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 \textit{rational choice}.

- First, we shall explore the nature of choice (decision, intention, preference, etc.), by working through Richard Holton’s book \textit{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 \textit{Rationality through Reasoning} (Wiley, 2013).
- Third, we shall study a number of versions of formal decision theory, by working though most of James M. Joyce’s book \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{one class presentation}, and write \textit{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
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
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?”