

PHIL 5983: Action Theory Seminar

University of Arkansas, Spring 2007

I. Contact Information

Professor: Eric Funkhouser

Office hours: Mondays and Fridays 2:30 – 4:00 p.m., and by appointment

Office location: 308 Old Main

Office phone: 575-7441

Email: efunkho@uark.edu (This is the best way to reach me.)

Class meeting time: Wednesdays 3:30 – 5:50 p.m.

Classroom: Old Main 327

Class webpage: <http://comp.uark.edu/~efunkho/motivation.html>

All class handouts, and some additional information, will be posted on this website. So, be sure to check it out from time to time.

II. Texts (Required)

1. Mele, Alfred. 2003. *Motivation and Agency* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press).

The Mele book should be available at the campus bookstore.

2. Velleman, David. 2000. *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press).

The Velleman book is out of print. You may try to find your own used copy, but it is also available online at:

<http://homepages.nyu.edu/~dv26/Possibility/>

3. Many other readings will be available as photocopies in a folder in the Philosophy Library. You will be responsible for photocopying, or otherwise accessing them, yourself.

III. Course Description

The topic of this seminar is action theory and, more specifically, motivation. We begin the semester by considering some standard accounts of motivation, along with some objections. We then consider topics like the following: Can only desire-like states motivate? Are motivational states open to rational evaluation? Must all motivation be under the guise of the good? How, if at all, is weakness of the will possible? Is motivation internal to various normative judgments (moral judgment, in particular)? What is the motivation behind pretense and other actions in which imagination often plays a prominent role? Can imagination itself provide motives for action? Finally, we spend the last third of the semester discussing Alfred Mele's account of motivation and agency, as represented in his recent book *Motivation and Agency*.

As this is a graduate seminar, I expect all enrolled students to have done the readings by the date on which they are to be discussed in seminar. You are expected to be prepared with questions, objections, or otherwise make intelligent contributions to our class discussions.

IV. Grading

Your course grade will be a function of 4 factors, weighted (approximately) as follows:

- A term paper due at the end of the semester (50%)
- 4 short “reaction papers” on weekly readings (30%)
- An in-class presentation or discussion-leading session (20%)
- Weekly participation (pushes the grade here or there)

V. Miscellaneous

- Assignments are due as listed on the schedule below, or as specified later in the semester. Late assignments will not be accepted, but for *extreme circumstances*. Even in these extreme circumstances (death in family, hospitalization, imprisonment, etc.) you should notify me *before* the assignment is due.

- Academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism) is taken very seriously. Any violation will result in severe repercussions. For the University policy on academic dishonesty, see:

<http://www.uark.edu:80/campus-resources/rlee/honesty.html>

- If you require special accommodations for anything related to class performance, inform me of them by the first week of class (with proper documentation) so that the proper arrangements can be made.
- Inclement weather policy: Assume, until and unless you hear otherwise from me, that class will *not* be canceled due to inclement weather (even if the university's inclement weather policy is in effect). If class must be canceled due to the weather, or for any other reason, I will send out a class email as soon as possible. In the worst case scenario, I will simply have a notice posted in the classroom.

VI. Schedule of Reading Assignments

Note: This schedule is subject to change.

On Some Standard Accounts of Action

- W Jan 17: Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (excerpts)
Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes"
- W Jan 24: Davidson, "Agency"
Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"
Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality"
- W Jan 31: Velleman, "Introduction"
Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts?"

The Humean Theory of Motivation

- W Feb 7: Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (excerpts)
Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"
Smith, "The Humean Theory of Motivation"
- W Feb 14: Pettit, "Humeans, Anti-Humeans, and Motivation"
Smith, "On Humeans, Anti-Humeans, and Motivation: A Reply to Pettit"
Mele, "Motivation: Essentially Motivation-Constituting Attitudes"
- W Feb 21: Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (excerpt)
Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason"
Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason"

Motivation and Value

- W Feb 28: Davidson, “How is Weakness of the Will Possible?”
Watson, “Skepticism about Weakness of Will”
Stocker, “Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology”
- W March 7: Velleman, “Is Motivation Internal to Value?”
Velleman, “The Guise of the Good”

Motivation and Imagination

- W March 14: Velleman, “On the Aim of Belief”
Currie, “Imagination as Motivation”
- W March 21: **NO CLASS SPRING BREAK**
- W March 28: Nichols and Stich, *Mindreading* (excerpt)
Funkhouser and Spaulding, “Imagination and other Scripts”

Mele’s *Motivation and Agency*

- W April 4: Mele, “Motivation and Agency: *Precis*” and *M&A* pp. 3–66
- W April 11: Mele, *M&A* pp. 69–157
- W April 18: Mele, *M&A* pp. 161–245
- W April 25: Davis, “The Antecedent Motivation Theory — Discussion”
Ginet, “Comments on Alfred Mele, *Motivation and Agency* — Discussion”
Roth, “The Mysteries of Desire: A Discussion”
- W May 2: Mele, “Motivation and Agency: Replies”