

## **The Philosophy Department Speaker Series presents:**

**Dr. Gillian Einstein**

### **“The Multiple Selves of Alzheimer's Disease”**

Friday October 17, 2008  
MacKinnon, Room 305  
3:30-5:30 pm

#### **Abstract:**

Because people with Alzheimer's disease lose the ability to integrate new and old experiences into a single, explicit, continuous story of their lives, it has been thought that they no longer have a self. If we are to develop therapies and humane treatments of Alzheimer's patients, we need to re-examine this unitary model of selfhood. Drawing on William James' idea of the stream of consciousness comprising "many mes" as well as a "knowing I",

I propose that we use a multivalent notion of self that encompasses a non-unitary view of memory. Using neurobiological understandings of memory systems, and lessons based on studies of Henry M, I argue (i) that neurobiology supports such a non-unitary view of memory, and (ii) that some of these aspects of memory continue to be preserved in Alzheimer's disease. Moreover, patterns of neuronal preservation (as well as neuronal loss) suggest that these continuing aspects of memory may be self-constituting. In sum, whereas a unitary notion of self (based only on the "knowing I") impoverishes our understanding of memory's contribution to self and does an injustice to people with AD, a broader understanding matches the current science and allows us to accord them their authentic humanity.

Gillian Einstein is a neuroscientist and Associate Professor in the Departments of Psychology and Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto. She is the former Associate Director for the Centre for Research in Women's Health, Women's College Hospital, and was a Scientific Review Administrator for the Institute of Molecular, Developmental and Cellular Neurosciences at the (U.S.) National Institutes of Health. Dr. Einstein was also a Professor of Neurobiology at Duke University.

Her current research efforts explore the bridge between our scientific understanding of the brain and larger concerns having to do with self, identity, feminism, and the nature of science. They focus on the effects of culture on the central nervous system and ways in which to re-theorize women's health to align it with a biology of diversity that includes sex, race and culture. She is studying the neurobiological effects of female genital mutilation/cutting as well as the effects of steroid hormones on mood and memory. Her expertise is in women's health, neurodegenerative disease, cognitive neuroscience and sex-based biology.

For more information on Dr. Einstein's research: <http://psych.utoronto.ca/users/einstein>