**(Phil 415) Action in Ancient Greek and Contemporary Analytic Philosophy**

**Fall 2019**

**Course Instructor:**

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HOURS AVAILABLE: 12:40 – 13:40

**Class Meetings:**

DAYS/HOURS: TU, TH 11:00a-12:35p CB-2

**Course Description**

(Bernini, The Ecstasy of Mother Teresa)

This course is meant as an introduction to what often goes by the general name of “practical philosophy” – a thing most generally put as philosophical reflection on the question of action.

Philosophical reflection on the question of action forms a very rich and subtly nested complex of related sub-questions, which are framed in terms of concepts such as the concepts of reason, desire, truth, knowledge, intention and intentional action, life, virtue and well-being (happiness) for the individual and the polis, etc.

The aim of this course is to throw light on the shape that these concepts took in ancient Greek and modern philosophy with a view to bringing to the foreground and critiquing the shape of our very own conceptions.

To carry off this task, we will first explore the Socratic conception of eros (desire), psyche (soul) and arête (virtue). Then we will explore the Platonic conception of the division of the polis (political community), the psyche (soul) and the ideas (forms). Following this we will turn to Aristotel and his conception of praxis (action), arête (virtue), pathe (passions), logos (reason), phronesis (practical wisdom), hedone (pleasure) and Eudaimonia (happiness).

Turning to modern philosophy we will study Hume’s conception of understanding and experience and his account of the will. Then, we will explore Kant’s conception of the maxim of an action, inclination and the moral law.

Finally, in the third part of the class we will turn to 20th century philosophy and in particular we will begin with Wittgenstein’s critique of the will, to turn then to Davidson’s concept of “acting for reasons” and Anscombe’s concept of “intentional action.

**Course Resources and Activities**

Reading: We will read works of both primary and secondary literature.

Discussions: In this class philosophy is being taught as an activity and not a mere body of doctrine. Hence you will be asked to participate in the class discussions.

Writing: Writing will be divided between free writing and academic writing. In your **weekly reflections,** you will be asked to write freely about anything at all in the readings and the class discussions that may interest you. In your **research paper(s)** you will be asked and taught to write academically in order to participate in the professional activity of philosophy as it is today.

Presentations: In this class, you will have the opportunity to present readings to the class.

Guest Lectures: In this class, you will have the opportunity to engage directly with guest lecturers who are renowned specialists in some of the subject matters we will be dealing with. Names, dates and times will be announced on the first day of classes.

**Learning Objectives**

*It is the ambition of this class to present the contemporary philosophical problem of practical rationality in its historical dimension* and to enable all of us to do philosophy together.

In this class, you will be able to:

1. Familiarize yourselves with an important field of philosophical discourse: the philosophy of action and practical reason.
2. Trace the connections between this field and major philosophical movements in the history of philosophy and in particular in the history of ancient, modern and 20th century philosophy.
3. Learn how to work both with primary and secondary literature in order to conduct philosophical research.
4. Learn how to produce high quality research in the field.

**Course Requirements**

Weekly Reflections**:**

You will be asked to turn in ***weekly assignments.*** The assignments *may be briefly commented on but not graded separately*. You will be graded just for turning them all in *on time.* You will get an A if you’ve turned them all in on time and an F if there is more than two reports unjustifiably missing or written in such a manner as to convey that the reading was not actually done. Late assignments will not be read but not commented on.

Paper(s):

To complete the main writing assignment of this class you have the following option: either write two shorter research papers (7 pages for the midterm and 10 pages for the final) or write one longer research paper (15 to 20 pages) on which you will be working throughout the semester (deliver the first draft during midterms week and then spend the rest of the semester rewriting it).

Guidelines for writing a research paper will be discussed in class. Paper topics will be selected freely by you, after prior consultation with me.

Presentations

You will be responsible for presenting readings in class throughout the semester.

Participation

Class Participation is mandatory.

*Participation rule*: No-one is allowed to look down on anyone in this class. Lack of respect and tolerance will not be tolerated.

**Grading and Evaluation**

Assessment Distribution:

Class participation (incl. presentations): 30% of the grade.

Weekly reports: 15% of the grade.

Midterm paper: 20% of the grade

Final papers (incl. peer review): 35% of the grade.

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**Grades** are intended to give you a sense of the quality of a particular piece of work: roughly speaking, a B means that you have done a good job with the writing, the ideas, and the organization of the work; a C conveys that the work lacks some important qualities and has some problems, while an A means that the work is exemplary in some key ways: the writing is particularly clear, the ideas thoroughly treated, the organization of the presentation well considered and effective, the participation in class is thoughtful, frequent and respectful. (for more details, see attached rubric)

**Use of Laptops:** In-class or on-site use of laptops and other devices is permitted only if there is text we are reading online. On no other occasion.

**Attendance**:Students are expected to report for classes promptly. CYA regards attendance in class and on-site as essential. Absences are recorded and have consequences. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately in the Student Affairs Office.

