PHIL5150/7150: Topics in Western Philosophy

(*Subtitle: Autonomy, Mental Causation, and Physicalism*)

Second Term, 2026-2027

Time: Wednesday, 2:30pm–5:15pm

Location: Room 203, Lee Shau Kee Building

Course overview

This seminar focuses primarily on my recently completed monograph, *The Autonomy of Mind*. The book develops a systematic and ambitious approach—which I call the "autonomy approach"—to addressing the mind-body problem. It engages substantially with various topics (such as mental causation, higher-level causation, supervenience, phenomenality, synthetic identity, multiple realizability, and the epistemic gap) across several areas of philosophy (including philosophy of mind, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of language).

Assessment scheme

Task nature	*Weight*
Discussion	20%
Presentation	30%
Term Paper (4,500 – 5,500 words in English; due on May 4)	50%

Required readings

- Lei Zhong, *The Autonomy of Mind*, Manuscript.
- Other selected readings

Course schedule

Week	*Content*	*Readings*
1	Introduction	
2	Discussion	Ch. 1: "The Autonomous Mind"
3	Discussion	Kim, "The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism"
4	Discussion	Ch. 2: "A Theory of Supervenient Causation"

5	Discussion	Bennett, "Why the Exclusion Problem Seems Intractable and How, Just Maybe, to Tract It"
6	Discussion	Ch. 3: "Modest Autonomy: Merits and Limits"
7	Discussion	Ch. 4: "Robust Autonomy in a Physical World"
8	Discussion	Robinson, "Causation, Sensations and Knowledge"
9	No Class	
10	Discussion	Ch. 5: "The Predicament of Epiphenomenalism"
11	Discussion	Loar, "Phenomenal States"
12	Discussion	Ch. 6 "Troubles with Reductive Physicalism"
13	Discussion	Chalmers, "Consciousness and Its Place in Nature"
14	Discussion	Ch. 7: "Physicalism without Supervenience"
15	Discussion	Ch. 8: "Physicalism and Causal Arguments"

Details of course website

Reading materials, assignments, and lecture notes will be put in a Onedrive folder. The link to this folder is posted on Blackboard.

Contact details for teacher

Name:	Zhong, Lei
Office location:	Room 425, Fung King Hey Building
Telephone:	3943 7156
Email:	leizhong@cuhk.edu.hk

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in learning, teaching and assessment

<u>Approach 1 – Prohibit all use of AI tools</u> Students are not allowed to use any AI tools in any kind of learning activity or assessment that will be counted towards students' final grade of the course, or used for evaluating students' attainment of the desired learning outcomes. Students are expected to produce their own work independently without any collaboration or use of AI tools.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.