

Ashoka University | Spring 2021

PHI-4631

Philosophy of Action

MW 2:50–4:20 | Classroom: online

INSTRUCTOR:

Juliana Lima

juliana.lima@ashoka.edu.in

<https://julianaflima.github.io/>

My Office: online | Office Hours: M,T,W,F 4:30–5

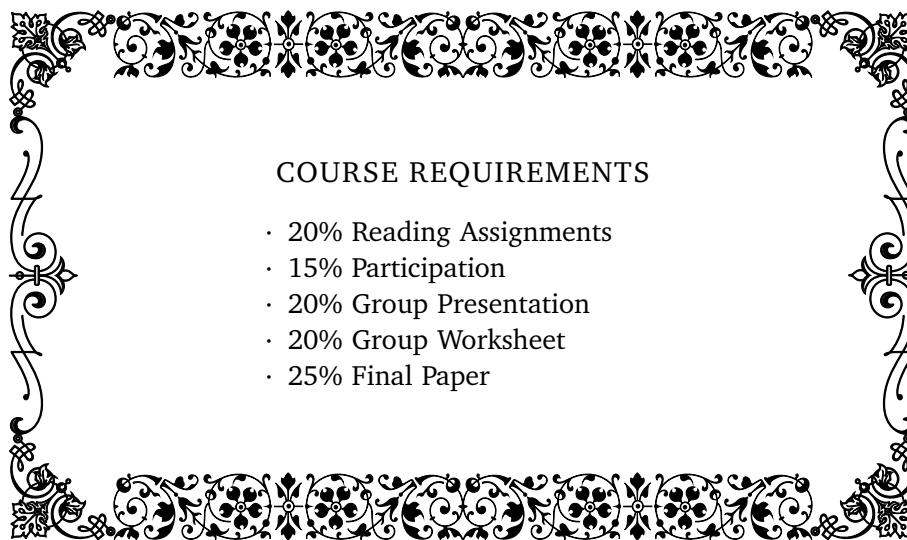
COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This is an upper-division course in which we will discuss theories about individual and group actions. Here are the main questions that will guide this course:

- Individual actions: What is an intentional action and how is it different from mere events? What is it to act with an intention? What are intentions? Are they mental states in their own right or can they be reduced to other mental states?
- Collective action: we often perform intentional group actions, like when you and your friend coordinate to carry a heavy couch together. In this case, you and your friend intend to act together. What is the nature of this collective intention? Can it be reduced to individual intentions you and your friend have or is it some mental state over and above them?
- Lastly, we will discuss a more recent topic in Philosophy of Action: how do beliefs have to be like to motivate an individual, like me, to act? Orthodoxy holds that having information about oneself from a first-person perspective ("I am in danger", "I should hide", etc.) is enough to be motivated to act and have a flourishing life in this respect. But some philosophers have been raising doubts over this thesis. We will look closely at how cases of agency motivated by beliefs we have about which groups we identify ourselves with (race, gender, societal role, religious-cultural groupings, etc) offered by Léa Salje can threaten the orthodoxy.

The assignments in this course are designed not only to evaluate students' understanding of the content, but also to develop transferable skills, like basic research abilities, text interpretation, written and presentation skills, and team-work experience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	STUDENT OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand basic concepts and distinctions in the readings and theories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and explain positions and concepts clearly and precisely. • Extract and charitably reconstruct arguments from assigned readings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with selected important debates, positions, and methods in philosophy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply theories and concepts in new contexts. • Use introduced concepts and distinctions in your own arguments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate theories and develop original ideas on selected topics in philosophy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct thought experiments and arguments against hypotheses presented in class. • Compare theories and understand theoretical implications of different views



Reading Assignments (20%)

Reading Assignments take the form of quiz or reflection paper. There will be more than 10 readings assignments, but only the highest 10 scoring assignments will count towards your grade. Each assignment is worth 2%.

Participation (15%)

Participation grade will be based on student's engagement throughout the course at the instructor discretion. Students can show engagement by participating in synchronous meetings or attending office hours.

