

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Freedom, Commitment, and the Self
Course Code	: PHI4399C
Recommended Study Year	: 3 rd or 4th Year
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)	: PHI3103 Advanced Western Ethics, or PHI3104 Western Political Philosophy, or PHI3265 Philosophy of Mind
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 the significance of personal commitments in determining the value of our lives.

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 and political freedom?

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, personal commitment, and liberty.

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, Hume, Kant and Berlin
2. Beginning the Contemporary Debate: Frankfurt and Watson
3. The Debate over Reason: Pettit and Smith, and Frankfurt again

4. Personal Commitment: Williams, Frankfurt, Watson
5. Lockeanism about the Self: Locke, Parfit, and Dennett
6. Planning and Lockeanism: Velleman and Bratman
7. Identification: Velleman
8. Moral Responsibility: Wolf, Watson, Arpaly and Schroeder
9. Positive and Negative Theories of Liberty: Taylor and Christman
10. Women's Autonomy (a test case): Meyers and Noggle

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 (LO1, LO2, and LO3).
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 (LO1, LO2, LO3, and LO4).
3. The short quizzes and in-class participation will measure students' understanding of basic concepts from the reading (LO1, LO2, and LO3).

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.

25% Midterm Paper

To assess Outcomes 1 – 4.

40% Term Paper

To assess Outcomes 1-4.

Required Readings

Arpaly, Nomy, and Timothy Schroeder. "Praise, Blame, and the Whole Self."

Berlin, Isaiah. "Two Concepts of Liberty."

Berlin, Isaiah. "Introduction" from *Liberty*.

Bratman, Michael. "Three Theories of Self-Governance."

Christman, John. "Liberalism and Individual Positive Freedom."

Dennett, Daniel. "The Self as the Narrative Center of Gravity."

Frankfurt, Harry. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of the Person."

Frankfurt, Harry. "Identification and Wholeheartedness."

Frankfurt, Harry. "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love."

Hume, David. "Of Liberty and Necessity."

Korsgaard, Christine. "Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant."

Locke, John. Excerpts from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

Meyers, Diana T. "Personal Autonomy and the Paradox of Feminine Socialization."

Noggle, R. "Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation."

Parfit, Derek. "Personal Identity."

Pettit, Philip, and Michael Smith. "Freedom in Belief and Desire."

Plato. Excerpts from *The Republic*.
Taylor, Charles. "What's Wrong with Positive Liberty?"
Velleman, J. David. "Self as Narrator."
Velleman, J. David. "Identification and Identity."
Velleman, J. David. "A Theory of Value."
Watson, Gary. "Free Agency."
Watson, Gary. "Volitional Necessities."
Watson, Gary. "Two Faces of Responsibility."
Williams, Bernard. "Persons, Character, and Morality."
Wolf, Susan. "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility."

Supplementary Readings

Bratman, Michael. Introduction from *Faces of Intention*.
Bratman, Michael. "Intention, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency."
Frankfurt, Harry. "On Caring."
Hart, H.L.A. "Acts of Will and Responsibility."
Kant, Immanuel. Excerpts from *The Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*.
Velleman, J. David. Introduction from *The Possibility of Practical Reason*.

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/>