

Phil of Action

PHI 4930 Fall 2020

Prof. Ray

PHI 4930 - Syllabus

This is an upper-division introduction to the philosophy of action – which is concerned with the nature of actions and human agency, and such things as intending, planning and trying, the giving of reasons for action and action explanations, practical deliberation, choosing, weakness of the will, and the nature of collective action.

- What do you do when you do? Some philosophers have thought all you can ever do is move your body. Or that maybe all we really ever do is try to do things and the rest is up to the world.
- We are happy to think of some things that happen when we act as expressions of our agency, but want to think of other things as merely consequences. And we think sometimes this makes a moral difference. But what is the real difference between what you do and what else happens – and does that difference fall in line with the moral distinctions we wanted to make?
- We seem often to suffer failures of will. We mean well and intend to do one thing (eat well), but then we end up doing something else (cake!) that we ourselves think less good. What is going on in such cases? Are we just out of control? Or are we really doing what we really wanted all along? And doesn't that make us sort of crummy? (Cake!)
- It has been thought that we have a special kind of access to or knowledge of our own actions. What does this come to?
- We think of actions as fundamentally explicable. But what should we say about our practice of giving explanations of our actions? How do such explanations (when we are not just making excuses for ourselves) actually relate to the doing of the things we do?

The concerns in philosophy of action are relevant to many other areas of philosophy – to the discourse on freedom of the will in metaphysics, discussions of rationality in epistemology, questions of moral responsibility in ethics, as well fundamental questions about collective will, collective action and the standing of social institutions in social and political philosophy, and, for example, the question of animal minds in philosophy of mind, and the role of the emotions in moral psychology.

The student learning outcomes for this 4000-level course are broadly spelled out [here](#).

Course Work:

To accommodate an online modality, this course is designed like a reading group. We will read each week and talk about what we have read with an eye toward gaining a critical understanding of the material we have read and improving our own understanding of the topic at issue. So, this course centrally requires the careful reading and analysis of difficult philosophical texts and

active discussion of them in class. Students may be called upon to prepare short presentations to contribute to the discourse of the class as we go along. To facilitate discussion, this course proceeds in three modalities: i) lecture-discussion classes, open discussion classes, one-on-one discussion meetings. A substantive thesis-defense paper (prepared in several required stages) will be due at the end of the seminar. 40% Participation (discussion & presentations). 60% Term paper (paper plus prep stages).

Course Materials:

All course materials will be made available via Canvas or this class web site as a link to the source and/or as a pdf file. Pdfs may be password protected. In order to view and print them you need to know a password – which will be given to you in class...

There are no texts which you are required to purchase for this course.

A running bibliography of reading and reference materials will be maintained on this site.

ONLINE NOTICE: This is a wholly online course being taught in a synchronous format. Classes occur live at designated sometimes and your attendance is expected. No meetings (class or otherwise) in connection with this class will be recorded. As in all courses, unauthorized recording or sharing of recorded materials by students is prohibited.

Rules of Engagement:

1) The materials on this site do not belong to you. You may not give access to or share them with anyone outside the class. This applies equally to materials supplied on the class Canvas site (if applicable). 2) You may not use digital devices in classroom lecture or discussion sessions without special permission from the professor. 3) During online class attendance (if applicable), you may not use any digital device (or function thereof) other than that required to attend the class (except by special permission of the professor). Rule of thumb: If it would not be appropriate activity in the classroom, then it is probably not appropriate in your online class either. 4) You may not take pictures or make audio or video recordings of any kind during class. Violation of the terms of this agreement may be grounds for dismissal from the class. Seriously.

Nota bene:

Plagiarism or other academic honesty violations are not tolerated and will result in i) immediate failure in the course and ii) referral to the Dean of Students for further action. Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's words or ideas as if they were your own. All assignments are to be completed on your own. It is your responsibility to know and understand the [UF Student Honor Code](#).

Note for Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

UF General Policy:

Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing [online evaluations](#). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. UF emails students with specific times when they are open. [Summary results](#) of these assessments are made available to students. UF has [specific guidance](#) on how to give professional (and respectful) feedback.

Conformality:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with prevailing [university policy](#).

Grade Points:

Information on how UF calculates grade points from grades can be found [here](#).

Useful Disclaimer:

Our schedule of topics/readings/assignments are subject to change. So, stay informed as we go along.

Personnel & Contact

- [Prof. Greg Ray](#), 300 FLO

Office Hours

- TBA
- [And by appt](#)

Topical Schedule:

- 09/01- Introductory.
- 09/08- Intentional Action.
- 09/15- Reasons and Causes.
- 09/22- Agency.
- 09/29- Guidance.
- 10/06- Planning.
- 10/13- Akrotic Action.
- 10/20- Trying.
- 10/27- Intending.
- 11/03- Collective Action I.

- 11/10- Collective Action II.
- 11/17- Collective Action III
- 11/24- Project.
- 12/01- Project.
- 12/08- Papers Due.

Section Meetings:

- Lecture--T 11:45-1:40 [GR] Canvas Zoom
- Lecture--R 12:50-1:40 [GR] Canvas Zoom