

## **SELF-CONTROL: METAPHYSICAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES**

This graduate seminar will consider a range of philosophical issues related to self-control. What kinds of control should we aim to have over our actions and mental states? How should we understand the failure of control we exhibit when we act against our own better judgment? Can we also *believe* something against our own better judgment, and if so, how should we react when we do? Can we, and should we, exercise voluntary control over our beliefs? What is it to think of an activity as “compulsive,” and what, if anything, is wrong with acting compulsively? Is finding something “unthinkable,” or morally impossible, a failure of self-control, or an admirable instance of it? What sort of attitude should we take toward our own failures of self-control, and what are the ethical implications of our views on these various issues? We will consider these questions through close readings of contemporary writings on these topics.

**Instructor:** Eugene Chislenko, [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu)

Office hours: Anderson Hall 750, Tuesdays 1-3pm or by appointment

**Course requirements:** (1) Eight 1-page response papers (25%)  
 (2) Two 3-page papers (25%)  
 (3) 2-page proposal for final paper (required but not graded)  
 (4) 10-15 page final paper (50%)

### **SCHEDULE OF SEMINAR MEETINGS AND READINGS**

1. Tu 1/17: **Introduction: Problems about Self-Control**

Reading: Gregory Kavka, “The Toxin Puzzle”

#### **I. Controlling our Beliefs**

2. Tu 1/24: **Believing at Will, I**

Reading: Bernard Williams, “Deciding to Believe”; Rico Vitz, “Doxastic Voluntarism”

3. Tu 1/31: **Kinds of Self-Control**

Reading: Pamela Hieronymi, “Controlling Attitudes”

4. Tu 2/7: **Believing at Will, II**

Reading: Carl Ginet, “Deciding to Believe”; Quassim Cassam, “Judging, Believing and Thinking,” pp. 80-86 only

5. Tu 2/14: **Believing Against One’s Own Better Judgment**

Reading: Alfred Mele, *Irrationality*, Ch.8: “Akratic Belief”; Eugene Chislenko, “How Can Belief be Akratic?”

## II. Controlling our Actions

6. Tu 2/21: **Weakness of Will, I**

Reading: Donald Davidson, "How is Weakness of the Will Possible?"; Eugene Chislenko, "Akratic Action under the Guise of the Good"

7. Tu 2/28: **Weakness of Will, II**

Reading: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.1-3; Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, Ch. 2: "On Acting Rationally Against One's Best Judgment"

8. Tu 3/7: **Willpower**

Reading: Roy Baumeister et. al., "Ego Depletion: Is the Active Self a Limited Resource?"; Eugene Chislenko, "The Ethics of Willpower"

[No class Tu 3/14. Happy spring break!]

## III. Lack of Control

9. Tu 3/21: **Compulsion, I**

Reading: Hanna Pickard, "Psychopathology and the Ability to Do Otherwise"

10. Tu 3/28: **Compulsion, II**

Reading: Gary Watson, "Disordered Appetites: Addiction, Compulsion, and Dependence"

11. Tu 4/4: **Moral Incapacity, I**

Reading: Bernard Williams, "Moral Incapacity"; Harry Frankfurt, "Rationality and the Unthinkable"

12. Tu 4/11: **Moral Incapacity, II**

Reading: Gary Watson, "Volitional Necessities"

**Paper proposals due Friday, April 14.**

## IV. Conclusion

13. Tu 4/18: **Discussion of Paper Proposals, I**

Reading: Paper proposals.

14. Tu 4/25: **Discussion of Paper Proposals, II**

Reading: Reread paper proposals.

**Final paper due Friday, May 5.**

## COURSE POLICIES

**Office Hours:** I encourage you to come to office hours often; talking one-on-one or in small groups is one of the best ways to get a handle on the material and methods of the course. You'll probably get more out of it if you come with specific questions, but coming to talk about the issues in a more general way is fine too. It's also fine to come as a small group. If you want to meet but have a schedule conflict, let me know and we can find a different time.

