

Syracuse University  
Department of Religion  
REL 394/PHI 342: Theories of the Self  
Office hours: M: 9:30 am-10:30 am; Fr: 12:00 pm-1:00 & by appointment  
512 Hall of Languages  
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Fall 2016

## *Theories of the Self*

### **Description:**

The inquiry into human nature and the meaning of the self is one of the key questions in the history of philosophy and religious thinking alike. On the one hand it constitutes the subject matter of one of the primary fields of research in philosophy, namely, philosophical anthropology. On the other hand, the notion of the meaning of the self lies at the core of some of the most fundamental questions and concepts of religious thinking, including: the relation between the human and the divine, the problem of identity, and the relation between religion, ethics, and social norms.

This course is a comparative study of how the questions of self and selfhood have been approached by key philosophical and religious traditions. Through this survey we will investigate how philosophy has influenced religious and spiritual insights into human nature and how it has been influenced by religion in turn. In this vein we will touch on the longstanding question of the relation between faith and reason, particularly with regard to questions of human nature. Our comparative approach will be both thematic and historical. It will be thematic inasmuch as we will trace the main themes pertaining to the way the meaning of the self has been addressed in philosophical and religious thought. It will also be historical inasmuch as it will trace how these themes have been depicted in various religions and by key religious and philosophical thinkers.

We will start with Greek antiquity and late antiquity; in this section of the course we will focus on three key schools: the Platonic, the Aristotelian and the harmonization of both in Neo-Platonism. We will then turn to medieval Islamic thought at the height of Islamic civilization exploring how philosophers and mystical philosophers approached human nature. Next we will turn to the birth of modern Cartesian subjectivity in reaction to medieval Christian scholasticism. Subsequently, we turn to the 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment and the Kantian project that not only attempted to harmonize rationalism with empiricism but also furnished the ground of protestant liberalism. We will finally turn to early 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenology and existentialism tracing its critique of early modern and enlightenment theories of human nature in the work of Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

*After taking this course, the students will be able to:*

1. Exploring different religious and philosophical perspectives on the concept of human nature.
2. Examining whether human nature or personal identity is trans-historical or culturally and historically relative.
3. Acquiring a critical attitude towards cultural/religious dogma about human nature and the meaning of the self.

**Bibliography/ Texts / Supplies:** *All Readings available on Blackboard under 'Content-Readings'*

1. Selections from Al-Ghazali. *Deliverance from Error*.
2. Selections from Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy*.
3. Selections from Plato's *Republic and Timaeus*.
4. Selections from Aristotle's *De Anima* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.
5. Selections from Richard Sorabji's *Self*.
6. Selections from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*.
7. Selections from Julia Annas's *Platonic Ethics: Old and New*.
8. Selections from Jonathan Lear's *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*
9. Selections from Pierre Hadot's *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*
10. Selections from G.M. Grube's *Plato's Thought*
11. Selections from al-Ghazali's *Book of the Wonders of the Heart*
12. Selections from Ibn 'Arabi's *Meccan Revelations & The Bezels of Wisdom*
13. Selections from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason, and Critique of Judgment*
14. Selections from Heidegger's *Being and Time* and *Problems of Phenomenology*
15. Selections from Foucault's *The Order of Things*

**Requirements:**

**A. Two Essay Papers (50% of the grade—each worth 25% of the grade)**

1. Each paper should be 1500-2000 words in length.
2. Essays must be double spaced in 12-pitch font.
3. Papers will be graded based on content, ability to show critical skills, organization and rigor of the argument

**B. Final Paper (35% of the final grade)**

1. The paper should be 2000-2500 words in length.
2. The essay must be double spaced in 12-pitch font.
3. The paper will be graded based on content, ability to show critical skills, organization and rigor of the argument.

### **C. Class participation (15% of the grade)**

*Class attendance and participation:* Regular attendance and constructive class participation are both course requirements. Your participation grade will be based on your attendance as well as on the quality and quantity of your contributions to class discussion.

**Important Note: Missing more than 1 class except for valid and documented conditions may result in your loss of the whole participation grade.**

### **Grading:**

Letter/Number Grade Conversion Table for This Course:

	B+ 80-84	C+ 65-69	D+ 54-56
A 90-100	B 75-79	C 60-64	D 50-53
A- 85-89	B- 70-74	C- 57-59	

### **Course Specific Policies on attendance, late work, make up work, examinations if outside normal class time, etc.:**

Students must complete all of the course requirements by the end of the semester in order to receive a passing grade. Incompletes will be granted only in cases of actual emergency.

### **Additional Information**

#### **Academic Integrity**

Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university policy. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first offense by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy. The standard sanction for a first offense by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

Check if you will use Turnitin in this class. If so, include the following statement:

This class will be using Turnitin, a plagiarism prevention system. The ease of using the Internet has made it very easy for students to "cut and paste" material into papers that they are writing without proper citation. I will submit all/some/ papers that you write in this class to Turnitin, a service that identifies "matched text." I will then interpret the originality report, based on your writing capability and writing style. In this class, you will also be given the opportunity to submit your own papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you have used are properly acknowledged and cited. Note that all submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

### **Disability-Related Accommodations**

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services(ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Suite 303 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 or TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

### **Religious Observances Policy**

SU religious observances policy, found at [http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp\\_ben/religious\\_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm), recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to are religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/StudentServices/Enrollment/MyReligiousObservances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

### **Weekly Reading Schedule:**

#### **Monday 29<sup>th</sup> August through Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September**

General Themes Concerning the Self and the Question of Human Nature:

