

PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION

PHIL XXXXX · Semester Year · Class Time · Class Meeting Place

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Course Description: What is an action? What distinguishes an action from something that merely happens to you? The primary aim of this course will be to review all of the major theories in contemporary philosophy of action. We will begin with an exploration of (1) the nature of action, (2) reasons for action, (3) deliberation about action, and (4) intentional action. After investigating these four areas of action theory, we will consider recent developments in action theory brought on by the incorporation of social scientific methods in philosophical research. In particular, we will read literature on the “Knobe Effect.” Passing acquaintance with philosophy is not presupposed for this course; curiosity is.

Check the course webpage frequently for updated information about this course: [enter course website here]

Required Text: Mele, Alfred (1997). *The Philosophy of Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Course Packet

More suggested texts citations are available on the course website.

Requirements: Actually doing philosophy involves class discussion, in which students dialogue back and forth with the instructor and with each other. This is a seminar style class that places a premium on class discussion. Since this is the case, attendance is vital for success in the course.

Participation (15%). You should come to class prepared to talk about the article(s) you read for that day. By raising a question, a comment, or criticism of the reading, you earn participation points. The participation grade will be based on the extent to which you participate in discussion and the quality of your comments.

Presentation (15%). You will be expected to present one/two articles to the class. A presentation consists in outlining at least the main argument of the reading. You may also include some of the auxiliary arguments if they are important components of the main argument of the paper. An exceptional presentation will include a few criticisms of the main argument. You need to demonstrate that you have command of the argument. If you are too confused by the argument, then summarize what you think the main argument of the reading is and present a few questions.

Mini-papers (30%). You will be responsible for completing two mini-papers of no more than 5 pages (strict limit). The first paper is due DUE DATE, and the second paper is due DUE DATE. For each of them, I will prepare a few questions for you to use as a guide for writing the paper. If you want to create your own topic to write about, then please make an appointment with me to discuss it.

Final Paper (40%). The student will be expected to complete one 10-12 page paper on a topic of the student's choice. More information, i.e., suggested topics, will be distributed sometime toward the middle of the semester. The student must submit a brief prospectus of the paper by DUE DATE, a bibliography by DUE DATE, and a detailed outline by DUE DATE.

Failure to complete any of these requirements will severely effect your grade.

Policies:

Cheating. Cheating on any course requirement shall not be tolerated. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, copying from one's own clandestine notes, from someone else's paper, or quoting or paraphrasing an author without crediting the source (plagiarism). If the student is caught cheating, then s/he will receive a 0 on the work and will be subject to disciplinary action.

Students with Disabilities Act. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, cognitive, systemic, learning, and psychiatric impairments. Please contact the instructor at the beginning of the course to discuss any such accommodations that you may require for this course. For more information, the student should contact the Center for Disability Services.

Notice. The student is advised. All material contained herein, including course design, content, lectures, correspondence, Internet content, and written material, is the intellectual property of the instructor. In addition, the instructor reserves the right to change, revise, or alter any portion of this syllabus at any time, at his sole discretion, for any reason, without further notification to the student. This syllabus is in accordance with the [university or college handbook].

Grading:

There are no averages in this class, so put your calculators away. Grades will be determined according to a linear point scale. The more points you accumulate the higher your grade. In-class participation is worth a total of 100 points, each presentation is worth 50 points (100 total points available), each mini paper is worth 100 points (200 points total), and the final paper is worth a total of 250 points. The total number of points available equals 650.

The grading scale is as follows: 585 for an A-, 520 for a B-, 455 for a C-, 390 for a D-. Anyone who fails to earn 390 points fails the class.

**Course
Schedule &
Assignments:**

The course schedule is available online at the class website. Since this is an advanced philosophy class that emphasizes discussion in the classroom (and outside the classroom) the schedule may change frequently. The class website and blog will be the primary forms of communication with the student, and the student should check these website regularly.

Reading Assignments	Homework Assignments (TBD)
General Introduction to Philosophy of Action: Mele, “Introduction” [M]; Thalberg, “Some Mysteries about the Material Elements of Action” [CP]	Week 1
The Nature of Action and the Causal Theory of Action: Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes” [M]; Donald Davidson, “Agency” [CP]	Week 2
The Nature of Action: Harry Frankfurt, “The Problem of Action” [M]; Jaegwon Kim, “Mechanism, Purpose, and Explanatory Exclusion” [M]	Week 3
The Nature of Action and Minimalist Accounts of Action Individuation: Donald Davidson, “The Individuation of Events” [CP]; excerpt from G.E.M. Anscombe, <i>Intention</i> [CP]	Week 4
The Nature of Action and Maximalist Accounts of Action Individuation: Alvin I. Goldman, “The Individuation of Action” [CP]; excerpt from Alvin Goldman, <i>A Theory of Human Action</i> [CP]	Week 5
Reasons for Action (I): Robert Audi, “Acting for Reasons” [M]; Carl Ginet, “Reasons Explanation of Action” [M]	Week 6
Reasons for Action (II): Elijah Millgram, “Practical Reasoning and the Structure of Actions” [CP]; Gilbert Harman, “Practical Reasoning” [M]	Week 7
Deliberation about Action (I): Excerpts from Aristotle’s <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> [CP]	Week 8
Deliberation about Action (II): Peter van Inwagen, selections from <i>An Essay on Free Will</i> [CP]	Week 9
Deliberation about Action (III): Randolph Clarke, “Deliberation and Beliefs about One’s Abilities” [CP]	Week 10
Intentional Action and Causal Theories of Action: Lawrence Davis, “A Causal Theory of Intending” [M]; Michael Bratman, “Two Faces of Intention” [M]	Week 11

<p>Intentional Action: Hugh McCann, “Settled Objectives and Rational Constraints” [M]; Mele and Moser, “Intentional Action” [M]</p>	<p>Week 12</p>
<p>Introducing Experimental Work in Action Theory: Joshua Knobe, “What is Experimental Philosophy?” [CP]; Shaun Nichols, “Folk Concepts and Intuitions from Philosophy to Cognitive Science” [CP]</p>	<p>Week 13</p>
<p>The Knobe Experiments: Joshua Knobe, “Intentional Action and Side-Effects in Ordinary Language” [online]; Joshua Knobe, “Intentional Action in Psychology: An Experimental Investigation” [online]</p>	<p>Week 14</p>
<p>Gricean & Psychological Bias Responses to the Knobe Effect: Fred Adams and Annie Steadman, “Intentional Action in Ordinary Language: Core Concept or Pragmatic Understanding?” [online]; Thomas Nadelhoffer, “On Praise, Side Effects, and Folk Ascriptions of Intentionality”</p>	<p>Week 15</p>