**Short papers:** In weeks 2-12, you will write eight 1-page response papers, defending a thought about the readings for the *upcoming* seminar meeting; and two more substantial 3-page papers, defending a thought about the readings for the *preceding* three meetings. These are due by Monday at noon, as a Word or PDF file (I slightly prefer Word, but either is fine) emailed to [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu). Within weeks 2-12, you have complete freedom with regard to which two weeks you write a 3-page paper and which week(s) you write no paper at all, depending on your interests and your schedule. You may not write two 1-page papers in the same week, but you can choose to submit both a 1-page paper and a 3-page paper in the same week, if you want. You can expect some of the short papers to be integrated into class discussion, and I might read selections from them out loud in class, or ask you to read part of your paper to the seminar.

**Plagiarism:** *All* written work for this course must be your own. Be sure to cite any works you use, including web sites, books, and articles. Presenting *anyone* else's work as your own is considered plagiarism. Please read Temple University's Policy on Academic Honesty: [http://www.temple.edu/bulletin/Responsibilities\\_rights/responsibilities/responsibilities.shtm](http://www.temple.edu/bulletin/Responsibilities_rights/responsibilities/responsibilities.shtm)

**Disabilities:** Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability, including accommodations for access to technology resources and electronic instructional materials required for the course, should contact me privately to discuss your situation by the end of the second week of classes, or as soon as you can. If you haven't already, please contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) in 100 Ritter Annex or 215-204-1280 to learn more about the resources available to you. I will work with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities.

**Statement on Academic Freedom:** Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. Temple University has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy # 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: [http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy\\_no=03.70.02](http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02)

## FINAL PAPER AND PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT

Write a term paper on a topic of your own choosing, from within the topics covered in this seminar. Defend your view through discussion of relevant parts of the readings for the course, as well as your own thoughts and examples. Explain all key terms so that someone who has not taken the course can understand your paper. Consider explicitly the best reasons why someone might disagree with you, and how you might convince that person. Your paper should show an understanding of course readings and class discussion, and of which parts of the readings are relevant for your topic. But the assignment is to work out and defend your own view. Summary of what we have covered so far should take up less than half your paper. When choosing a topic, think about what you're most interested in, and also what you have something to say about that goes beyond what we have covered in class.

**Length:** You can write: (1) a paper of at most 15 pages, using only the readings for the course; OR (2) a paper of at most 3000 words, not including notes and bibliography (about 10-12 pages), in which you do additional research on your topic. Both are double spaced, with 12-point font and at least 1-inch margins. The first is a more typical seminar paper, while the second is a more typical conference paper, which you can revise and submit directly to conferences. Feel free to consult with me throughout the semester about your topic and choice of paper length.

**Logistics:** Your paper is due **Friday, May 5, by noon**. Please email your paper as a Word file or PDF (I slightly prefer Word, but either is fine) to [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu), with your name and a title at the top of the first page. *Late papers* will be marked down one third of a grade (from A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for each day or fraction of a day they are late, including Saturday and Sunday. *Grades are non-negotiable*, and will not be changed for any reason. I'm open to *extensions* in extenuating circumstances, but only if you ask at least at least two weeks before the deadline.

**Proposals:** This assignment includes a *required proposal* of at most two pages, due Friday, April 14, by noon as a Word file or PDF to [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu). Your proposal must include: (1) a direct statement of the view you will defend in the paper; (2) a brief explanation of what the view is saying, including what you mean by any key terms; (3) a brief list of the texts you will focus on, including specific titles and page numbers; and (4) a summary of the planned line of thought of the paper, including your central reasons for holding your view to begin with, the main objections or problems you anticipate, and how you plan to address them. Of these, (4) should take up more than half of your proposal. These proposals will not be graded, but they are required, and will be discussed in our last two seminar meetings. Your final *paper* will be marked down one third of a grade for each day the proposal is late, and will not be accepted without a proposal. Incomplete proposals will not be accepted; I strongly recommend submitting your proposal before the due date, so that you can revise it in time if it is incomplete. You can submit a proposal as early as you like, and you can submit a draft proposal for written feedback. And again, feel free to consult with me at any time about your paper as the semester goes on.