

**Lingnan University**  
**Department of Philosophy**

<b>Course Title</b>	: Philosophy of Action
<b>Course Code</b>	: PHI4365
<b>Recommended Study Year</b>	: 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year
<b>No. of Credits/Term</b>	: 3
<b>Mode of Tuition</b>	: Lecture and tutorial
<b>Class Contact Hours</b>	: 2 hours Lecture/week; 1 hour Tutorial/week
<b>Category in Major Programme</b>	: Programme Elective - Philosophy of Natural and Human Sciences Profile
<b>Recommendation(s)</b>	: PHI2115 Metaphysics
<b>Co-requisite(s)</b>	: N/A
<b>Exclusion(s)</b>	: N/A
<b>Exemption Requirement(s)</b>	: N/A

### **Brief Course Description**

The central question of this course is that of agency: how are we to understand the distinction between actions and happenings? A range of philosophical responses to this question will be outlined and examined, including recent attempts to integrate our understanding of action with the view of the world provided by the natural sciences.

### **Aims**

1. To give an introduction to those concepts and issues that figure centrally in contemporary philosophy of action;
2. To make students aware of the interesting and close relationship between action theory and many traditional as well as contemporary philosophical problems such as the mind-body problem, free will, moral responsibility, practical rationality, and puzzles of irrationality.

### **Learning Outcomes**

On completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Grasp certain central concepts and problematics involved in explaining actions.
2. Get a sense of the close relationship between action and intentionality or rationality.

### **Indicative Content**

1. Introduction: An overview of the status of philosophy of action
2. The Structure of Behavior (F. Dretske)
3. Actions, Reasons, and Causes (D. Davidson)
4. The Problem of Action (H. Frankfurt)  
& Passive Action (A. Mele)
5. Practical Reasoning (G. Harman)
6. Naturalising Mental Action (J. Bishop)
7. Intentional Action (A. Mele & P. Moser)
8. Reasons Explanation of Action: An Incompatibilist Account (C. Ginet)
9. Agency and Causal Explanation (J. Hornsby)
10. Metaphysical Foundations of Action Explanation (A. Marras)  
& Reasons as Causes for Action (G. Wilson)
11. I intend that We *J* (M. Bratman)
12. Collective Intentions and Actions (J. Searle)
13. The Logical Structure of Reasons (J. Searle)

## Teaching Method

The course will be delivered in lecture/tutorial format. Lecturing on theoretical concepts and positions will be supplemented with students' own critical discussions on particular topics. Tutorials will be used for students' presentations as well as free discussions based on their independent exegesis and interpretation of a pre-assigned text corresponding to a lecture.

## Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Students' progress towards the learning outcomes will be measured in the following way:

1. A mid-term short paper (words: 1000-1500) will examine whether students have grasped some of the basic concepts and their application in some of the arguments in the required readings (LO1).
2. A final paper (words: 1500-3000) will measure to what extent the students can apply and/or integrate relevant conceptual analysis in discussing or resolving the issues chosen by the students themselves (LO1 & LO2).
3. Tutorial presentations and performance in free discussion will be used to measure students' understanding and articulation of the content in the wider coverage of the course (LO1 & LO2).

## Assessment

Tutorial performance	25%
Mid-term paper	25%
Final paper	50%

## Required Readings

- A. Mele (ed.), *The Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.  
G. Holmstrom-Hintikka & R. Tuomela (eds.), *Contemporary Action Theory* (Vols. 1&2), Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997. (Five chapters)  
F. Dretske, *Explaining Behavior*, MIT Press, 1988. (The first two chapters)  
J. Searle, *Rationality in Action*, MIT Press, 2001. (The last chapter)

## Supplementary Readings

- J. Bishop, *Natural Agency: An Essay on the causal Theory of Action*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.  
C. Ginet, *On Action*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.  
C. J. Moya, *The Philosophy of Action - An Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.  
F. Schick, *Understanding Action: An Essay on Reasons*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.  
G. F. Schueler, *Desire - Its Role in Practical Reason and the Explanation of Action*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995.

## Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is "the presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student's own work". Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.

- (4) To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>