

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: The Theory and Practice of Autonomy
Course Code	: PHI4399R
Recommended Study Year	: 2-4 Years
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours sectional per week
Category in Major Programme	: Programme Elective – Special Topics
Prerequisite(s)	: N/A
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

Human beings do not simply act. They also exert control over their acts. They deliberate; they exercise will power; they attempt to avoid temptations; they attempt to inculcate good habits in themselves and to lose bad ones. These capacities for self-control seem to mark out an essential distinction between the agency of adult human beings and that of animals or young children. These capacities are often cited to explain why we can be held responsible for our choices, why we have moral and political rights, and why we are owed moral duties by others.

This course will have two parts. First, it will look at historical and contemporary investigations into the psychological capacities and circumstances necessary for self-control, or autonomy. Then it will consider the normative implications. What are the implications of different theories of autonomy for issues like responsibility, political freedom, and consent?

Aims

1. To provide an understanding of the nature and methodology of theories of autonomy;
2. To teach students to think critically about how to assess issues in the intersection of philosophy of mind, psychology, and normative theory;
3. To improve students' skills in writing argumentative essays systematically addressing abstract theoretical issues;
4. To allow students to recognize the presuppositions about the nature of the self and mind implicit in many contemporary discussions about responsibility, consent, and rights.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. describe the nature, methods, and theories of autonomy
2. explain and evaluate various theories of autonomy
3. think critically about philosophical issues at the intersection of philosophy of mind and normative theory
4. construct arguments connecting theoretical issues in philosophy to practical ones.

Indicative Content

1. Historical Background: Plato and Kant
2. Historical Criticisms: Nietzsche and Berlin
3. Beginning the Contemporary Debate: Frankfurt
4. Return to Reason: Watson; and Smith and Pettit
5. Rejecting Reason: Frankfurt

6. Lockeanism about the Self: Locke, Parfit, and Bratman
7. Self-constitution: Korsgaard and Velleman
8. Identification: Frankfurt and Velleman
9. Moral Responsibility
10. Positive and Negative Theories of Liberty
11. Consent and Justification

Teaching Method

Sectional

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

1. Students will give oral presentations on assigned readings. They are expected to summarize, paraphrase and respond critically to the arguments in these texts (to measure outcomes 1 – 3).
2. Students will write several philosophical essays, the topics of which correspond to the contents of the lectures and readings. They are expected to present their interpretations and criticisms effectively (to measure outcomes 1 – 4).
3. The short quizzes and in-class participation will measure students' understanding of basic concepts from the reading (to measure outcomes 1 and 2).

Assessment

Assessment will be based on the presentation and performance in tutorials, two essays, a term paper and in-class quizzes.

10% Class attendance and participation

Primarily to assess Outcomes 1 and 2, but also 3.

10% Presentation

To assess Outcomes 1- 3.

15% Quizzes

To assess Outcomes 1 and 2.

10% Short Essay

To assess Outcomes 1-3.

15% Mid-length Essay

To assess Outcomes 1-4.

40% Term Paper

To assess Outcomes 1-4.

Required Readings

Selected Chapters, Essays, and Passages from:

Frankfurt, Harry G., *The Importance of What We Care about*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Korsgaard, Christine, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Genealogy of Morals*, 1887; translated by Walter Kaufmann, Random House, 1967.

Parfit, Derek, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press, 1984.

Plato (c. 380 BCE) *The Republic*; translated by G.M.A. Grube and revised by C.D.C. Reeve, Hackett Publishing, 1996.

Taylor, James Stacey (ed.), *Personal Autonomy*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Velleman, J. David, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Velleman, J. David, *Self to Self*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Watson, Gary (ed.), *Free Will: Oxford Readings in Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

The following articles:

Bratman, Michael, "Three Theories of Self-Governance," *Philosophical Topics*, 2010.

Watson, Gary, "Skepticism about Weakness of Will," *Journal of Philosophy*, 1976.

Supplementary Readings

Buss, Sarah, and Lee Overton (eds.), *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt*, MIT Press, 2002.

Christman, John (ed.), *The Inner Citadel*, Oxford University Press, 1989.

Rorty, Amelie (ed.), *The Identities of Person*, University of California Press, 1976.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is "the presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student's own work". Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>