Philosophical Perspectives on the Self (Phil. 220W)
Fall 2003

Instructor: Marianne Janack
Meeting time: 1-1:50 pm, MWF
My phone numbers: x 4127 (office), 478-0803 (home: but please don’t call this number before 7:00 a.m. or after 10 p.m.)
Email: mjanack@hamilton.edu
My office: 210 College Hill Rd., upstairs
My office hours: Friday 2-4 pm and by appointment

Course description

What is a self? How does it relate to the body, the mind, the soul, and personhood? To put it in other terms: What kinds of entities have (or are) selves? What kinds lack them? Is it possible to be a person, but not a self? Is it possible to be a self but not a person? Is a self the kind of thing that is “one to a customer”? Or is it possible to have many selves? Could one have many at the same time, or can one have only one at a time, but perhaps have a number of different ones over time? According to what criteria do we say that one self is different from another?

We will start by reading Descartes, Locke, Reid, Hume, and Kant on the metaphysical issues that arise in discussions of the self. Following that, we will jump forward into the twentieth century, and consider the issues that have cropped up in this area as a result of the development of neuroscientific inquiry into the nature of mind(s) and brain(s). Yet the growing field of neuropsychology has given rise to different metaphysical issues, however, particularly questions about the nature of human freedom, and related issues in moral philosophy. We will conclude with Carl Elliott’s book, Better Than Well, which addresses the issues about identity and authenticity raised by a variety of “enhancement technologies,” including cosmetic psychopharmacology.

Required texts
Descartes, R. Meditations on First Philosophy (Hackett Publishing)
Sacks, O. The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat
Carl Elliott, Better Than Well

My Expectations and the Class Format

1. Class attendance

This class will be primarily a discussion-based class. Sometimes I will present material in a lecture format, but these days will be rare; you should come prepared to talk about the day’s readings. This means, of course, that you should read the essay or chapter assigned for that class before class time. But in addition, you should have done some thinking about issues raised in the readings. You should come with questions, observations, etc. With shorter articles, you should be able to identify the argument presented by the author (including the premises and conclusions). I will periodically ask you to do some ‘free-writing’ at the beginning of class time that will ask you to tell me what the argument was in the article and what was important about the points made by the author. Some of these will be graded, so be forewarned.

2. Class preparation and participation
Because this will be primarily a discussion class, it is imperative that you come prepared to discuss. This requires not only doing the reading, but also thinking about the reading and formulating questions, so avoid doing your reading at the last minute!

Students will also be required to present material to the class and lead class discussions. This will not take place until a little later in the term, and I will give you more guidance at that time. But you should begin thinking about which issues are most interesting to you, and about which you’d most like to lead a discussion.

3. Class attendance and participation—AGAIN!

Given all this, it should be obvious to you that regular class attendance is essential. Not only does irregular attendance ruin the dynamics of the course, but also you won’t learn much from a class discussion you miss. I realize that sometimes you will have to miss class, but this should be an exception rather than a rule. If you are going to miss class—if you wake up some morning and you’re sicker than the proverbial dog, for instance, call me or email me before class to tell me that you’re sick and that you won’t be in class.

4. Papers

Students will write a number of papers, some of them short in-class “thought” pieces, some short out-of-class essays, and some longer papers, including a final paper approximately 7-10 pages in length. I will give you more direction when they are assigned. Late papers will not be accepted. There will be no make-ups for in-class writing assignments, either, so be sure not to miss class if you can avoid it.

Grading

Your final grade will be based on the following:
20% class participation, including in-class presentations
20% final exam.
60% writing assignments (including in-class writing assignments)

Here is a rough guide to what grades mean as evaluations of your work:

A  An excellent understanding of assignments, original thought, and excellent progress with the issues raised in the course, including a) demonstrated excellence in analysis and critical discussion of readings and topics as well as b) an excellent grasp of and facility at explaining how particular texts and topic fit into the broader themes of the course.

B  A good understanding of assignments, some original thought, good progress with the issues raised in the course, including a) demonstrated skill in clarifying and explaining the issues raised in readings and b) solidly grounded explanations of the ways in which particular texts and topics fit into the broader themes of the course.