Do not expect a perfect grade merely for login in on Zoom/Google Meets.

If you encounter difficulties that prevent you from consistently participating in the course in one of the aforementioned ways, email me in advance to discuss alternative ways to show engagement in the course.

Group Presentation (20%)

Presentations will happen throughout the semester. Groups will be of 3 to 4 students. For this activity, each group will have to submit a short essay (**max. 1,000 words**) the day before their presentation is due, (2) record a presentation, and (3) ask questions in other presentations. Students will be graded as follows: 7% report (one per group); 7% presentation (one per group), 6% questions asked on other presentations (individual).

Group Worksheet (20%)

There will be weekly exercise worksheets throughout the course which will be done in group either in class or as take-home assignment. There will be about 8–9 worksheets but only the highest 5 scoring worksheets will count towards the final grade. Each assignment is worth 4%.

Please note that only those students who are present in the class the day the worksheet is distributed will be allowed to participate in this activity.

Final Paper (25%)

Paper (**max. 2,000 words**) is due on **May 3th**, Monday, by 11:59pm. The paper is on a self-chosen topic (with instructor/TA/GA approval).

NOTE: Things change – the Fates are fickle. Information found on this syllabus is subject to revision as we progress through the semester: Readings and content may be added (or cut) depending on our rate of progress, and it may be necessary to amend the due date of the assignments. Revisions will be announced in lecture and posted online. It is each student's responsibility to keep informed of any changes.



If you are facing a major medical or another major difficulty that is keeping you from doing well in the class, contact me as soon as you can. I am happy to work with you to find the best course of action and, if possible, to help you complete the course successfully. But I can't help if you don't let me know about your circumstances as soon as they arise.



Please, don't wait until after the last week of classes to let me know about your circumstances. At that point there is virtually nothing I can do to accommodate you.



MATERIALS

- All course materials, information, assignments, etc. will be available on Canvas.
- All communications will be made through your Ashoka email address and Canvas. Please make sure you have turned on notification alert on Account Notification Settings to get an email when you receive messages on Canvas.
- If you haven't received an invitation to access the course on Canvas, please email me!

GRADING

The usual grading scale will apply: 0-39% F, 40-44% D-, 45-49% D, 50-54% D+, 55-59% C-, 60-64% C, 65-69% C+, 70-74% B-, 75-79% B, 80-84% B+, 85-89% A-, 90-100% A.

Paper and exams will be graded based on the following **six** evaluation criteria:

Bare minimum: is the paper prompt or question addressed at all?

Clarity: Are the explanations of technical terms and arguments clear, understandable, and accessible to someone who is not taking the class?

Correctness: Are the explanations of technical terms, theories and arguments correct? Are the theories and arguments ascribed to the right philosophers?

Originality: Are there original cases, objections, or replies?

Relevance: Are there theses, cases, arguments, or any other information that are irrelevant to address the prompt? Is the paper lacking explanation of a relevant theory, thesis, case, or argument?

Structure: Does the paper have a clear structure, with introduction and conclusion? Are the theses, cases, and arguments presented in an organized way?

NOTE: While there is no evaluation criterion for grammar or typos, they may affect the grade if they are severe enough to compromise understanding. Before submitting written assignments always proof read them. Take note of campus resources listed below that offer assistance with essay-writing.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND CAMPUS RESOURCES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Your work must be your own. Submitting work which you have not composed yourself, or using another person's ideas without due credit, or failing to mark another person's words with appropriate quotation marks all constitute plagiarism. The instructor reserves the right to assess penalties for violations of academic integrity, which may include giving a failing grade for an assignment, for the entire course, or referral to a University disciplinary committee.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND CAMPUS RESOURCES

1) *ACWB (Ashoka Centre for Well-Being)*

If you're dealing with depression, anxiety, or are just feeling overwhelmed, ACWB is available to help. They offer individual counseling, group workshops, and other resources to make the semester more bearable.

