

# PHI 513: ACTION THEORY

Spring 2022

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**Time:** Mon. 3:00–5:50pm  
**Place:** Marx 201

**Course abstract:** This course will cover foundational issues in the philosophy of action. We will address such questions as: What makes something an action rather than a mere bodily and/or psychological happening? What distinguishes actions that are intentional from those that are accidental? What is the nature of intention? What influence do our judgments about moral responsibility have on our judgments about intention and intentional action? Can we knowingly act against our own best interests, and if we can, is it ever rational to do so? Is there something epistemically special about our knowledge of our own actions? What is the nature of trying, and what is its relationship to intending and intentional action? Are there certain kinds of actions such that it is always under our control whether we perform them?

**Required texts:** We will provide PDFs of the readings on the course Canvas site.

**Units:** We will grant units for term papers in this class. If you are considering doing such a unit, let us know fairly early in the semester, and be sure to have met with one or both of us for a (brief) strategy meeting prior to Spring Recess. First drafts will be due by Dean's Date (May 3rd) at the latest, and if no special arrangements are made, final drafts will be due by the end of the exam period (May 12th).

**Accessibility policy:** If you require any accommodation for a disability please contact and register with [Disability Services](#). Note that you can contact them directly by phone at (609) 258-8840 or by email at [ods@princeton.edu](mailto:ods@princeton.edu). And please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns.

**Reading schedule**

1/24	Davidson (1971) – ‘Agency’ Smith (2012) – ‘Four Objections to the Standard Story of Action’ [Davidson (1963) – ‘Actions, Reasons, Causes’]
1/31	Anscombe (1957) – <i>Intention</i> , §5 Thompson (2008) – <i>Life and Action</i> , chps. 5–7 [Anscombe (1957) – <i>Intention</i> , §§1–18]
2/07	<b>Anton Ford’s visit</b> Ford (2017) – ‘The Representation of Action’ [Ford (2018) – ‘The Province of Human Agency’]
2/14	Audi (1973) – ‘Intending’ Bratman (1984) – ‘Two Faces of Intention’
2/21	<b>Joshua Knobe’s visit</b> Knobe (2010) – ‘Person as Scientist, Person as Moralist’
2/28	Harman (1976) – ‘Practical Reasoning’ Velleman (1985) – ‘Practical Reflection’
3/07	Spring recess
3/14	Davidson (1966) – ‘How is Weakness of the Will Possible?’ Arpaly (2000) – ‘On Acting Rationally Against One’s Best Judgment’
3/21	<b>Kieran Setiya’s visit</b> Setiya (2014) – ‘Intention, Plans, and Ethical Reasoning’ Setiya (2016) – ‘Akrasia and the Constitution of Agency’
3/28	<b>Thomas Grano’s visit</b> Grano (2017) – ‘The Logic of Intention Reports’ Grano (ms) – ‘Intention Reports and Eventuality Abstraction in a Theory of Mood Choice’
4/04	Setiya (2012) – ‘Knowing How’ Beddor and Pavese (2021) – ‘Practical Knowledge without Luminosity’
4/11	C. Peacocke (2007) – ‘Mental Action and Self-Awareness (I)’ C. Peacocke (2009) – ‘Mental Action and Self-Awareness (II)’ [A. Peacocke (2021) – ‘Mental Action’]
4/18	Blumberg and Hawthorne (ms) – ‘Kraemer’s Puzzle’ Holguín and Lederman (ms) – ‘Trying’ [Hornsby (1995) – ‘Reasons for Trying’]