

Philosophy 20443, *Spring* 2024
Monday & Wed 9:30-10:45

Rationality and Action

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116 Malloy Hall; Office hours: Friday 1:00-2:00, & by appointment

Course Description

Acting on the basis of reasons is something we are all thought to do. You have probably also heard someone say of someone else that they “acted for a reason.” This course explores issues related to acting for and from reasons in philosophy. These issues include what is involved in acting for a reason, what motivates us when we act for or from reasons, what reasons are, and how the concept of a reason is related to other concepts in ethics like “good,” “right,” and “ought.”

Objectives

Improving our reading, writing, and critical analysis of philosophical texts.

Assignments

Attendance (10%)

Participation (10%)

Midterm Exam (20%) - in class, March 6

Essay 1 (30%) - due March 26

Essay 2 (30%) - due May 6

Grading

You might notice that 20% of your grade comes from attendance and participation. If you know in advance that you will need to miss a class and would like to avoid having your absence factored into your participation and attendance grade, please contact me at least a week in advance of the class you plan to miss. If you are sick, you can contact me with less notice. In either case, I will ask you to submit a concise, one-page summary of the day’s reading as a make up assignment (an abstract, if you will). If you attend a class and speak at least once, you will receive full credit for attendance and participation on that day.

A large portion of your grade in this course will come from your written essays. I am happy to meet with students during office hours to discuss essays and am willing to provide comments on finished drafts in advance of deadlines. I will probably comment on your unfinished work too, if you insist.

You may pick your own essay topics based on your interests, but if you are really unsure of what to write about, please come see me for topic suggestions. Essay lengths should fall somewhere between five and ten single-spaced pages (or between 10 and 20 double-spaced pages), written in 12-point font, Times New Roman. You are not required to consult material other than the course readings for your essays, but if you do, you are required to cite your sources. Even if all of the sources that you consulted for your essay are listed on the syllabus, your essay should have a bibliography attached that contains a list of the works cited and consulted. You are expected to write your own essays in accordance with the honor code, and the use of Chat-GPT to write essays is not permitted.

This course will have a policy of blind grading to mitigate grading bias, meaning that I will ask you to submit your essays and exam to me in hard copy with no identifying information on them except for an identification number, which I will assign each student in advance. I encourage you to ask for specific help anyway, and in the past, it has tended to help students to seek feedback on their drafts.

Readings

It is recommended that you buy a copy of the Kant book, which is available on Amazon. Copies of the other readings for this course should be available online.

Schedule of Assigned Readings

(Readings are due on the dates next to which they are posted)

Unit 1

Jan 17: First day of class

Jan 22: Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, Causes"

Jan 24: Hume, Book 2 Part 3, "Of the Will and Direct Passions" p. 399-418

Jan 29: Schroeder, "Reasons and the Humean Theory"

Jan 31: Audi, “Psychoanalytic Explanation and the Concept of Rational Action”

Feb 5: Stampe, “The Authority of Desire” p. 335-358

Feb 7: Stampe, “The Authority of Desire” cont. p. 359-381

Feb 12: Williams, “Internal and External Reasons”

Feb 14: Schroeder, “Desire”

Unit 2

Feb 19: Kant, *Groundwork* Section 1 p. 3-10

Feb 21: Kant, *Groundwork* Section 1 cont. p. 11-20

Feb 26: Davis, “The Two Senses of Desire”

Feb 28: Hursthouse, “Arational Actions”

March 4: Kant, *Groundwork* Section 2 p. 21-38

March 6: Midterm Exam

March 11: Spring Break

March 13: Spring Break

March 18: Kant, *Groundwork* Section 2 cont. p. 39-55
Kant, *Groundwork* Section 3 p. 56-64

March 20: Kant, *Groundwork* Section 3 cont. p. 65-72

March 25: Williams, “Foundations, Practical Reason”

March 26: Essay 1 due

March 27: Easter Break

April 1: Easter Break

April 3: Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"

April 8: Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason"

Unit 3 (Subject to change)

April 10: Dancy, *Moral Reasons* Ch 1 p. 1-17

April 15: Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* Ch 1 p. 15-49

April 17: Prichard, "Duty and Interest"

April 22: Moore, *Principia Ethica* Ch 1 p. 1-36

April 24: Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* Ch 3 p. 64-82

April 29: Moore, *Principia Ethica* Ch 5 "Ethics in Relation to Conduct" p. 142-162

May 1: Moore, *Principia Ethica* Ch 5 cont. p. 163-182

May 6: Essay 2 due