- First floor of AC-02 (previously called 'New Academic Building'), next to TR106
- well.being@ashoka.edu.in
- Book an appointment: <http://acwb.ashoka.edu.in>

2) *CWC (Centre for Writing and Communication)*

CWC offers workshops on study skills, assistance with essay-writing, and other free services that will help you perform well in your classes.

- Third Floor, Administrative Block.
- <https://www.ashoka.edu.in/page/CWC-66>
- Book an appointment: <https://ashoka.mywconline.com>

3) *OLS (Office of Learning Support)*

If you have any sort of disability - physical or mental, permanent or temporary – we strongly encourage you to register with OLS. They can then notify your instructors if you need certain accommodations during classes or during tests.

A disability can be something like difficulty seeing or hearing; difficulty attending class due to physical or emotional distress; chronic anxiety or depression; or anything else that interferes with your schoolwork.

There's no shame in seeking help for these sorts of things. Contact them as soon as possible if you need or expect to need their support.

- Book an appointment: ols@ashoka.edu.in
- Request Support: <https://goo.gl/forms/8wYThiSMwv8f1G4L2>
- <https://www.ashoka.edu.in/page/ols-68#!/#section-418>

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS & ACTIVITIES

Overview

Week 1 Jan 18 Overview of course content & structure
syllabus,
and get to know each other/test technology

Individual Agency

Week 1 Jan 20 Introduction: Inward vs. Outward
Reading: Stout, R. "Action", Introduction, Chapter 1.

Week 2 Jan 25, 27 Acting for Reasons: A sense of 'why?'
Reading: Anscombe, G. "Intention", §1-18.

Week 3 Feb 1 A sense of 'why?' (cont'ed)
Worksheet #1 Due
Feb 3 Acting for Reasons: A causal theory
Davidson, D. *Essays on Actions and Events*, Essay 1 "Actions, Reasons, and Causes."

Week 4 Feb 8, 10 A causal theory (cont'ed)
Hursthouse, R. "Arational Actions."
Frankfurt, H.G. - "The problem of action"
<https://prezi.com/8kxd81puftpt/frankfurt-h-g-1978-the-problem-of-action-american-phi/>
Worksheet #2 Due

Week 5 Feb 15, 17 What are intentions?
Davidson, D. *Essays on Actions and Events*, Essay 5, "Intending."
Worksheet #3 Due

Week 6 Feb 22, 24 What are intentions? (cont'ed)
Bratman, M. "Two Faces of Intention."
Worksheet #4 Due

Week 7 Mar 1, 3 Can Buddha act?
 Readings: Finnigan,B. - How Can a Buddha Come to Act - The Possibility of a Buddhist Account of Ethical Agency
 Garfield,J.L. - Hey, Buddha! Dont Think Just Act—A Response to Bronwyn Finnigan
 Worksheet #5 Due


Week 8 Mar 8, 10: Midterm Break


Group or Collective Agency

Week 9 Mar 15 Lecture Canceled
 Extra-Credit Worksheet Due
 Mar 17 Shared Intention
 Bratman,M. “Shared Cooperative Activity”.

Week 10 Mar 22 Lecture Canceled
 Mar 24 Bratman (cont’ed)

Week 11 Mar 29 No Class: Holi
 Mar 30 Worksheet #6 Due
 Mar 31 Chant,S.R. “Unintentional Collective Action”.
 Apr 3 Make up lecture

Week 12 Apr 5, 7 Gilbert,M. “Shared Intention And Personal Intentions”
 Worksheet #7 Due

Social Identity & Agency

Week 13 Apr 12, 14 Readings: Cappelen,H. & Dever,J. *The Inessential Indexical*, Chapter 3: Indexicality, the *De Se*, and Agency.
 Recanati,F. “Immunity to error through misidentification: what it is and where it comes from”, in Recanati & Prosser, *Immunity to Error through Misidentification*
 Worksheet #8 Due

Week 14 Apr 19, 21 Salje,L. “The Essential Non-Indexical”.


Week 15 Apr 26, 28: Reading Week
Week 16 May 3, 5: Reading Week


Week 17 Final Paper
 May 10 Due date
 May 12 No Class

 *The End!* 