PHL 209: Self and Society

Course Name: Self and Society
Course Number: PHL 209
Faculty/Instructor: Barbara Muraca, Ph.D. (muracab@oregonstate.edu); Robert Figueroa
Class location & schedule: Corvallis, TR 10-11:50
Course Credits: 4

Course Catalog Description:
As introduction to social philosophy, the class addresses the interactions between the development of personal identity (self) and social structures, including social relations, institutions, norms and values. Includes issues in philosophical anthropology (what it means to be human), social theories of the self, and perspectives from feminist philosophy, post-colonial studies, and non-Western contributions in social philosophy.

Prerequisites: None

Learning Outcomes:
This class is part of the OSU Baccalaureate Core and it fulfills the requirement for study related to Social Processes and Institutions.

It does this by focusing on the interlink between the development of personal identity (self) and the social and institutional settings, in which the individual self is embedded. Human beings are fundamentally social: they are constituted by relations, norms, and institutions, but can also frame and transform them. This class analyzes the interaction between individual actions, practices, and social institutions.

The Learning outcomes for the Bacc Core Social Processes and Institutions are:
1. Use theoretical frameworks to interpret the role of the individual within social process and institutions.
2. Analyze current social issues and place them in historical context(s).
3. Critique the nature, value, and limitations of the basic methods of the social sciences.

In particular, after this class students will be able to:
1) Identify the interplay and reciprocal influences between the development of personal identity (self) and social interactions and institutions on the ground of different theoretical and historical perspectives.
2) Understand and critically analyze the relation between social transformation and transformation of the self.
3) Apply theories of the social/relational development of the self to the interpretation and articulation of one’s own experience, social position, and cultural identity.
4) Understand and critically reflect on how different disciplines frame and address the question about what it means to be human, by comparing approaches from philosophical anthropology, social psychology, religious studies, phenomenology, and sociology.
5) Identify a research question on the interconnections between self and society with respect to current social issues, articulate it in the form of a public display (poster, presentation or multimedia intervention), and discuss it critically.

Critical thinking
This class challenges students to engage in a critical reflection upon identity, social relations, norms, and institutions. This will be achieved by a) reading, analyzing, and discussing in class basic and diverse literature from different perspectives, b) identifying critical and analytical tools from the literature, and c) applying them to specific case studies as well as to students’ personal experience. Critical thinking is the method par excellence of philosophical inquiry. It is implemented for example a) through deep questioning (including analysis and articulation of implicit assumptions and bias, disclosure of
methodological frameworks, comparison with alternative approaches, inclusion of critical voices), b) contextualization (embedding theories and methods with respect to their historical, social, and cultural background, including the social position of the authors), and c) enhanced discussion in class (working groups presenting different perspectives on a topic, innovative facilitation methods to encourage an open and safe climate for discussion).

I will evaluate this by following criteria:
- Ability of students to identify and make explicit in their weekly responses hidden assumptions and the contextual settings of the readings assigned (via guidance to the reading, prompts for the essays)
- Active participation in the discussion and the working groups with deep questioning interventions (exercises in class)
- Ability of students to apply critical tools to self-reflection (journal and final project)

**Class Description**

As introduction to social philosophy and philosophical anthropology, the class addresses the interactions between the development of personal identity (self) and social structures, including social relations, institutions, norms and values. It introduces students to issues in philosophical anthropology (what it means to be human) and social theories of the self. This includes for example topics and perspectives like the relational self, stream of consciousness, theories of recognition, anthropology of the gift, transition studies, symbolic interactionism, and others. The class takes an interdisciplinary approach. It critically analyzes and compares theoretical perspectives from social psychology, sociology, women and gender studies, different philosophical traditions, as well as feminist theories, post-colonial and ethnic studies. The first section of the class is dedicated to different ways of understanding the self within the Western, modern tradition of thought. In the second session, students will encounter critical and alternative perspectives, in particular with respect with the idea of a relational self. The third section is dedicated to the study of interactions between personal identity and social institutions and of how the transformation of self and society are represented in different theories and in social debates.

**Class Requirements**

This is an interactive lecture class. This means that it includes working groups, discussion sessions, and other exercises in class, some of which will be graded.

**Consistent attendance, a close reading of all the texts, submitting assignments on time, and an active participation during class discussion are necessary requirements for a successful completion.**

All relevant information about the class, its structure, the readings (selection of pages and reading guide), and the assignments will be available on CANVAS. I will also use CANVAS for announcements and communication during term – it is important that all students know how to access and use CANVAS and that they enable the option of receiving notification in the CANVAS settings.

**Plagiarism** will not be tolerated. Students are expected to know and understand exactly what plagiarism is all about BEFORE they start working on the writing assignments. I am happy to provide help and support to students who are not sure about this requirement, as long as they contact me before the assignment is due.