C  Enough understanding of assignments and issues raised in the class to satisfy requirements and receive full credit. This includes: a) all assignments turned in, b) sufficient working knowledge of the issues and readings to demonstrate proficiency with the topics and readings.

D  All assignments have been turned in, but the student has failed to make any progress with central issues raised in class beyond the most rudimentary and introductory level. The D
student, however, will exhibit enough knowledge of class readings and the issues raised in the class to distinguish her/his knowledge of the topic from that of other students who have not taken the class. The D student has merited college credit, but just barely.

**F** Not deserving college credit.

**FF** Really not deserving college credit—this grade will generally be given if a student has failed to turn in all assignments, or has handed in an assignment more than one week late without having arranged in advance for an extension. It will also be given in the case of a student’s failure to participate in assigned in-class or out-of-class work, and for more than 7 absences from class.

All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the class. Note that this a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for passing the class.

Schedule of readings

September
1 Introduction
3 “Borges and I,” Jorge Luis Borges and “What is it Like to Be a Bat,” Thomas Nagel in *Mind's I*
History and Metaphysics
5 Descartes, Meditation 1
8 Descartes, Meditation 2
10 Descartes, Meditation 6
12 John Locke, “The Prince and The Cobbler” from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (electronic reserve) (ER)
15 Thomas Reid, “Of Identity” and “Of Mr. Locke’s Account of Personal Identity” from *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (ER)
17 David Hume, “The Self” from *A Treatise of Human Nature* (ER)
19 Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 55-58, 61-73
22 Kant, p. 95-121
24 continued discussion of Kant
26 paper #1 Due by 5 pm: come to class prepared to present your thesis and your argument
II. Humans, Machines, and Brutes: are there any relevant differences?
September
29 “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”, A. M. Turing, and “The Turing Test: A Coffeehouse Conversation,” Douglas Hofstadter in *Mind's I*
October
1 “The Princess Ineffabelle,” Stanislaw Lem, “The Soul of Martha, a Beast” and “The Soul of the Mark III Beast,” Terrell Meldaner, in *Mind's I*
3 “Rediscovering the Mind,” Harold Morowitz, in *Mind's I*
5 “Selfish Genes and Selfish Memes,” Richard Dawkins in *Mind's I*
8 “Prelude…Ant Fugue,” Douglas Hofstadter in *Mind's I*
10 “The Story of a Brain,” Arnold Zuboff in *Mind's I*
15 “Where Am I?” by Daniel Dennett and “Where Was I?” by David Sanford in *Mind's I*
17 “Beyond Rejection,” Justin Lieber and “Software,” Rudy Rucker in *Mind's I*
III. Free will and Determinism
20 “Every Existence Presupposes an Essence,” Arthur Schopenhauer (ER)
22 “The Seventh Sally or How Trurl’s Own Perfection Led to No Good” and “Non-Serviam,” Stanislaw Lem in Mind’s I
24 Jean Paul Sartre, selections from Being and Nothingness (ER)
27 paper #2 due; come to class prepared to present your thesis and your argument
IV. Bodies, Minds, and Stories
31 “Fiction,” Robert Nozick in Mind’s I and Susan Brison, “Outliving Oneself” (ER)
November
3 Jennifer Church, “Ownership and the Body” (ER)
5 Oliver Sacks, The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, Introduction to Part I, chapters 1-9
7 Sacks, Introduction to part II, chapters 10-14
10 Sacks, Introduction to Part III, chapter 15
12 Ian Hacking, “Making Up People” (ER)
V. Authenticity and Enhancement
14 Richard Schmitt, selections from Alienation and Class and The Relational Self (ER)
17 Schmitt, continued
19 Schmitt, continued
24 class conference: come prepared with summaries of all the readings, including their thesis, point, or theme and how they relate to other readings (to be handed in)
December
1 Carl Elliott, Better Than Well, “The Perfect Voice”
3 Elliott, “The True Self”
5 choose one of the following: “The Face Behind the Mask,” “The Identity Bazaar,” “Three Ways to Feel Homesick,” “Resident Aliens”
8 paper #3 due
8-12 student presentations, schedule TBD