PHIL 315: Personal Identity and Persistence

Course Catalogue Description

Intermediate course in the metaphysics of personal identity of persistence. Topics include the nature of the personal identity, survival through change, objects' movement or extension through time, the nature of time and the present, and questions in ethics that arise from issues of time, identity and persistence.

Full Syllabus Description

You have changed. Consider yourself as a young child—you were shorter, you may have believed in Santa Clause, and you probably thought that if the teacher said so, it must be true. But despite all these differences, that child was still you; the student reading this description and that child are one and the same person. Granted, many of your properties have changed—your psychology and most of the matter that makes you up is totally different, but those are all changes that were underwent by a single, persisting person: you. This is course about the persistence of objects through time. We will begin by considering people: in virtue of what is that child identical to you? Is it because of certain psychological connection? Some physical continuity, like having the same brain cells? Or something else entirely? We will then turn from people to the more general question: what is it for objects to persist. Do objects like you, me, and this piece of paper, in some sense, *move* through time, like a boat moves down a stream? Or are objects *extended through* time in more or less the same way they are extended through space? The course will conclude with a brief unit on time itself, with questions like: do all times exist? Or does only the present exist? And if all times do exist, is what time is "now" sort of like what place is "here"—just a matter of perspective? Or is the present moment in some way *special*?

This class does not offer simple answers; it equips students with the philosophical tools necessary for clear, systematic, and rigorous thought about these and other topics in ethics that we encounter in our every day lives. Students in this writing intensive course will grow as creative and independent thinkers, with heavy emphasis placed on developing students' argumentative writing and developing the skills to read and unpack the arguments and ideas of others.

ACE Outcomes

This course satisfies ACE 5 Humanities: "Use knowledge, historical perspectives, analysis, interpretation, critical evaluation, and the standards of evidence appropriate to the humanities to address problems and issues." Students will have an opportunity to learn the outcome by analyzing, interpreting, and critically evaluating classic and contemporary texts in philosophy, in both class discussion and written work. Over the course of three essay assignments, students will develop and defend their own views, while drawing on the literature using standards of evidence appropriate to philosophy. The final paper will be used to assess achievement of ACE 5.

Prerequisites:

Three credit hours in philosophy (typically via one prior course in the philosophy department).

Meeting Times:
Class: T/R 2–3:15 pm, LPH330.
Office Hours: Tuesday from 12–2 pm or by appointment, LPH 315R

Instructor:
Quinn White, qwhite@unl.edu, LPH 315R

Course Readings:
All readings will be available on the course website.

Grading and Assessment
- Attendance, participation (20% of final grade).
    - Attendance at all class sessions is required.
- Papers: (must be submitted via canvas)
    - Paper 1a: Reconstruction, 500-750 words. Due by 9/17, 5pm (20% of final grade)
    - Paper 1b: 1250-1500 words. Due by 10/14, 5 pm (25% of final grade)
    - Paper 2: 1500-1750 words. Due by 12/11 (35% of final grade)
- Late Policy
    - Students will have three free late days to use throughout the semester as they see fit. Students can use these three days to turn papers in late without penalty and without having an excuse or prior approval. (For example, one could turn in Paper 1 two days late, Paper 2 on time, and Paper 3 one day late.) Unexcused late work beyond the first three days will lose ⅓ grade per day (e.g., a B paper will receive a B-). Extensions beyond the three late days can be granted with *prior* approval from Prof. White.
- All Grades will be given on a 4.00 point scale (A is a 4.00, A- is a 3.67, B+ is a 3.33, etc.).

Additional Requirements
- You should expect to disagree with things we read, your peers, me, and maybe even different time-slices of yourself! These disagreements may be vigorous but must always be reasoned and respectful.
- A note on gadgets: laptops, iPads, and so forth are not permitted in lecture unless you speak to me to request their use and explain why you need it or you have an accommodation (see below under "Services for Students with Disabilities"). If you are found using gadgets for impermissible activities (checking email, etc.), your privileges will be revoked; if you have an accommodation, we will have a meeting with Services for Students with Disabilities to determine an appropriate resolution.

Academic Integrity
Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. If in doubt about what counts as plagiarism, or about how to properly reference a source, me or your TA. Other forms of academic dishonesty include: double submission of papers, aiding dishonesty, and falsification of records. Students who commit acts of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action and are granted due process and the right to appeal any decision. If academic dishonesty is proven, this can result in severe disciplinary consequences, which could include any

or all of the following: a redo of the assignment for a reduced grade; failure on the assignment; failure of the course; a letter in the student's or referral to university disciplinary authorities. If you are tempted to plagiarize because you are in crisis, it is always better to speak to your me, your advisor, the academic deans, the counseling center, or another trusted authority on campus who can help you handle the crisis. For details about expectations, see the Student Code of Conduct.