OSU defines plagiarism as follows: "Representing the words or ideas of another person or presenting someone else's words, data, expressed ideas, or artistry as one's own. Examples include, but are not limited to, presenting someone else's opinions and theories as one's own, using another person's work or words (including unpublished material) without appropriate source documentation or citation, working jointly on a project and then submitting it as one's own, etc."
The OSU Statement of Expectations of Student Conduct, which all students are required to know, can be found here: http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/sites/studentlife.oregonstate.edu/files/code_of_student_conduct.pdf

The use of electronic devices (laptops, tablets, smart phone) is allowed only with respect to class-related activities. In case the use of these devices disrupts the class work or disturbs classmates it will no longer be tolerated.

Diversity Statement: The College of Liberal Arts is a community that includes and values the voices of all people. As such, we recognize the social barriers that have systematically marginalized and excluded people and communities based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic background, age, disability, national origin and religion.
We are committed to the equity of opportunities, and strive to promote and advance diverse communiti- ties. We value and proactively seek genuine participation from these historically under-represented and underserved groups, and recognize them as an essential component of creating a welcoming and rich academic, intellectual, and cultural environment for everyone.

Religious Holiday Statement: Oregon State University strives to respect all religious practices. If you have religious holidays that are in conflict with any of the requirements of this class, please see me immediately so that we can make alternative arrangements.

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities
Accommodations for students with disabilities are determined and approved by Disability Access Services (DAS). If you, as a student, believe you are eligible for accommodations but have not obtained approval please contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098 or at http://ds.oregonstate.edu. DAS notifies students and faculty members of approved academic accommodations and coordinates implementation of those accommodations. While not required, students and faculty members are encouraged to discuss details of the implementation of individual accommodations.

Schedule and Readings

Week 1

Sept 26

Introduction to class, reciprocal expectations, structure, & assignments

Sept 28

Who am I? What am I? Exercise in class
How do we typically define ourselves? How can we talk about identity, self, and relations? What is the role of narrative, narration, and stories for the meaning of our identity? What is the relation between public roles and personal identity?
Readings (selection):
2) Zimbardo, Philip: “The mind is a formidable jailer”. In: New Form Times, April 8, 1973

Week 2

Oct 3

Western Modernity and the Self
The Western Tradition of thought is characterized by a special attention to the question of the self and the meaning of personal identity. The modern individual oscillates between isolation and openness,
between a buffered and a porous self. We start our journey by looking back at the Western tradition and its roots in the Enlightenment and in Romanticism.

Readings (selection) and Media:
2) Taylor, Charles: A Secular Age. Harvard UP.
3) Pirandello, Luigi: One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand. Video Elaboration.

Oct 5
Self and Identity: The Self as a Flow
What if the continuity of identity was not obvious? Looking into the self as a process and a flow
Readings (selection):

Week 3

Oct 10
Self and Identity: Self as a Center of Gravity
What if the Self were an empty attraction point, a knot where relations interject?
Readings (selection):
1) Dennett, D. (1986): The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity (http://cogprints.org/266/1/selfctr.htm)

Oct 12
Self and Identity: The Self as a Story
How is it possible to have a sense of continuity of our identity? Are we the same self that we were yesterday? How do we know? What role does narrative play in the sense of self?
Readings (selection):

First essay due: Oct 15

Week 4

Oct 17
Self and Relations: a Feminist Perspective on the Self as a Web
Are we just made up of our relationships? What is a relational self? What are the dangers attached to this idea? Can we imagine the self as a web? We will read contributions from feminist philosophy and theology
Readings (selection):
1) Feminist Perspectives on the Self: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-self/
Oct 19
Self and Relations: Ethics and Morals
How do relations to others, play, and interactions affect our values, beliefs, and moral principles? Where do moral values come from and how do we encounter and embody them?
Readings (selection):

Week 5

Oct 24
Self and Relations: Social Psychology
What role do others play in the development of self-consciousness? We will compare phenomenology and social psychology
Readings (selection):

Oct 26
Self and Relations: Anthropology
How do persons originate? What is the role of the community? Self and Person as social relation - the anthropological perspective of the ‘gift’.
Readings (selection):

Week 6

Oct 31
Self and Relations: Beyond the West
Are there commonalities between the concept of a relational self in the Western tradition of thought and other traditions? How to engage with these traditions without risking an easy and superficial appropriation?
Readings (selection):
1) Yuan, Lijun: Confucian and Feminist Notions of Relational Self and Reciprocity: A Comparative Study

Nov 2
Self and Relations: Mestiza Identity
How to imagine and construct identity across borders and barriers?
Readings (selection):


**Second essay due: Nov 5**

**Week 7**

**Nov 7**

**Self and Society: Agency vs. Structure?**

*Are we determined by institutions? Or do we shape them? How can social actors transform social institutions?*

**Readings (selection):**


**Nov 9**

**Self and Society: Institutions and Subjectivities**

*How do social expectations and institutions form our identities? What is the dominant historical and social context in which we live today?*

**Readings (selection):**


**Week 8**

**Nov 14**

**Self and Society: Social Transformation**

*Where are spaces for transformation of oneself and of social structures? Can social movements be a place for experimenting and for embodying new subjectivities?*

**Readings (selection):**


**Nov 16**

**Self and Society: Oppression and Liberation**

*What happens when our identities do not correspond to what is considered “normal” or acceptable in society? How can we find a livable space where to flourish?*

**Readings (selection):**


**Week 9**
This week is dedicated to share students’ research on examples of relational self, social transformation, alternative modes of living. The Syllabus recommends some possible readings, but alternatives can be suggested by students based on their research for the final project.

