

Philosophy of Action

PHI 4930 Fall 2022

Prof. Ray

Notices:

•Welcome! Syllabus and course information can be found below the References section, or just follow the Course Syllabus link at left. (08/24)

References:

The following is a running bibliography that will grow over the course of the semester. Each numbered section below may have as many as three distinct parts: i) the assigned reading (w/links), ii) additional sources you may find useful, and iii) texts referred to in or consulted for lecture.

- ---
- • 1: Anscombe (UP NOW for 8/29)
- —Elisabeth Anscombe's essay is famously difficult. Many of Anscombe's observations have been taken up by later thinkers. I have excerpted for you two basic parts of her text. We should try to understand this text and look for its insights.—
- Anscombe, G.E.M. *Intention* [first excerpt]. 2nd ed. Ithaca [NY]: Cornell University Press, 1957/1963. :local access (annotated):
★ assigned reading ★
- ---
- —The following might be of use to you in understanding.—
- Wiland, Eric, and Julia Driver. "G.E.M. Anscombe: §4 Action Theory". *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vers. Summer 2022. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. :public access: :local access:
- Teichman, Roger. "Anscombe". *Companion to the Philosophy of Action*. Ed. Timothy O'Connor, and Constantine Sandis. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. pp. 606-612. :local access:
- Schwenkler, John. *Anscombe's Intention: A Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- ---
- Anscombe, G.E.M. "Modern Moral Philosophy." *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1-19. :univ access:
- Anscombe, G.E.M. "Action, Intention and 'Double Effect'." *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 56 (1982): 12-25. Reprinted in

Ethics and Medical Decision-Making. Ed. Michael Freeman. London: Routledge, 2001. pp. 224-236. :univ access:

•

-
- • Some Core Readings
 - —Below are some core readings in philosophy of action. The following is meant to be suggestive of the sort of philosophical literature with which our course will be concerned. Local, annotated versions of some of these items will be made available as we come around to them.—
 - Anscombe, G.E.M. *Intention [excerpt]*. 2nd ed. Ithaca [NY]: Cornell University Press, 1963. :none access:
 - Davidson, Donald. "Actions, Reasons and Causes." *Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1963): 685-700. :univ access:
 - Davidson, Donald. "How is Weakness of the Will Possible?" *Moral Concepts*. Ed. Joel Feinberg. London: Oxford University Press, 1970. Reprinted in *Essays on Action and Events*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. pp. 21-42.
 - Davidson, Donald. "Agency." *Agent, Action and Reason*. Ed. Robert Binkley, Richard Bronaugh, and Ausonio Marras. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971. pp. 1-37. Reprinted in *Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. pp. 43-62.
 - Harman, Gilbert. "Practical Reasoning." *Review of Metaphysics* 29 (1976): 431-463. :univ access:
 - Davidson, Donald. "Intending." *Philosophy of History and Action*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Dordrecht: Springer, 1978. pp. 41-60. Reprinted in *Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. pp. 83-102.
 - Frankfurt, Harry. "Problem of Action." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978): 157-162. :univ access:
 - Hornsby, Jennifer. *Actions [excerpt]*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980. pp. 33-45.
 - Bratman, Michael. "Taking Plans Seriously." *Social Theory and Practice* 9 (1983): 271-287. :univ access:
 - Bratman, Michael. "Two Faces of Intention." *Philosophical Review* 93 (1984): 375-405. :univ access:
 - Gilbert, Margaret. "Walking Together." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 15 (1990): 1-14.
 - Searle, John. "Collective Intentions and Actions". *Intentions in Communication*. Ed. Philp P. Cohen, Jerry Morgan, and Martha E. Pollack. Cambridge [Mass]: MIT Press, 1990. pp. 401-415. :none access:
 - Bratman, Michael. "Shared Cooperative Activity." *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 327-341. :univ access:
 - Bratman, Michael. "Shared Intention." *Ethics* 104 (1993): 97-113. :univ access:
 - Gilbert, Margaret. "Obligation and Joint Commitment." *Utilitas* 11 (1999): 143-163.
 - Bratman, Michael. "I Intend that We J". *Faces of Intention*. Cambridge University Press, 1999. pp. 142-162. :univ access:
 - Tuomela, Raimo. "We-Intentions Revisited." *Philosophical Studies* 125 (2005): 327-369. :univ access:
 - Bratman, Michael. *Shared Agency [excerpt]*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

2014.

- Ludwig, Kirk. *Collective Action I: From Individual to Plural Agency [excerpt]*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
 - Ludwig, Kirk. *Collective Action II: From Plural to Institutional Agency [excerpt]*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
-

PHI 4930 - Syllabus

A close study of some core readings in 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, theoretical and practical reason, choosing, weakness of the will, and the nature of collective action. In addition to individual and collective action, we will seek to understand the roles of theoretical and practical reason in 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.

This course will help you develop and exercise many skills that are a goal of the major; in terms of learning outcomes (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/liberalarts/alc/philosophy.aspx>), see especially SLOs 4,5,6 & 7.

Course Work:

This course is designed like a reading group. Common weekly readings of primary material will provide focus for our discussion each week. We will talk about what we have read with an eye toward gaining a critical understanding of the material 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 in the class. Weighting: 30% participation, 30% midterm, 35% term paper, 5% foobar.

Be not fooled, attendance will be essential to your success in this class.

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.

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) The use of recording devices in the classroom is circumscribed by law. Students may not share, transmit, circulate, distribute to any person any such recording, nor upload such to any media platform.

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 (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>).

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 (<https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>). 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 (<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>) of these assessments are made available to students. UF has specific guidance (<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>) 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 (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>).

Grade Points:

Information on how UF calculates grade points from grades can be found here (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

Useful Disclaimer:

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

Class Web Address:

<http://users.clas.ufl.edu/gregray/class/actnow>

Personnel & Contact

- Prof. Greg Ray, 300 FLO

Office Hours

- Mon 2:00-4:00, Wed 10:45-12:00
- And by appt

Topical Schedule:

- 08/24- Introduction.
- •- INDIVIDUAL ACTION >
- 08/29- Intention
- 09/07- Reasons & Causes
- 09/12- Agency

- 09/19- Guidance
- 09/26- Intending
- 10/03- Trying
- 10/10- Simple View
- 10/14- MIDTERM.
- •- COLLECTIVE ACTION >
- 10/17- Acting Together
- 10/24- Planning & Cooperation
- 10/31- Collective Agency
- 11/07- Collective Responsibility
- •- CAPSTONE >
- 11/14- Unintended Consequences
- 11/21- Paper Projecting
- 12/12- Term Papers Due.