

MS480 Philosophy of Action and Knowledge
Summer 2017



Course Instructor:

Dr Evgenia Mylonaki

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Guest Lecturer

Professor John Hyman

University of Oxford

<https://www.queens.ox.ac.uk/people/prof-john-hyman>

Class Meetings:

Day: Mondays to Fridays Contact Hours: 60 hours (20 three-hour class meetings)

Course Description

This 4-week intensive seminar aims to introduce advanced undergraduate students who entertain the prospect of a graduate career in philosophy to the **philosophy of action**, expose them to the latest research and enable them to engage with the distinguished philosopher **John Hyman** who will give five lectures on his latest book on action and knowledge.

Wittgenstein once famously asked: "*What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?*"

This question, the question of understanding what distinguishes **intentional action** from **mere bodily movement**, becomes central in **the philosophy of action** in the 20th century.

In this course we will examine some of the most prominent **contemporary** answers to this question and trace their roots to **ancient Greek** and **modern philosophy**.

Thus, our topics will include the relation between **human and non human action**, the distinction between **voluntary and chosen actions**, the role of **desires and beliefs** in actions, and finally the connection between **action and knowledge**.

In the first part of the class we will read works by Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Wittgenstein, Davidson, Anscombe, Frankfurt, Hornsby, Kenny, Raz, Dancy, Williamson, etc.

In the second part professor John Hyman will give five lectures on his new groundbreaking book *Action, Knowledge and Will* (Oxford University Press, 2015), which invites us to reconsider the central questions of the philosophy of action.

And in the third part students will present their own work in class.

Course Resources and Activities

Distinguished Guest Lectures: In this class students will have the opportunity to engage directly with the work of the distinguished philosopher John Hyman; Professor of Aesthetics, University Lecturer and Tutorial Fellow in Philosophy at Queens College, University of Oxford.

On Site Classes: The seminar will visit and hold classes in the archaeological sites of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum.

Suggested Optional Conference Attendance: Students will have the option to attend an **international conference** on *Reflection and Non-Positional Self-Consciousness* at the University of Patras (in a coastal city 3 hours away from Athens) with John McDowell (University of Pittsburgh), Jim Conant (University of Chicago), Adrian Haddock (University of Stirling), Matt Boyle (University of Chicago), Sebastian Roedl (University of Leipzig) and the seminar's instructor (Evgenia Mylonaki) among others. (June 19-21)

Student Presentations: Students will have the opportunity to present their own work in class in Student Symposia.

Reading and discussions: In this class we will read and discuss works in contemporary philosophy of action as well as works in ancient Greek and modern philosophy in the original or in translation where needed. (Students with knowledge of ancient Greek will be

encouraged and assisted to read texts in the original, although knowledge of ancient Greek is *not necessary*.)

Writing: In this class the instructor will guide students at every stage of the process of writing research papers of publishable quality: finding an idea, working on the literature, writing a draft, getting feedback, writing a final draft.

Learning Objectives

In this class you will be able to:

1. Familiarize yourselves with an important new field of philosophical discourse: **the philosophy of action**.
2. Trace the **connections** between the philosophy of action and **epistemology** but also **ancient** and **modern** philosophy
3. Learn how to work in the context of a **graduate seminar**.
4. Learn how to produce **high quality research** in the field.

Course Requirements

Paper(s):

To complete the main writing assignment of this class you have to write one 15-20 pages paper of publishable quality. The deadline is the 30th of June.

Guidelines for writing a research paper will be discussed in class.

Presentations

You will be responsible for presenting and discussing your work in class in Student Symposia.

Participation

Class Participation is crucial for this class.

Grading and Evaluation

Assessment Distribution:

Class participation (incl. presentations): 35% of the grade.

Presentation: 30% of the grade.

Final paper: 45% of the grade.

Books, Course Materials, Moodle

Alvarez, M., 2010, *Kinds of Reasons: An Essay on the Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Anscombe, G.E.M., 1957, *Intention*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, J. Barnes (ed.), 1984, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dancy, J., 2000, *Practical Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davidson, D, 1980, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Frankfurt, H., 1988, *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hornsby, Jennifer, 1980, *Actions*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Kenny, A., 1963, *Action, Emotion, and Will*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Locke, J., *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1975.
- Raz, J., 1975, *Practical Reasoning and Norms*, London: Hutchinson & Co., reprinted, Oxford University Press, 1990 and 1999.
- , 1999, *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ryle, G., 1949, *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson. Page references are to the 2000 republication, London: Penguin Books.
- Williamson, Timothy, 2000, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wittgenstein, 1958, *The Blue and Brown Books (BB)*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, 1980, vol. 1, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), vol. 2, G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman (eds.), C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell.
- Philosophical Investigations (PI)*, 4th edition, 2009, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (eds. and trans.), Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Attendance Policy

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 V.P. for Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation.

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.

Class Schedule (Tentative Draft)

Part I: Knowledge and Action in Ancient Greek and Modern Philosophy

1 **Plato, Meno**

In this class we will examine Plato's conception of knowledge in the Meno and the question concerning the value of knowledge over true belief.

2 **Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, BK II & III**

In this class we will explore Aristotle's conception of voluntariness and choice.

We will also read:

- *Voluntariness and Intention* by John Hyman

3 **Descartes, The Passions of the Soul Part I: The Passions in General and incidentally the whole nature of man**

In this class we will examine Descartes conception of the soul and the will.

**4 John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
Chapter XXI, On Power**

In this class we will examine Locke's conception of power and the will.

**5 David Hume, a Treatise of Human Nature
Book 1, part III, Of Knowledge and Probability**

In this class we will explore Hume's account of causation and knowledge.

**6 Wittgenstein, Blue and Brown Books, Remarks on the
Philosophy of Psychology, On Certainty
Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind, Chapter I & III**

In this class we will explore Wittgenstein's and Ryle's criticism of the modern notion of the will.

**7 Donald Davidson, Actions, Reasons and Causes
Agency
The Logical Form of Action Sentences**

In this class we will explore Davidson's account of intentional action as an event caused by a belief and a desire.

8 Elizabeth Anscombe, Intention

In this class we will explore Anscombe's account of intentional action as action done for reasons.

**9 Harry Frankfurt, The Importance of What We Care About
Jennifer Hornsby, Actions**

In this class we will explore Frankfurt's and Hornsby's account of the metaphysics of action.

**10 Anthony Kenny, Action, Emotion and Will, Chapter 1, 7, 10 & 11
Joseph Raz, Engaging Reason & Practical Reason and Norms**

Jonathan Dancy, Practical Reality

In this class we will explore leading accounts of intentional action as an action done for reasons.

11

Timothy Williamson, Knowledge and Its Limits (Intro & 1st chapter)

John Hyman, The Most General Factive Stative Attitude

In this class we will explore a prominent contemporary account of knowledge and an objection to it.

12

Lecture by prof John Hyman on his book *Action, Knowledge and Will* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

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Lecture by prof John Hyman on his book *Action, Knowledge and Will* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

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Lecture by prof John Hyman on his book *Action, Knowledge and Will* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

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Lecture by prof John Hyman on his book *Action, Knowledge and Will* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

16

Lecture by prof John Hyman on his book *Action, Knowledge and Will* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

17

Critical Discussion of John Hyman's book.

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Student Presentations

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Student Presentations

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Class Recap