

Nottingham Trent University

Module Specification

	Basic module information	
1	Module Title:	Reasons For Action
2	Module Code:	PHIL30315
3	Credit Points:	20
4	Duration:	Year Long
5	School:	Arts and Humanities
6	Campus:	Clifton
7	Date this version first approved to run:	Jan 2015

8 Pre, post and co-requisites:

These are modules that you must have studied previously in order to take this module, or modules that you must study simultaneously or in a subsequent academic session

<u>Pre, Co, Post</u>	<u>Module Code</u>	<u>Module Title</u>
Pre	Phil 201	Contemporary Philosophy

9 Courses containing the module

<u>Level</u>	<u>Core/Option</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Course Title</u>
		FT	HUMA008	BA (H) Communication & Society and Philosophy
		FT	HUMA016	BA (H) English and Philosophy
		FT	HUMA023	BA (H) European Studies and Philosophy
		FT	HUMA028	BA (H) Film & TV and Philosophy
		FT	HUMA033	BA (H) Global Studies and Philosophy
		FT	HUMA038	BA (H) History and Philosophy
		FT	HUMA042	BA (H) Linguistics and Philosophy
		FT	HUMA045	BA (H) Philosophy and International Relations
		SW	MODL014	BA (H) French and Philosophy
		SW	MODL027	BA (H) German and Philosophy
		SW	MODL039	BA (H) Italian and Philosophy
		SW	MODL058	BA (H) Spanish and Philosophy
		FT	EURX001	European Exchange (First Half Year)
		FT	EURX002	European Exchange (Second Half Year)

FT	EURX003	European Exchange (Full Year)
FT	INTX001	International Exchange (First Half Year)
FT	INTX002	International Exchange (Second Half Year)
FT	INTX003	International Exchange (Full Year)

10 Overview and aims

The aim of the module is to introduce students to selected issues around the general topic: what kind of reasons for acting one way rather than another are good reasons? One possible reason for doing something is the belief that it's the right thing to do: we ask whether morality can give us a reason for action. But we also consider other reasons for action (e.g. just wanting to do something) and what it is that we should be aiming for in life in general. People also act in a social context: what I have reason to do may depend on what you do, which in turn may depend on what you have reason to do. The module thus also involves some basic political philosophy and game theory, asking how human cooperation is possible.

11 Module content

This module focusses on the following two claims, and the ways in which they interact:

1. We have most reason to do what it is rational to do.
2. We have most reason to do what it is right to do.

These claims are often expressed in *normative* terms. A normative claim is a claim about what we *should*, or *ought to*, do. There is a clear sense in which both of the previous two claims are *prima facie* true when viewed normatively:

1. We have most reason to do what it is rational to do.
2. We have most reason to do what it is (morally) right to do.

But can they both be correct? What happens when the rational thing to do conflicts with the right thing to do? Indeed, can this ever happen? Or is *always* rational to be moral? These are the sorts of questions addressed in this module. The specific topics covered segue into one another, and can be viewed in terms of a series of questions, as follows:

The module begins by considering the claim that what we have most reason to do is that which it is our purpose to do, i.e. the claim that the only thing we truly ought to be doing is that which relates to the meaning of life.

This leads naturally the question: What is the "Good Life"? The following basic principle is assessed:

BASIC PRINCIPLE: An act is rational if it is rationally judged that performing it will make one's life go better.

The following questions are considered: what does it mean to say that acting in a certain way make one's life go better? Is this purely a subjective matter? Or are there objective features of a life that make it better even if they're not desired?

This leads to the following set of questions: Is it true that we all just go about trying to make our life go best? If not, is it true that this is what we all rationally or morally ought to be doing?

This in turn leads to a direct consideration of the question: 'Should we be moral?' The considerations of previous weeks will feed directly into the question: Is there any advantage to the individual in being moral?

Finally, the topics from the previous weeks are brought together by considering some basic political philosophy and game theory (and specifically some results about rational co-operation in Prisoner's Dilemma situations).

12 Indicative reading

Nagel, Thomas (1971). The absurd. *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (20):716-727.

Parfit, Derek A. (1984). *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: OUP

Wolf, Susan (1997). 'Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life.' *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14 (01):207-232

Moore, G. E. (1903). *Principia Ethica*. Dover Publications.

Williams, Bernard (1985). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Brandt, Richard (1972). 'Rationality, egoism, and morality.' *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (20):681-697.

Gauthier, D. P. (1967). 'Morality and advantage.' *The Philosophical Review*, 460-475.

Axelrod, R. M. (2006). *The evolution of cooperation*. New York: Basic books.

13 Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes describe what you should know and be able to do by the end of the module

Knowledge and understanding. After studying this module you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of the techniques of philosophical reasoning and analysis
- Critical evaluate opposing philosophical positions and offer reasons why one position is more persuasive/important than others in the field
- Demonstrate a good understanding of the key arguments relating to the issue of what we have reasons to do
- Analyse some of the central views presented about the meaning of life, self-interest, and moral reasons for action

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the basis of the distinction between rational and moral reasons for action, and understand how the two conflict and otherwise interact • Understand the relevance of philosophical ideas and forms of questioning for everyday life
Skills, qualities and attributes. After studying this module you should be able to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a good understanding of how to construct a cogent argument in relation to philosophical debates and organise a complex body of information into meaningful prose • Prove in practice how generalisations can be supported or weakened by detailed discussion • Understand the positions of historical and contemporary philosophers who have engaged with the question of what reasons we have to act • Evaluate, in detail, the success of arguments relating to the topic of what we have reasons to do

14 **Teaching and learning**

Range of modes of direct contact

This indicates the range of direct contact teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. lectures, seminars

Teaching and learning methods will normally consist of weekly two hour lectures accompanied by a one hour seminar.

Total contact hours: 52

Range of other learning methods

This indicates the range of other teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. directed reading, research

Alongside the standard package of lecture / seminar sessions, you will be invited to participate in a number of more independent learning exercises. For example, you may be asked to read chapters and sections from books and articles, and use this as the basis for preparing for seminars as well as the final essay. Reading is an essential learning activity for this module

Total non-contact hours: 148

15 **Assessment methods**

This indicates the type and weighting of assessment elements in the module

<u>Element number</u>	<u>Weighting</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>
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1	100%	Essay	1 Summative End of Semester Essay
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Diagnostic/formative assessment

This indicates if there are any assessments that do not contribute directly to the final module mark

You will be offered opportunities to submit and discuss an essay outline, which will help you develop a feasible approach to the necessary research for the essay as well to improve the structure and content of the writing. You will also have the opportunity to receive formative feedback on a weekly basis based on seminars.

Participation and engagement in seminar work and workshops on a group and an individual basis.

Further information on assessment

This section provides further information on the module's assessment where appropriate

The assessment for this module consists of :

- 1 x 4,000 word essay (100% of final module mark)

Document management

16	Module Title:	Reasons For Action
17	Module Code:	PHIL30315
18	Subject (JACS) Code	V500
19	Cost Centre	141
20	School:	AAH
21	Academic Team	ECM
22	Campus	2 (Clifton)
23	Other institutions providing teaching	<i>Please complete in box 23 a-d - if applicable</i>
		Institution %
23a	Other UK Higher Education or Further Education Institution- Please name Percentage not taught by NTU	
23b	Other public organisation in the UK- Percentage not taught by	

	NTU	
23c	Other private organisation in the UK - Percentage not taught by NTU	
23d	Any other Non-UK organisation - Percentage not taught by NTU	
24	Date this version was formally approved by SASQC/DAG:	