

The First-Person Perspective

Department of Philosophy
Johns Hopkins University
Course #: AS.150.671
Fall 2024

Course Description

In this seminar, we will study the first-person perspective and its implications for both theoretical reasoning (including self-understanding) and practical reasoning (including self-development). Drawing on texts from historical and contemporary sources, we will explore questions such as:

- What does it mean to be a thinker with a first-person perspective? (Can there be a thinker without one?)
- Does the first-person perspective necessarily include a position for the subject?
- What role does the body play in the first-person perspective?
- Are perspectivity and objectivity mutually exclusive?
- Do empathy and morality require us to exit the first-person perspective?
- What is the relation (if any) between the first-person perspective and “the self” as it figures in moral psychology?

Readings may include, but are not limited to, texts by Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, as well as Anscombe, Perry, Lewis, and Bar-On.

Time: Th 1:15 PM – 3:45 PM
Place: Gilman 288

Instructors:	J. David Velleman	Katharina Kraus
Contact Details:	jdvelleman@jhu.edu	kkraus2@jhu.edu
	San Martin Center 261	San Martin Center 236
Office Hours:	Mon 1:00 – 2:00 PM	Tue 2:30 PM – 3:30 PM (and by appointment)

CANVAS:

Course-related material, such as the readings, handouts, and assignments will be made available on CANVAS. You can find most of the material under “Files”.

Policies and expectations

All students, including auditors, are expected to be committed to the seminar as a space for shared intellectual inquiry. In particular, you are required to attend all seminar sessions, prepare all the required readings and the study questions, actively participate in classroom discussions, and complete the required assignments on time. This course follows Hopkins’ [Academic Ethics Policy \(undergrad\)](#) and the [Academic Integrity Policies \(grad\)](#). In completing their assignments, students should not use generative AI programs such as ChatGPT.

Assignments:

Students who have signed up for credit must fulfil the following requirements:

Abstract:

Students are asked to find a topic of their choice and write an extended abstract of about 500 words by **November 22** on a potential paper they would write. The abstract should contain a short but precise description of the philosophical issue to be addressed, an outline of the intended argument, and a synopsis of the paper.

Final Paper:

In a next step, the abstract should be extended into a final paper (of about 5,000 words) that offers a philosophical discussion of this question, including an in-depth textual analysis and a systematic argument and taking into account some of the texts we have read in the course.

The paper is due by **Thursday, December 12**, and should be submitted via *Canvas* as a Word document (.doc or .docx; Times New Roman, 12 pt., spacing 1.5). Please discuss the topic with the instructor in advance. There will be an opportunity to receive feedback on drafts of the final paper.

Important:

If you intend to take this course as a **history requirement** (for the graduate program in philosophy), your final paper must deal with a historical figure and a historical text in your final paper, e.g., Descartes, Kant, Husserl, E. Stein, Wittgenstein.

Schedule

Time	Topic and Texts	Faculty Lead
Week 1 (Aug. 29)	<p>General Introduction to the Course and the Topic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ René Descartes' <i>Second Meditation</i> ○ Excerpt from David Hume's <i>Treatise</i>, Appendix 	D/K
Week 2 (Sept. 5)	<p>'I' as Non-Referring Expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Elizabeth Anscombe, 'The First Person' 	D
Week 3 (Sept. 12)	<p>Using the First-Person Pronoun 'I' in Language and Thought</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ John Perry, 'Self Knowledge and Self-Notions' ○ - -----, 'The Sense of Identity' ○ Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>Blue Book</i> Ts-309,110-115 ○ -----, <i>Tractatus LogicoPhilosophicus</i> 5.62-5.64 	D
Week 4 (Sept. 19)	<p>Kant's Theory of Self-Consciousness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason [CpR]</i>, Transcendental Deduction B, §16: B131-136 ○ Wolfgang Freitag & Katharina Kraus, 'An Expressivist Interpretation of Kant's <i>I think</i>' ○ If you are not familiar with Kant's <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>, then please also read the Introduction B (esp. sections I, II, IV, VI, and VII) 	K
Week 5 (Sept. 26)	<p>Pre-Reflective Self-Consciousness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Matthew Boyle, 'Self-Consciousness, Transparency, and Reflection' ○ Manfred Frank, 'In Defence of Pre-Reflective Self-Consciousness – The Heidelberg View' ○ Optional: Matthew Boyle, <i>Transparency and Reflection</i>, Ch. 3 and Ch. 4 	K
Week 6 (Oct.3)	<p>Kant's Argument for Objectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kant, <i>CpR</i>, Transcendental Deduction B, §§17-20: B136-143 ○ Kant, <i>CpR</i>, Transcendental Deduction A, A103-110 <p>For further background on the Deduction of the Categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kant, <i>CpR</i>, Transcendental Deduction A/B, §§10-13: A76/B102-A94/B129 	K
Week 7 (Oct. 10)	<p>Empathy with Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Edith Stein, <i>On the Problem of Empathy</i>, Ch. II.2, Ch. III.4 (a-b), Ch. III.5 (a-h) 	K

- Optional: Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations, Fifth Meditation*, §§ 42-48

Fall Break – No meeting on Oct. 17

Week 8 (Oct. 24)	The Body as Center of Orientation	D
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gareth Evans, <i>Varieties of Reference</i>, excerpts from Chs. 6 and 7 	
Week 9 (Oct. 31)	Neo-Expressivism [Dorit Bar-On will be visiting]	
	Texts by Dorit Bar-On (TBA)	
Week 10 (Nov. 7)	The First-Person Perspective and Action	D
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lucy O'Brien, 'Action and Immunity to Error through Misidentification' ○ Tyler Burge, 'Reason and the First Person' 	
Week 11 (Nov. 14)	The First-Person Perspective and Time	K
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ J. David Velleman, 'How Time Does and Doesn't Pass' ○ Edmund Husserl, excerpt from <i>Phenomenology of Inner Time-Consciousness</i> (and other Lectures) 	
Week 12 (Nov. 21)	The First Person Plural	D
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ J. David Velleman, 'How to Share an Intention' ○ Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>, excerpt from Part II 	
Week 13 (Dec. 5)	Wrapping Up	D/K