

**PHIL 501: Seminar in Recent Philosophy**  
**Fall Semester 2022**

Instructor: Ralph Wedgwood  
Wednesdays, 4.30 – 6.50 pm  
MHP 102

**Course overview**

The theme of the seminar will be *rational choice*.

- First, we shall explore the nature of choice (decision, intention, preference, etc.), by working through Richard Holton’s book *Willing, Wanting, Waiting* (Oxford, 2009).
- Second, we shall think about what is involved in evaluating mental states or mental events as “rational”, by working through the first two-thirds of John Broome's book *Rationality through Reasoning* (Wiley, 2013).
- Third, we shall study a number of versions of formal decision theory, by working through most of James M. Joyce’s book *The Foundations of Causal Decision Theory* (Cambridge, 1999).
- Fourth, we shall think a bit more about the significance of this kind of formal decision theory, by looking at José Luis Bermúdez’ book *Decision Theory and Rationality* (Oxford, 2009), and a couple of further articles on the topic.

Electronic versions of these books and articles will be made available on the course Blackboard site.

**Work required**

Besides attending class, doing the assigned reading, and participating in class discussions, students who are taking the course for credit should make *one class presentation*, and write *one term paper*, on a subject of their choice, which they should choose in consultation with the instructor. They should schedule two meetings with the instructor – one in the first half of the semester, and another in the second half of the semester – to discuss their term paper plans.

The first draft of the term paper will be due by the last meeting of class (November 30); the final draft will be due eleven days later (December 12).

Each student's grade for the course will be based on the class presentation (25%) and the term paper (75%).

### **Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability should register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP), and provide us with a statement listing the requested accommodations. (DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8.30 a.m.–5.00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number is (213) 740-0776.)

### **Schedule of readings**

1. 24 August: Organizational meeting and preliminary discussion
2. 31 August: Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, Chaps. 1–2
3. 7 September: Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, Chaps. 3–5
4. 14 September: Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, Chaps. 6–8
5. 21 September: Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning*, Chaps. 1–4
6. 28 September: Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning*, Chaps. 5–8
7. 5 October: Broome, *Rationality through Reasoning*, Chaps. 9–11
8. 12 October: Joyce, *Foundations of Causal Decision Theory*, Chaps. 1–2
9. 19 October: Joyce, *Foundations of Causal Decision Theory*, Chaps. 3–4
10. 26 October: Joyce, *Foundations of Causal Decision Theory*, Chaps. 5 and 7
11. 2 November: Bermúdez, *Decision Theory and Rationality*, Chaps. 1–3
12. 9 November: Bermúdez, *Decision Theory and Rationality*, Chaps. 4–5
13. 16 November: Wedgwood, “*Akrasia and Uncertainty*” and “*Must rational intentions maximize utility?*”
14. 30 November: Wedgwood, “*Gandalf’s Solution to the Newcomb Problem*”, and Podgorski, “*Tournament Decision Theory*”