Philosophy of Action 2021/2022

People

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Course aims and objectives

Wittgenstein famously asked: ‘What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?’ (Philosophical Investigations §621) — In virtue of what is the action of raising my arm an action rather than a mere event, or something that merely happens? And what role do I, as agent, have in making it happen? These questions lie at the centre of the Philosophy of Action, a branch of philosophy that brings together issues in the philosophy of mind, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

This course examines in depth the field of philosophy of action. We will learn about prominent approaches to action theory - such as those championed by Elizabeth Anscombe and Donald Davidson. We will consider a variety of central issues in the philosophy of action including questions about: agency and action, the nature of intentional action, what it is to act for a reason, alienation from one’s own action, irrational action and the possibility of weakness of will, and the kind of action that we identify with and that, in a salient sense, makes us who we are.

Intended learning outcomes

By the end of this course, you should:

☑ Have gained transferable skills in research, analysis and argumentation
☑ Be able to articulate in your own terms the main conception of intentional action
Be able to develop a rational reconstruction of an important philosophical view, such as Anscombe

- Have the ability to critically and closely read difficult philosophical texts
- Understand the connection between agency and rationality
- Recognise the mistake involved in thinking of what we do as an outcome

Syllabus

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<th>Action and Agency</th>
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Assessment

- **40% Mid-Term Essay [1500 words]**
  - **Deadline:** Monday 7 March 2022
  - **55% Final Essay [2500 words]**
    - **Deadline:** Monday 25 April 2022
  - **5% Participation**
    - The assessment of participation will be based on presence and engagement in tutorial and in office hours.

Readings

Below you will find a list of the **required readings** for each week. Supplementary readings will be posted on the Learn site.

**Required Readings**

**Week 1: Action and Agency**

**Week 2: Action and Agency**

**Week 3: Intention and Intentional Action**

**Week 4: Intention and Intentional Action**
Week 5: **Acting for a Reason**

Week 6: **Acting for a Reason**

Week 7: **Alienation**
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm

Week 8: **Alienation**

Week 9: **Weakness of Will**

Week 10: **Identification of Full-Blooded Agency**

Week 11: **Review**
This week we will bring together the themes of the course, discuss essay strategies, and anything else you’d like to go over.