

PH997-30 Topics in Metaphysics and Epistemology

23/24

Department

Philosophy

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Lucy Campbell

Credit value

30

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

PH997 Topics in Metaphysics and Epistemology

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

This module will offer students critical engagement with selected central topics in Metaphysics and Epistemology through the careful study and discussion of seminal works in the area. Students will be expected to engage critically with the main arguments of the selected texts, and the philosophical positions presented in them. They will be expected to articulate their own views of the relative strengths and weaknesses of these arguments and positions.

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.

This module considers the interrelations between metaphysical and epistemological issues within

the sphere of philosophy of action. It discusses two approaches to the metaphysics of intentional action: the Causal Theory of Action (broadly following Donald Davidson), and an account of intentional action in terms of the agent's practical knowledge of what she is doing (broadly following Elizabeth Anscombe). We consider how key notions such as cause, reason, intention, and explanation, function in each approach. In the first half of the module, we discuss the causal theory, and consider whether and (if so how) Causal Theorists might be able to accommodate the distinctive knowledge an agent has of what she is intentionally doing. In the second half of the module, we discuss the alternative practical knowledge view of intentional action. We discuss how best to understand practical knowledge, concentrating on Anscombe's claims that it has a distinctive form by contrast with 'ordinary' or 'theoretical' knowledge. And we ask what kind of relationship there might be between practical knowledge of intentional action, and a deeper sense in which one may know or fail to know 'what one is doing' - a sense which ties action-theory to ethics.

Syllabus:

Week 1. Introduction: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Intentional Action
 Week 2. The Causal Theory of Action: Motivations and Challenges
 Week 3. Agent's knowledge on the Causal Theory: "Action-Awareness"
 Week 4. Agent's knowledge on the Causal Theory: Reasons, evidence, and inference
 Week 5. Velleman's Synthesis: The Causal Theory and "Anscombean" Practical Knowledge
 Week 6. READING WEEK: No seminar
 Week 7. The Practical Knowledge View: Motivations and Challenges
 Week 8. Practical knowledge, practical reasoning, and Anscombe's special question 'Why?'
 Week 9. Practical knowledge and knowledge-how
 Week 10. Practical knowledge, desire, and the good: Anscombe on 'practical truth'

Learning outcomes

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

- By the end of the module the student should be able to have a systematic and advanced understanding and knowledge of the texts covered in the module, the main arguments of the texts, and critical responses to those arguments.
- By the end of the module the student should be able to communicate at an advanced level clearly and substantively in speech and in writing on the questions addressed in the module. They should be able to provide critical analysis of the relevant texts.
- By the end of the module the student should be able to work autonomously to articulate their own view of the relative merits of arguments, methodologies and positions in the literature, and engage critically with other points of view.
- Students should be able to demonstrate the skills involved in philosophical discussion, they will have improved abilities to analyse and critically assess complex concepts and arguments.

They will be able to communicate at an advanced level clearly and substantively in speech, as well as in writing, the philosophical arguments and concepts covered in the texts. They will be able to demonstrate sound judgement and initiative in selecting appropriate texts and methods for their investigation of a specifically circumscribed problem and should have acquired an advanced ability to pursue and organize philosophical research, documenting research carefully, and showing the ability to engage independently in philosophical debate.

Indicative reading list

Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" (1963/2001)
Lucy O'Brien. "On Knowing One's Own Actions", ch. 9 in *Self-Knowing Agents* (2007)
Hannah Pickard. 2004. "Knowledge of Action without Observation"
Kieran Setiya. "Practical Knowledge" (2008) and "Practical Knowledge Revisited" (2009); both in *Ethics*
Sarah Paul. 2009. "How we Know what we're Doing" in *Philosophers' Imprint*
David Velleman. 1989. *Practical Reflection*, ch. 1 and ch. 2
John Schwenkler and Beri Marusic. 2018. "Intending is Believing" in *Analytic Philosophy*
Nathan Hauthaler. 2022. "Strong Cognitivist Weaknesses" in *Analytic Philosophy*
GEM Anscombe, *Intention*. (1957/2000)
Frederick Stoutland. "Summary of Anscombe's Intention" in Ford, Hornsby and Stoutland eds., *Essays on Anscombe's Intention* (2011)
Rosalind Hursthouse. "Intention" in R. Teichmann ed., *Logic, Cause, and Action: Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Anscombe* (2000)
Sarah Paul. 2011. "Deviant Formal Causation" in *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*
Lucy Campbell. 2018. "Two Notions of Intentional Action? Solving a Puzzle in Anscombe's Intention" in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*
Adrian Haddock. "The Knowledge that a Man Has of his Intentional Actions" in Ford, Hornsby and Stoutland eds., *Essays on Anscombe's Intention* (2011)
Michael Thompson. "Naive Action Theory" in *Life and Action* (2008)
Jennifer Frey. 2019. "Anscombe on Practical Knowledge and the Good" in *Ergo*
Roger Teichmann. 2008. *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, ch. 2
Lucy Campbell "On Anscombe on Practical Knowledge and Practical Truth"
Rachael Wiseman. 2016. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*, ch. 2

Research element

The module will be assessed by a long capstone essay, which must be the product of the student's own research, and should not simply re-hash the delivered content. Students are encouraged to use the provided reading list as a jumping-off point for this research.

Subject specific skills

- (i) The capacity to read key texts in philosophy of action, focused on the metaphysics and epistemology of intentional action.
- (ii) The capacity to explain key arguments and positions found in the module reading material.

- (iii) To develop an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the positions and arguments found in the texts covered by the module, and to be able to analyse and assess these positions and arguments in written and oral work.
- (iv) To work effectively with peers in group-oriented work on action-theory, and to communicate and think about the metaphysics and epistemology of intentional action in a seminar environment

Transferable skills

- (i) To acquire the capacity to read demanding material effectively and critically.
- (ii) To develop the capacity to explain demanding ideas and arguments clearly, briefly and accurately.
- (iii) To think creatively about problems by deploying the capacity for clear thinking and reasoning
- (iv) To work collaboratively and sensitively with others in a group environment, and to develop the self-confidence to communicate effectively in a group environment.
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	9 sessions of 2 hours (6%)
Private study	282 hours (94%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A4

	Weighting	Study time
5000 word essay	100%	

Feedback on assessment

Feedback on essays will be provided on the coversheet for the essay, addressing standard areas of evaluation and individual content.

Availability

Courses

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 1 of TPHA-V7PM Postgraduate Taught Philosophy
- TPHA-V7PN Postgraduate Taught Philosophy and the Arts
 - Year 1 of V7PN Philosophy and the Arts
 - Year 2 of V7PN Philosophy and the Arts

This module is Option list E for:

- Year 1 of TPHA-V7PM Postgraduate Taught Philosophy