**Policy on Original Work**: Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own, original work. Any excerpts from the work of others must be clearly identified as a quotation, and a proper citation provided. (Check Student handbook, pg 9)

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**: If you are a registered (with your home institution) student with a disability and you are entitled to learning accommodation, please inform the Director of Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation.

**Books, Course Materials, Moodle**

Indicative Bibliography

Plato, *Phaedrus, Protagoras*, *Republic*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Kant, *Groundwork of the metaphysics of Morals* (edition to be decided in due course)

Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (edition to be decided in due course)

Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (edition to be decided in due course)

Anscombe, E., 2000, Intention (reprint), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (any edition will do)

Davidson, D., 1980, Essays on Actions and Events, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Korsgaard, C., *2008, The Constitution of Agency (Oxford University Press).*

McDowell,1998, *Mind, Value, and Reality,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Segvic, H. - Myles Burnyeat(Ed.) *From Protagoras to Aristotle: Essays in Ancient Moral Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Williams, B., 1981, *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, M.,1994, *The Moral Problem,* Oxford: Blackwell.

Dancy, J.,2000*, Practical Reality, Oxford: Oxford University Press.*

**SYLLABUS**

1. **T 10 Sep** **Introduction**  
   Overview of the class – The question of the question of action.
2. **R 12 Sep** – **Plato’s Phaedrus, 1st part**

We will study Lysias’ speech and we will examine the conception of thought about action and action that Lysias’ conception of eros presupposes.

1. **T 17 Sep** - **Plato’s *Phaedrus*, 2nd part & Diotima’s speech from the Symposium**

We will study Socrates’ two speeches and we will try to grasp the conception of thought about action and action that Socrates’ conception of eros involves.

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| Sep 18-21 | FT | Crete (Depart late PM on 9/17 & return early AM on 9/22) |

1. **T 24 Sep** – **Plato’s Protagoras, 1st part**

We will examine Protagoras’ conception of teaching and virtue.

1. **R 26 Sep** **-** **Plato’s *Protagoras*, 2nd part**

We will examine Socrates’ conception of teaching and virtue.

1. **T 1 Oct** **– Plato’s Republic, I and II**

We will focus on the Platonic conception of the character of the concept of virtue/justice.

1. **R 3 Oct** – **Plato’s Republic, IV**

We will examine Socrates’ account of the division of the soul.

1. **T 8 Oct** **– Plato’s Republic VI and VII**

We will once more return to the Platonic account of love.

1. **R 10 Oct – Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics I**

We will focus on Aristotle’s outline of a life of goodness.

1. **T 15 Oct** – **Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* II**

We will examine Aristotle’s account of virtue.

1. **R 17 Oct** – **Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, III and IV**

We will focus on Aristotle’s account of particular virtues.

1. **T 22 Oct** – **Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, VI**

We will study Aristotle’s conception of weakness of the will.

1. **R 24 Oct** – **Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, X**

We will study Aristotle’s conception of friendship, pleasure and eudaimonia.

**Th 24 OCT @midnight – Midterms Deadline**

1. **T 29 Oct** – **Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature***

We will focus on Hume’s account of reason and passions.

1. **R 31 Oct** – **Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature***

We will try to understand how reason might be the slave of the passions.

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| Nov 5-9 | FT | Peloponnese |

1. **T 12 Nov** – **Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals***

We will focus on Kant’s notion of “acting from duty”.

1. **R 14 Nov** – **Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals***

We will examine what acting under the moral law is.

1. **T 19 Nov** – **Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations***

We will examine why Wittgenstein thinks that the Will is a chimera

1. **R 21 Nov** – **Davidson, *Actions, Reasons and Causes***

We will focus on the character of the concept of “acting for reasons”.

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| Nov 22-Dec 1 | Fall Break |

1. **F 3 Dec** – **Anscombe, *Intention***

We will examine Anscombe’s conception of the character of the concept of intention.

1. **T 5 Dec** – **Anscombe, *Intention***

We will focus on Anscombe’s concept of “intention in acting”

1. **R 6 Dec** – **Anscombe, *Intention***

We will go into Anscombe’s concept of “acting intentionally”

1. **T 10 Dec** – **Anscombe, *Intention***

We will examine Anscombe’s concept of “Intention with which”

