

**Lingnan University**  
**Department of Philosophy**

<b>Course Title</b>	: Personal Identity
<b>Course Code</b>	: PHI3371
<b>Recommended Study Year</b>	: 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> Years
<b>No. of Credits/Term</b>	: 3
<b>Mode of Tuition</b>	: Lecture and Tutorial
<b>Class Contact Hours</b>	: 2 hours lecture per week; 1 hour tutorial per week
<b>Category in Major Programme</b>	: Programme Elective – Philosophy of Natural and Human Sciences Profile
<b>Prerequisite(s)</b>	: N/A
<b>Co-requisite(s)</b>	: N/A
<b>Exclusion(s)</b>	: N/A
<b>Exemption Requirement(s)</b>	: N/A

### **Brief Course Description**

This course investigates classic and contemporary theories of personal identity and their consequences for relevant moral debates. The first part of the course gives a foundational knowledge of classic and contemporary theories of personal identity and the self. In the second part, we will discuss various controversial topics, such as the morality of abortion, self-concern, the definition of death, and the legitimacy of genetic human enhancements (in particular those enhancements aimed at extending human life beyond its perceived ‘natural’ limits). An emphasis will be placed on the role played by different conceptions of personal identity in the proposed answers to these moral debates.

### **Aims**

The course aims to:

- Introduce the students to classic theories of personal identity and the self from different philosophical traditions;
- Present contemporary theories of personal identity and relate them to their predecessors;
- Enable students to draw a connection between classic and contemporary theories of personal identity with issues in applied ethics;
- Provide students with theoretical tools to develop their own views on the philosophical issues debated.

### **Learning Outcomes**

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- (LO1) Describe classic theories of what it is (if anything) that makes us persons and of the criteria that make us the same person over time.
- (LO2) Illustrate how classic theories of personal identity have been developed and their relevance for contemporary theories.
- (LO3) Relate controversial disputes in contemporary applied ethics to their theoretical presuppositions on the nature of the self.
- (LO4) Propose and discuss their personal views on the metaphysical nature of persons and on moral issues such as what matters in survival, abortion, and life-extension technologies.

### **Indicative Content**

Part I:

- Classic Theories of the Self and Personal Identity  
(Plato, Buddhist Non-self theories, Augustine, J. Locke)

- Contemporary Theories of the Self and Personal Identity  
(B. Williams, S. Shoemaker, E. Olson, M. Schechtman)

Part II:

- Future Concern and Survival  
(D. Parfit, R. Martin)
- The Beginning of a Person  
(D. DeGrazia, D. Marquis)
- The Definition of Death  
(J. McMahan)
- Human Enhancements and Life Extension  
(J. Harris, W. Glannon)

### Teaching Method

Lectures and tutorials.

### Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Students will take:

- A midterm exam, in which they will have to answer short questions on classic theories of personal identity and evaluate such theories (to assess LO1 and LO4);
- A final exam, in which they will have to answer short questions on how classic theories of personal identity have developed and their relevance for issues in applied ethics. Students will have to evaluate and express their views on the topics discussed in the course (to assess LO2, LO3, and LO4).

In the tutorial sessions, students will answer short questions posted on Moodle on the weekly lectures (to assess LO1-2-3-4).

### Assessment

20% Tutorials (questions posted on Moodle); 40% Midterm exam; 40% Final exam.

### Required Readings

Selections from Plato (*Phaedo*, *The Republic*), Augustine, (*The Confessions*), Descartes (*Meditations on First Philosophy*), Locke (*Essays Concerning Human Understanding*).  
Shoemaker, David (2011) 'Personal Identity and Ethics'. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.  
Selections from Gallagher, Shaun (ed.) (2011) *The Oxford Handbook of The Self*. OUP.  
Selections from Steinbock, Bonnie (ed.) (2007) *The Oxford Handbook of Bioethics*. OUP.

Other required readings will be posted on Moodle.

### Supplementary Readings

Bostrom, Nick and Julian Savulescu (eds.) (2007) *Human Enhancement*. Oxford: OUP.  
Conee, Earl (1999) 'Metaphysics and the Morality of Abortion', *Mind*, 108: 619–646.  
DeGrazia, David (2005) *Human Identity and Bioethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Glannon, Walter (2002) Identity, Prudential Concern, and Extended Lives, *Bioethics*, 16: 266–283.  
Harris, John (2007) *Enhancing Evolution*. Princeton University Press.  
Heathwood, Chris (2011) 'The Significance of Personal Identity to Abortion', *Bioethics*, 25: 230–232.  
Johnston, Mark (1987) 'Human Beings', *Journal of Philosophy*, 84: 59–83.  
Korsgaard, Christine M. (1989) 'Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 18: 101–132.

- Marquis, Don (1989) 'Why Abortion is Immoral', *Journal of Philosophy*, 86: 183–202.
- Martin, Raymond (1998) *Self-Concern: An Experiential Approach to What Matters in Survival*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McMahan, Jeff (1995) 'The Metaphysics of Brain Death', *Bioethics*, 9: 91–126.
- Olson, Eric (1997) *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology*. Oxford: OUP.
- Parfit, Derek (1984) *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: OUP.
- Perry, John (1978) *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Rorty, Amelie Oksenberg, ed., 1976, *The Identities of Persons*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schechtman, Marya (1996) *The Constitution of Selves*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Shoemaker, David (2007) 'Personal Identity and Practical Concerns', *Mind*, 116: 316–357.
- Shoemaker, Sydney (1970) 'Persons and Their Pasts', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 7: 269–285.
- Siderits, Mark (2003) *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Unger, Peter (1990) *Identity, Consciousness, and Value*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Bernard (1976) 'Persons, Character, and Morality', in Rorty 1976, pp. 197–216.
- Williams, Bernard (2007) 'Life as Narrative', *European Journal of Philosophy*: 1–10.

### **Important Notes**

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>