Services for Students with Disabilities

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options privately. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). If you are eligible for services and register with their office, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so they can be implemented in a timely manner. SSD contact information: 117 Louise Pound Hall; 402-472-3787.

Writing Center

The Writing Center can provide you with meaningful support as you write for this class as well as every course in which you enroll. Trained undergraduate and graduate peer consultants are available to talk with you about all forms of communication. You are welcome to bring in everything from lab reports, presentations, and research papers to cover letters, application essays, and graduate theses and dissertations. Writing Center Consultants can work with you at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming and organizing your ideas through polishing a final draft.

In 2021-22 (UPDATE IF NEEDED), there are two ways you can connect with a Consultant: Online (a real-time, video conversation) and eTutoring (email feedback). You can sign up any time by visiting unl.mywconline.com. For more information about the Writing Center, please visit unl.edu/writing.

Academic Support Services

You can schedule free appointments for individual academic coaching with First-Year Experience and Transition Program staff through MyPLAN. You can also take advantage of study stops--which provide individual and group study with learning consultants in a variety of disciplines--and free group workshops on topics such as time management, goal setting, test preparation, and reading strategies. See success.unl.edu for schedules and more information.

Counseling and Psychological Services

UNL offers a variety of options to students to aid them in dealing with stress and adversity. Counseling and Psychological & Services (CAPS) is a multidisciplinary team of psychologists and counselors that works collaboratively with Nebraska students to help them explore their feelings and thoughts and learn helpful ways to improve their mental, psychological and emotional well-being when issues arise. CAPS can be reached by calling 402-472-7450. Big Red Resilience & Well-Being (BRRWB) provides one-on-one well-being coaching to any student who wants to

enhance their well-being. Trained well-being coaches help students create and be grateful for positive experiences, practice resilience and self-compassion, and find support as they need it. BRRWB can be reached by calling 402-472-8770.

Face Coverings Are Required

An individual in this course has a documented need for face coverings to be required in this course. Without divulging personal or identifying information, such a documented need might be that a member of their household is unable to be vaccinated or has a health condition that makes vaccines less effective for them. As a result, the College of Arts and Science has determined that *face coverings will be required in this course*. If you are unwilling to comply with this requirement, please visit with your advisor about different sections or possible alternative courses that you might take in lieu of this one.

Schedule and Readings

8/24: Introduction, No Reading

I. Personal Identity

8/26: John Locke, selections from the *Essay*

8/31: Thomas Reid, responses to Locke

9/2: David Hume, Selections

9/7: Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future"

9/9: Derrick Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* Ch. 10

9/14: Derrick Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* Ch. 11

9/16: Derrick Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* Ch. 12

9/17: Paper 1 Due, 5pm

9/21: Christine Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit"

9/23: Eric Olson, An Argument for Animalism

9/28: Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death*, selections

9/30: Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death*, selections

10/5: Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death*, selections

II. Persistence

10/7: Ted Sider, *Four Dimensionalism*, Ch. 1

10/12: David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, selections

10/14: Ted Sider, *Four Dimensionalism,* Ch. 3 and Thomson excerpt
Paper 2 Due

10/19: HOLIDAY

10/21: Van Inwagen, Four Dimensional Objects

10/26: Sider, *Four Dimensionalism*, Ch. 5, §1-3 (stop on pp. 197/21)

10/28: Ted Sider, *Four Dimensionalism*, Ch. 4, §7.1 (just timeless worlds), 9 (vagueness)

11/2: Hawley, How Things Persist, excerpt

11/4: Sally Haslanger, "Persistence, Change and Explanation"

11/9: Kit Fine, "In Defense Of Three Dimensionalism"

Optional Readings:

- Haslanger, "Persistence Through Time" (an overview)
- Kurtz, Intro to *Persistence: Contemporary Readings*
- Sider, Four Dimensionalism Ch. 5 (responses to objections)
- Sider, Lewis, "Tensing the Copula"
- Johston, "Hylomorphism"

III. Time

11/11: Sider, *Four Dimensionalism*, Ch. 2 Part I

11/13: J.J. Smart, "The Tenseless Theory of Time"

11/18: McTaggart, "Thank Goodness That's Over"

11/23: Zimmerman, "The Privileged Present"

11/25: Sider, *Four Dimensionalism*, Ch. 2, Part II

11/30: HOLIDAY

12/2: Bradford Skow, *Objective Becoming*, Ch. 1

12/7: Brad Skow, *Objective Becoming* Ch. 2

12/9: Brad Skow, *Objective Becoming* Ch. 3

12/11: Final Paper Due, 5 pm