

Phil 470

## Comparative Conceptions of the Self

Prof. Edward Slingerland

**Instructor**

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**Winter Session, Term 1 2023**

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W 9-10  
TH 10-11

Also virtual, by appointment:

<https://ubc.zoom.us/j/4422938752?pwd=aGxFRVU5bkZvUS9kUWxSMmFsWktCdz09>

Meeting ID: 442 293 8752  
Passcode: 520254

**Class meetings:**

**TH, 3-6 p.m. HEBB 114**

Course Description

This course is intended to introduce students to the various ways in which the “self” has been portrayed (implicitly or explicitly) in both Eastern and Western religious traditions, as well as how these differing conceptions of the self have resulted in quite disparate manners of understanding ethics, the relation of the self to society, and the valuation of particular human abilities. The main theme will be the history of the construction of the modern western, liberal conception of the self, some of the problems endemic to this conception, and how western conceptions of the self compare with those from the Warring States period of early China.

The idea is to help the student see: 1) that he or she *has* a conception of him-/herself, whether he or she was previously aware of it or not; 2) where this conception of the self came from, and what some of its tensions are; 3) how any conception of the self is inextricably tied up with theories about

human nature and some sort of religious worldview; and 4) how pairing particular thinkers from the West and from early China can highlight both important similarities and deep differences. Thinkers to be treated include Kant, Nietzsche, Freud, Camus, Confucius and Zhuangzi

### Required Texts

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self*

Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (trans. Paton)

Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (trans. Strachey)

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil* (trans. Kaufmann)

The *Analects* of Confucius (trans. Slingerland), Hackett Publishing Company

The *Zhuangzi* (trans. Watson), Columbia University Press

Additional readings on Canvas

### Class Requirements

This is a seminar style class, so class attendance and participation are crucial. Attendance will be taken daily. One unexcused absence will be tolerated, but each absence after that will result in 8% being deducted from the “class participation” portion of one’s grade. The other components of the “class participation” portion of the grade will include participation in class discussions and level of preparation for class (students may be called upon randomly to comment on the readings). Discussions will be supplemented by occasional lectures to introduce new material, but even lecture periods are expected to be interactive.

Each student will be responsible for writing one ungraded and two short graded papers (4-6 pages). Papers are due at the beginning of class on the day noted in the syllabus; late papers will incur a 4 point penalty for each 24-hour period after the due date.

There will also be five (5) quizzes over the course of the semester, with the lowest grade being dropped, as well as a final exam. Grading will be as follows:

Class participation:	10%	
Short papers:	20%	(10% each, paper #1 not graded)
Quizzes (11% each)	44%	(lowest grade dropped)
Final exam	26%	

### Schedule of Classes/Readings

*Conceptions of the self, the good life and their relationship to ethics*

09/07 Course Introduction, lecture: “Inescapable Frameworks.”

Discussion: Bellah et al., pp. 3-35 (Canvas). **Paper #1 assigned: spiritual autobiography.**

09/14 Discussion: *Sources of the Self*, pp. 3-90. Lecture: Descartes & Locke. **Paper #1 due.**

*Creation of the Western Liberal Self*

09/28 Lecture: Kant. Discussion: Descartes, Locke, utilitarianism, and the “affirmation of ordinary life.” *Sources of the Self*: 143-158, 289-294, 321-327; selections from Descartes and Locke (Canvas). Discussion of Kant, *Sources of the Self* 363-367; *Groundwork* 55-73. **Quiz #1.**

10/05 Discussion: Kant *Groundwork* 74-131. Lecture: Freud

**10/12 No class because of M/TH switch**

*The Tragic Modern Self*

10/19 Discussion: Freud. *Civilization* 10-112; *SS*: xx-xx. Lecture: Romanticism **Paper #2 assigned. Quiz #2.**

10/26 Discussion: Nietzsche. *SS*: [romanticism?], 441-455; *Beyond Good & Evil* 1-76.

11/02 Discussion: Nietzsche. *Beyond Good & Evil* 97-141; excerpts from Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus* (Canvas), *SS*: xx-xx [Camus] **Paper #2 due. Quiz #3.**

*Early Chinese Conceptions of the Self*

11/09 Lecture: background to Warring States thought. Confucius I

**11/16 Midterm Break**

11/23 Confucius II; lecture on Mencius and Xunzi **Quiz #4. Paper #3 assigned.**

11/30 Zhuangzi I. **Final paper assigned.**

12/07 Zhuangzi II **Quiz #5. Paper #3 due.**