August 29<sup>th</sup>: General Introduction and welcoming

August 31<sup>st</sup>: Problems with Defining the Self: selections from *Sources of the Self* (Chapter I: “Inescapable Frameworks” 3-24; 21 pages)

#### **Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September through Monday 12<sup>th</sup> September**

September 5<sup>th</sup>: **Labor Day Holiday**

September 7<sup>th</sup>: Problems with Defining the Self: selections from *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death* (Chapter 1-3; 66 pages)

#### **Monday 12<sup>th</sup> September through Monday 19<sup>th</sup> September**

Palo’s Metaphysics of the Self: The Tripartite Soul, Consciousness, Individuals and Society:

September 12<sup>th</sup>: Selections from the *Republic* Books IV (435c-441c), Book V (472a-480a9), Book VI (484b-486; 509c-511e), Book VII (514-520); (total: 20 pages) **Plus** selections from *Sources of the Self* (Chapter 6; 12 pages)

Plato’s Self and his Theory of Ethics:

September 14<sup>th</sup>: Selections from the *Timaeus* (69c5-92c3; 20 pages) **Plus** selections from *Plato’s Thought* (Chapter IV 120-150; 30 pages); (total: 50 pages)

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup> September through Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September**

September 19<sup>th</sup>: Selections from Julia Annas's *Platonic Ethics Old and New* (Chapters III-V, 52-117; 65 pages)

Aristotle's Self: The Empirical Critique of Plato and the Inseparability of Soul and Body:

September 21<sup>st</sup>: Selections from Aristotle's *De Anima*: Book I, Book II (1 & 12) & Book III; (total: 30 pages)

**Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September through Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October**

Aristotle's Self: The Empirical Critique of Plato and the Inseparability of Soul and Body:

September 26<sup>th</sup>: Selections from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books I-III; 30 pages)

September 28<sup>th</sup>: Selections from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books VI-VIII; 30 pages) **Plus** selections from *Aristotle: the Desire to Understand* (Chapter 5, sections 1,2,3,5 & 6; 40 pages)

**Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October through Monday 10<sup>th</sup> October**

October 3<sup>rd</sup>: Selections from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book X; 15 pages) **Plus** Selections from *Self: Ancient ad Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death* (Chapters 6 & 7; 42 pages)

Islamic Medieval Philosophical Anthropology: the birth of subjectivity

October 5<sup>th</sup>: Selections from al-Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error* (20 pages)

**First Paper due on October 5<sup>th</sup>**

**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> October through Monday 17<sup>th</sup> October**

Islamic Medieval Philosophical Anthropology: the birth of subjectivity

October 10<sup>th</sup>: Selections from al-Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error* (20 pages)

October 12<sup>th</sup>: Selections from Ibn 'Arabi's *The Bezels of Wisdom* (Chapter 1, 47-55; 8 pages)

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> October through Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October**

Islamic Medieval Philosophical Anthropology: the birth of subjectivity

October 17<sup>th</sup>: Selections from Ibn 'Arabi's *The Bezels of Wisdom* (Chapter 1, 55-60; 5 pages)

The Modern Turn: the advent of the detached rational subject

October 19<sup>th</sup>: Selections from *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Meditation 1 and 2, 13-24; 11 pages)

**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October through Monday 31<sup>st</sup> October**

The Modern Turn: the advent of the detached rational subject

October 24<sup>th</sup>: Selections from *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Meditation 3 and 6; 15 pages)

Kant's Copernican Synthesis of Empiricism and Rationalism: liberal Protestantism and the paradox of subjectivity

October 26<sup>th</sup>: Selections from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Introduction; 28 pages)

**Monday 31<sup>st</sup> October through Monday 7<sup>th</sup> November**

Kant's Copernican Synthesis of Empiricism and Rationalism: liberal Protestantism and the paradox of subjectivity

October 31<sup>st</sup>: Selections from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Transcendental Analytic; 30 pages)

November 2<sup>nd</sup>: Selections from the *Critique of Practical Reason* (Deduction of the Principles of Practical Reason; 28 pages) **Plus** Selections from the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue; 2 pages)

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> November through Monday 14<sup>th</sup> November**

Kant's Copernican Synthesis of Empiricism and Rationalism: liberal Protestantism and the paradox of subjectivity

November 7<sup>th</sup>: Selections from the *Critique of Judgment* (First Introduction, 3-30; 27 pages)

November 9<sup>th</sup>: Selections from the *Critique of Judgment* (First Introduction, 30-51; 21 pages)

**Plus** Selections from the *Critique of Judgment* (section 59 "On beauty as a symbol of morality"; 4 pages)

**Second Midterm Paper Due on November 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Monday 14<sup>th</sup> November through Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November**

Heidegger's Existential Critique: De-structuring the modern subject

November 14<sup>th</sup>: Selections from the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Sections 13-15; 32 pages)

Heidegger's Existential Critique: De-structuring the modern subject

November 16<sup>th</sup>: Selections from *Being and Time* (30 pages)

**Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November through Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November**

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November through Monday 5<sup>th</sup> December**

Heidegger's Existential Critique: De-structuring the modern subject

November 28<sup>th</sup>: Selections from *Being and Time* (30 pages)

November 30<sup>th</sup>: Selections from Foucault's *The Order of Things* (40 pages)

**Monday 5<sup>th</sup> December through Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December**

December 5<sup>th</sup>: Selections from Foucault's *The Order of Things* (40 pages)

December 7<sup>th</sup>: Selections from Foucault's *The Order of Things* (40 pages)

**Final Paper due by email to [aelsayed@syr.edu](mailto:aelsayed@syr.edu); date and time TBA**

*Good Luck!*