Nov 21
Self and Society: Radical Imagination and Social Transformation
The new commons as social relations - alternative economies and collectives

Nov 22
Self and Society: Radical Imagination and Social Transformation
The new commons as social relations - alternative economies and collectives

Third essay due: Nov 25

Week 10

Nov 28
Final Project Bazaar
“Market Place Session”, during which the final projects of all the groups are presented and discussed in class (see assignments description). Feed-Back is collected for the final assignments.

Nov 30
Recapitulation, Class Evaluation, and feedback
Information about this session will be given on CANVAS

Final Projects due: Dec 4
Assignments and Grades:

Regular attendance of the class is mandatory. Active participation in research, discussion, and in-class working groups as well as the careful preparation of the assigned readings are a necessary requirement for successfully attending this class. Students are expected to come to class with the texts ready to hand (hard or electronic copy) and to be prepared to answer questions on the assigned material. Assignments include in-class exercises that require attendance. Detailed instructions about the form and structure of the assignments will be given during class and be available on CANVAS.

Assignments include:
1) **Reflection Journal** on the readings of each week. Collected twice per term (week 5 and week 9). Max points: 40 (4 each x 10 entries)
2) **Three short essays**, the two best of which count. Max Points: 20 (10 each)
3) **Exercises in class**: max 20 points (2 each)
4) **Final Project**: Group assignment to present and discuss during the Bazaar in Week 10. Max Points: 20

For the due date of assignments, please check CANVAS.

**Reflection Journal**: (This assignment assesses Learning Outcome SPI #1)
A guide to the reading(s) will be available before each class meeting on CANVAS. It includes suggestions for a self-reflection based on the reading. Students are required to write a Journal entry for each class meeting (up to 4 entries can be skipped), in which they articulate a personal reflection connected to the reading for that day. Length: max 300 words. Use of images other creative forms of expressions (such as multimedia materials) are encouraged.

**Exercises in class (this assignment assesses Learning Outcome SPI #1): Randomly**, especially in occasion of class discussions or group exercises in class, I will take attendance and distribute 2 points for class activities up to a maximum of 20 points (10 times). Students earn points for actively participating in these activities individually or in a group. Coming late to class, leaving earlier or not participating in the activities will not grant the points.

**Short Essays (max. 800 words)** (This assignment assesses Learning Outcome SPI #2)
Short essays may be based on Journal reflection and address the three sections of the class:
1) Self and Identity
2) Self and Relations
3) Self and Society

A more detailed explanation of the short essays is available on CANVAS. I will offer a choice of possible prompts for each essay – students are welcome to choose one as a guidance for the essay, if they are not sure about how to organize it. The essay should include:
1) A brief presentation of some of the main features of at least two perspectives/theories, either their key points or aspects that are relevant to their application to a specific case or personal experience.
2) When applied to a specific case, the outline of the case and the illustration of how the theories can be used to address it. If the essay is a more general comparison between the perspectives/theories, a detailed presentation of their respective positions, differences, and similarities.
3) A final comment from the point of view of the student on the topic, as a way of conclusion. If the essay refers to a specific case, a recapitulation of the arguments made, the articulation of possible open questions that remain open, and a personal comment, supported by arguments. If the essay compares theories in general, a final comment including critique or disagreement with some of the authors’ claims. In any case it is important to articulate the arguments in a clear and
understandable way and give reasons) and/or some reference to a possible concrete application
to the students’ own field of study or to daily experience.

Final Project: (This assignment assesses Learning Outcome SP#3)
This is a group assignment. From Week 7 on, students will be encouraged to identify a specific
question that they want to investigate and form groups by using CANVAS collaboration tools. During
Week 10 students will have the opportunity to present and discuss the draft of their project, collect
feedback from the instructors and other groups, and rework/revise/improve it before the final sub-
mission. Further information about his assignment will be available on CANVAS. The final project can
have a creative format (poster, multimedia contribution, performance, essay, newspaper article, short
story), but has to display a documentation/explanation that embeds it into the class discussion.

Extra credits include summaries of public talks on Campus related to the class topics on the ground of
a template/worksheet that will be posted on Canvas. I will give more information during class about the
requirements. 2 points each for a maximum of 6 points. To be submitted at the very latest by the
last day of class of week 10. No later submission will be considered.

All the assignments add up to a score of max. 100 points. I will translate the points roughly into
letter as the table shows (roughly means that it is NOT a mathematical calculation, as I consider addi-
tional factors for the final grade that are not displayed in the score – mostly to your advantage, such as
active, substantial, and engaged participation in class. Cheating attempts, irregular attendance, or
class disruption will of course work against you):

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