

PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION PHIL 31702

Spring 2014

MW 12:30-1:45pm

NAC 5/124

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Office Hours: MW 2:00-3:00pm & by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Human beings are generally held responsible for their actions, while most other creatures are not. One characteristic explanation for this asymmetry invokes our capacity to be the agents of our actions. In this class, we will discuss central questions concerning the nature of action and agency. What is an action? What is an agent? Under what conditions does an agent identify with her actions? Is weakness of the will possible?

This course is structured so as to progressively develop critical philosophical skills: careful reading of philosophical texts, critical analysis of philosophical positions, developing a philosophy argument, and defending an argument from objections. Assignments throughout the term will be used to assess and aid in your development of these skills. Your final paper and presentation will showcase the progress you made in developing these skills in this course.

**PREREQUISITES:** An introductory level philosophy course (Phil 10200, Phil 30000, Phil 20100, or Phil 20200).

**READING:** All readings will be available via Blackboard.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** You will be required to turn in a 1-2 page polished weekly reading response based on the assigned reading and a prompt I will post on Blackboard. Be ready to share your reading response with the rest of class. You are responsible for one in-class exam and two papers during the course of the term. You are also required to complete drafts of your papers and peer reviews. You will also be responsible for one student presentation during which you will present your final paper idea. Most importantly, you are expected to attend every meeting and actively participate in class discussion.

8 Reading Responses (1-2 pp)	25%
Paper #1 (2-3 pp)	10%
Exam	15%
Paper # 2(6-7 pp)	25%
Paper Drafts	5%
Paper Presentation	5%
Group Activities/Quizzes	5%
Participation & Attendance	10%

A	95-99%
A-	90-94%
B+	85-89%
B	80-84%
B-	75-79%
C+	70-74%
C	65-69%
C-	60-64%
D	51-59%
F	0-50

**LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY:** **NO LATE Reading responses** will be accepted (no exceptions!). You will, however, be allowed to make-up 1 reading response. Late papers will only be accepted in cases of emergency AND arrangements must be made with me at least **48 hours in advance**. No exams will be issued after the exam date, except for in extreme medical circumstances with a doctor's note.

**SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS:** A printed copy **AND** an electronic copy (via Safe Assign) should be submitted.

**ATTENDANCE: Regular attendance is required.** You will be granted up to **3 excused absences** throughout the term, any absences above that number will affect your grade significantly. If you arrive **late to class**, I will call on you and you **must** contribute to the class discussion in the form of a **thoughtful** question or comment in order to count as having attended the class.

**PLAGIARISM:** You will receive no credit for a plagiarized assignment and your participation grade will be significantly lowered. Any act of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will be subject to penalties in conformity with the College's policy on Academic Integrity. ([http://www1.cuny.cuny.edu/facultystaff/provost/policies\\_integrity.cfm](http://www1.cuny.cuny.edu/facultystaff/provost/policies_integrity.cfm)).

**LEARNING COURSE OBJECTIVES:** By the end of this course you should: (1) Improve your ability to read philosophy, that is, to identify the thesis of a piece of philosophical writing and the arguments or evidence adduced in support of that thesis. (2) Be able to identify and debate central issues in philosophy of action. (3) Be able to develop and argue for a critical position in a philosophy paper that engages with a central issue in philosophy of action.

Date		Reading Assignment	Writing Assignment	
M	1/27	Intro		
W	1/29	George Wilson, "Action," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy	R. Response #1	
ACTION, REASONS, CAUSES				
Reading Philosophy	M	2/03	Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes"	
	W	2/05	Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes"	R. Response #2
	M	2/10	Harry Frankfurt, "The Problem of Action"	
	W	2/19	Harry Frankfurt, "The Problem of Action" / Donald Davidson, "Intending"	R. Response #3
	Th	2/20	Donald Davidson, "Intending"	Paper Topics
	M	2/24	Bratman, "Two Faces of Intention"	
	W	2/26	[No Class-Online Assignment] Bratman, "Two Faces of Intention"	Online Assignment
M	3/3	Paper Writing Workshop	Paper #1 Draft Due	
HIERARCHICAL THEORIES OF AGENCY				
Critical Analysis	W	3/5	Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"	Paper #1 Due
	M	3/10	Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"	
	W	3/12	Gary Watson, "Free Agency"	R. Response #4
	M	3/17	Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion"	
	W	3/19	David Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts"	R. Response #5
	M	3/24	Michael Bratman, "Identification, Decision, and Treating as a Reason"	
	W	3/26	Exam Review	
	M	3/31	Exam #1	Paper Topics Distributed
WEAKNESS OF WILL				
Defending an Argument	W	4/2	Davidson, Donald, "How is Weakness of the Will Possible?"	R. Response #6
	M	4/7	Bratman, Michael, "Practical Reasoning and Weakness of the Will"	
	W	4/9	Watson, "Skepticism about Weakness of Will"	R. Response #7
	M	4/14	SPRING BREAK	
	W	4/16		
	M	4/21		
	W	4/23	Christine Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason"	R. Response #8
	M	4/28	Holton, Richard, "How is Strength of Will Possible?"	
W	4/30	Arpaly, Nomy, "On Acting Rationally Against One's Better Judgment"	R. Response Make-Up	
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS				
Objections	M	5/5	Student Paper Presentations	Paper Draft Due
	W	5/7	Student Paper Presentations	Online Peer Review Due
	M	5/12	Student Paper Presentations	
	W	5/14	Wrap-Up	Final Paper Due