PH375-15 Making Decisions

22/23

Department
Philosophy
Level
Undergraduate Level 3
Module leader
Christoph Hoerl
Credit value
15
Module duration
10 weeks
Assessment
100% coursework
Study location
University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

We constantly face the need to make decisions, may they be relatively trivial (‘Do I go for the pepperoni pizza or the ham and pineapple one?) or momentous ones (‘Do I get married to him?’). Philosophers have looked at human decision making from a variety of different perspectives: What are the processes involved in the way people actually make decisions? How should we go about making decisions? What sorts of challenges do we face in making decisions, and how might we be able to overcome them? Should we regret bad decisions we made in the past, or just move on? This module aims to introduce students to some of the answers philosophers have given to these questions, and to evaluate them critically.

Module aims

By taking the topic of decisions as its focus, the module aims to foster students' understanding of issues such as the following: What is it to act rationally? Do people ultimately always act for selfish reasons? What makes something a hard choice? Why do we procrastinate and how can we overcome procrastination? What role do emotions play in decision-making? You will learn to analyse and critically evaluate the answers philosophers have given to such questions, and to situate them in wider philosophical debates. The module also aims to develop students' skills at reading and analysing philosophical literature and formulating philosophical arguments with clarity and precision.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

1. Rational choice theory (weeks 1-3)
   The nature of rational choice explanation
   Bounded rationality
   Philosophical critiques of rational choice theory
2. Hard choices (weeks 4-7)
   Incomparability and incommensurability
   Transformative choice
   Procrastination
3. Inter-temporal choice and the role of emotions (weeks 8-10)
   Dynamic choice and its paradoxes
   Temporal discounting and temporal bias
   Regret and choice

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- At the end of the module, you should have a good understanding of a number of ways in which decision making has been and continues to be the subject of philosophical debate, and how these debates relate to other areas of philosophy as well as to empirical research on decision making. You should be able to use some of the key concepts philosophers have used to analyse human decision making, and be able to critically evaluate both descriptive and normative accounts of human decision making in philosophy.

Indicative reading list

Andreou, Chrisoula, "Dynamic Choice." In: Zalta, E. (ed.): The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2017 Edition)
Becker, Gary. 1996. “The Economic Way of Looking at Life.” In: Accounting for Tastes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 139 – 161.
Bittner, Rüdiger. 1992. “Is It Reasonable to Regret Things One Did?” Journal of Philosophy 89 (5): 262–273.
Chang, Ruth (ed.), 1997. Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Hoerl, C., & McCormack, T. (2016). “Making decisions about the future: Regret and the cognitive function of episodic memory.” In K. Michaelian, S. Klein, & K. Szpunar (Eds.), Seeing the future: Theoretical perspectives on future-oriented mental time travel. Oxford University Press.
Elster, Jon. 1985. “The Nature and Scope of Rational-Choice Explanation.” In: E. LePore and B. McLaughlin (eds.): Actions and events: Perspectives on Donald Davidson. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 60-72.
Gigerenzer, Gerd, Peter M. Todd, and the ABC Research Group. 1999. Simple Heuristics that Make Us Smart. Oxford: Oxford University Press, esp. chapter 1.

Greene, Preston, and Meghan Sullivan, 2015. “Against Time Bias,” Ethics, 125: 947–70.
Paul, L. A. (2015). "What you can't expect when you're expecting." together with thirteen commentaries by other authors and a response by Paul. Res Philosophica 92, Vol. 2
Reuter, K., Messerli, M. (2017). How not to characterize a hard choice. Ratio 30(4), pp. 494–521.
Sen, Amartya. 1977. "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory." Philosophy and Public Affairs 6: 317 – 344.
Tversky, Amos and Daniel Kahneman. 1981. “The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice.” Science 211(4481): 453 – 458.
Ullmann-Margalit, E. (2006). “Big decisions: Opting, converting, drifting.” Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, 81(58), 157-172.
Velleman, David, 2000. “Deciding How to Decide,” in The Possibility of Practical Reason, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Subject specific skills

Students should be able to express themselves using precise philosophical vocabulary, appreciate what makes some questions about decision making distinctly philosophical ones, and engage independently in philosophical debate.

Transferable skills

To be added

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	18 sessions of 1 hour (12%)
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)
Private study	124 hours (83%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time
72 hour take home exam	20%	
2500 word essay	80%	

Feedback on assessment

Essays will be returned with written feedback on tabula, in line with the Philosophy department's policies and guidance on giving feedback to students.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- UHIA-V1V8 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
    - Year 3 of V1V8 History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
    - Year 4 of V1V8 History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy
    - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
    - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
    - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
    - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
- Year 4 of UPHA-V701 Undergraduate Philosophy (wiith Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of UPHA-V702 Undergraduate Philosophy (with Work Placement)
- Year 4 of UPHA-V7MM Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics (with Intercalated year)

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 3 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list B for:

- UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
    - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
    - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
    - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy

- Year 2 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list C for:

- Year 4 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list F for:

- UMAA-GV18 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year
    - Year 4 of GV18 Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year
    - Year 4 of GV18 Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year

This module is Option list A for:

- UPHA-VL78 BA in Philosophy with Psychology
    - Year 2 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
    - Year 3 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
- Year 4 of UPHA-VL79 BA in Philosophy with Psychology (with Intercalated year)

This module is Option list B for:

- UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature
    - Year 2 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
    - Year 3 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
- Year 4 of UPHA-VQ73 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature with Intercalated Year

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)

This module is Option list D for:

- UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
    - Year 2 of V1V5 History and Philosophy
    - Year 3 of V1V5 History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)
- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)