handout)
	2/2: Descartes' argument that he is "strictly speaking only a thinking thing" [focus on reading philosophy]	• Descartes, <i>Meditation II</i> (BB) • Concepción, "How to Read Philosophy" (BB)
	2/4: Descartes' "real distinction" argument	• Descartes, <i>Meditation VI</i> (BB)
What is a Person?	2/9: Concepts and criteria of personhood	• Screening: <i>TNG</i>, "The Measure of a Man" • Dennett, "Conditions of Personhood" (BB)
	2/11: Personhood and first-person perspective	• Baker, "When Does a Person Begin?" (BB)
	2/16: Personhood and Freedom of the will	• Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"(BB)
	2/18: Non-human persons? Take I	• Gordon and Patterson, "The Case for the Personhood of Gorillas"(BB)

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

	2/23: Non-human persons? Take II	• Herzing and White, “Dolphins and the Question of Personhood” (BB) • [optional] DeGrazia, “...Personhood beyond <i>Homo sapiens</i>” (BB)
	2/25: Metaphysical vs. moral concepts of personhood	• Beauchamp, “The Failure of Theories of Personhood” (BB)
How many people are there? Individuation of persons at a time	3/1: One body, two people?	• Nagel, “Brain Bisection and Unity of Consciousness” (PI)
	3/3: One body, multiple people?	• Screening: <i>Fight Club</i> • Wilkes, “Multiple Personality and Personal Identity” (BB) • [optional] Olson, “Was Jekyll Hyde?” (BB)
	3/8: From individuation of persons to identity of persons over time	Williams, “Personal Identity and Individuation” (BB)
	3/10: Criticisms of Dualist accounts of identity Topics for Paper 1 distributed	• Perry, “First Night” in “Dialogues on Personal Identity and Immortality” (BB)
SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS 3/15, 3/17		
Is this the same person as before? Persistence of persons over time	3/22: Psychological theory of identity Drafts for Paper 1 DUE	• Screening: <i>Memento</i> • Locke, “Identity and Diversity” (PI)
	3/24: Criticisms of Locke’s theory Reviews of Paper 1 Drafts DUE Sign up for Instructor-Student Midterm Status Meetings in Office Hours week of 3/29-3/31	• Screening: <i>Black Mirror</i>, “White Bear” • Butler, “Of Personal Identity” (PI) • Reid, “Of Identity,” “Of Locke’s Account of Personal Identity” (PI)
	3/29: Quasi-memory and the psychological criterion of identity Paper 1 DUE	• Shoemaker, “Persons and Pasts” (PI)
	3/31: One animal = one person	• Screening: <i>Moon</i> • Olson, “An argument for Animalism” (BB)

SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 230: PERSONAL IDENTITY

	4/5: Does (ordinary) survival matter, or is psychological continuity just as good?	• Screening: <i>The Prestige</i> • Parfit, "Personal Identity" (PI) • [optional] McDowell, "Reductionism and the First Person" (BB)
Who am I (really)? Narrative Identity and the Characterization Question	4/7: Are thought-experiments a good guide to personal identity?	• Screening: <i>Black Mirror</i>, "White Christmas" • Williams, "Self and Future" (PI)
	4/12: Narrative Identity attacked	• Strawson, "Against Narrativity" (BB)
	4/14: Narrative identity defended	• Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival" (BB)
	4/19: Personal identity, dementia, and advanced directives Topics for Paper 2 distributed	• Screening: <i>Away from Her</i> • Dresser, "Dworkin on Dementia" (BB)
	4/21: Transformative Experience L.A. Paul talk, "Transformative Experience" (8pm, Gannett Aud.) Topics for Paper 2 distributed	• Paul, "What you can't expect when you're expecting" (BB)
	4/26: Advanced Directives, Take II	• Kuhse, "...Advanced Directives, Personhood, and Personal Identity" (BB)
	4/28: Transgender issues and personal identity Drafts of Paper 2 DUE	• Overall, "Sex/Gender Transitions and Life-Changing Aspirations" (BB)
Wrap up and Recap	5/3: Course Recap Reviews of Paper 2 Drafts DUE	NO READINGS

Paper 2 Due: Wednesday, May 11, 12pm (final draft to Safe Assign, first draft and peer comments to Prof. Murray's box (Ladd 108))