1. **R 12 Dec – Summing up**

**DEC 17 – final paper deadline**

Rubrics

**Here is the rubric I shall use for the papers:**

**University at Buffalo Department of Philosophy Grading Rubric for Writing Assignments**

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|  | **Fails Completely** | **Unsatisfactory** | **Needs Improvement** | **Competent** | **Exemplary** |
| **Thesis** | No identifiable thesis or thesis shows lack of effort or comprehension of assignment. | Difficult to identify, inconsistently maintained, or provides little around which to structure paper. | Unclear, buried, poorly articulated, lacking in insight and originality. | Promising, but may be unclear or lacking insight or originality. | Easily identifiable, interesting, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, clear. |
| **Structure and style** | No evident structure or organization. No transitions between major points. | Unclear, unfocused, disorganized, lacking in unity, transitions abrupt or confusing, context unclear. | Generally unclear, unfocused, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions. Does not provide sufficient information, explanation, and context for readers. | Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have some unclear transitions or lack of coherence. Does not fully appreciate reader’s need for information, explanation, and context. | Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis. Essay is focused and unified. Words chosen effectively. Excellent transitions between points. Anticipates reader’s need for information, explanation, and context. |
| **Use of sources (when applicable)** | No attempt made to incorporate information from primary and secondary sources. | Very little information from sources. Poor handling of sources. | Moderate amount of source information incorporated. Some key points supported by sources. Quotations may be poorly integrated into paragraphs. Some possible problems with source citations. | Draws upon sources to support most points. Some evidence may not support thesis or may appear where inappropriate. Quotations integrated well into paragraphs. Sources cited correctly. | Draws upon primary and secondary source information in useful and illuminating ways to support key points. Excellent integration of quoted material into paragraphs. Sources cited correctly. |
| **Logic and argumentation** | No effort made to construct a logical argument. Failure to support thesis. | Little attempt to offer support for key claims or to relate evidence to thesis. Reasons offered may be irrelevant. Little to no effort to address alternative views. | Arguments of poor quality. Weak, undeveloped reasons offered in support of key claims. Counter- arguments mentioned without rebuttal. | Argument is clear and usually flows logically and makes sense. Some counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed fully. | Arguments are identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Clear reasons are offered in support of key claims. Author anticipates and successfully grapples with counter-arguments. |
| **Mechanics** | Difficult to understand because of significant problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. | Several problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. | Some problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. | Sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling strong despite occasional lapses. | Correct sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. |

Rubric I use to assess class participation:

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| **Component** | **Sophisticated** | **Competent** | **Not Yet Competent** | **Unacceptable** |
| *Conduct* | Student shows respect for members of the class, both in speech and manner, and for the method of shared inquiry and peer discussion. Does not dominate discussion. Student challenges ideas respectfully, encourages and supports others to do the same. | Student shows respect for members of the class and for the method of shared inquiry and peer discussion. Participates regularly in the discussion but occasionally has difficulty accepting challenges to his/her ideas or maintaining respectful attitude when challenging others’ ideas. | Student shows little respect for the class or the process as evidenced by speech and manner. Sometimes resorts to ad hominem attacks when in disagreement with others. | Student shows a lack of respect for  members of the group and the discussion  process. Often dominates the discussion  or disengages from the process. When  contributing, can be argumentative or  dismissive of others’ ideas, or resorts to  ad hominem attacks. |
| *Ownership/Leadership* | Takes responsibility for maintaining the flow and quality of the discussion whenever needed. Helps to redirect or refocus discussion when it becomes sidetracked or unproductive. Makes efforts to engage reluctant participants. Provides constructive feedback and support to others. | Will take on responsibility for maintaining flow and quality of discussion, and encouraging others to participate but either is not always effective or is effective but does not regularly take on the responsibility. | Rarely takes an active role in maintaining the flow or direction of the discussion. When put in a leadership role, often acts as a guard rather than a facilitator: constrains or biases the content and flow of the discussion. | Does not play an active role in maintaining  the flow of discussion or undermines the  efforts of others who are trying to  facilitate discussion. |
| *Reasoning* | Arguments or positions are reasonable and supported with evidence from the readings. Often deepens the conversation by going beyond the text, recognizing implications and extensions of the text. Provides analysis of complex ideas that help deepen the inquiry and further the conversation. | Arguments or positions are reasonable and mostly supported by evidence from the readings. In general, the comments and ideas contribute to the group’s understanding of the material and concepts. | Contributions to the discussion are more often based on opinion or unclear views than on reasoned arguments or positions based on the readings. Comments or questions suggest a difficulty in following complex lines of argument or student’s arguments are convoluted and difficult to follow. | Comments are frequently so illogical or  without substantiation that others are  unable to critique or even follow them.  Rather than critique the text the student  may resort to ad hominem attacks on the  author instead. |
| *Listening* | Always actively attends to what others say as evidenced by regularly building on, clarifying, or responding to their comments. Often reminds group of comments made by someone earlier that are pertinent. | Usually listens well and takes steps to check comprehension by asking clarifying and probing questions, and making connections to earlier comments. Responds to ideas and questions offered by other participants. | Does not regularly listen well as indicated by the repetition of comments or questions presented earlier, or frequent non sequiturs. | Behavior frequently reflects a failure to  listen or attend to the discussion as  indicated by repetition of comments  and questions, non sequiturs, off-task  activities. |
| *Reading* | Student has carefully read and understood the readings as evidenced by oral contributions; familiarity with main ideas, supporting evidence and secondary points. Comes to class prepared with questions and critiques of the readings. | Student has read and understood the readings as evidenced by oral contributions. The work demonstrates a grasp of the main ideas and evidence but sometimes interpretations are questionable. Comes prepared with questions. | Student has read the material, but comments often indicate that he/she didn’t read or think carefully about it, or misunderstood or forgot many points. Class conduct suggests inconsistent commitment to preparation. | Student either is unable to adequately  understand and interpret the material or  has frequently come to class unprepared,  as indicated by serious errors or an  inability to answer basic questions or  contribute to discussion. |