

Introduction to the Philosophy of Action

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Please note that this is only a selection of some of the literature in philosophy of action. More relevant reading can also be found in the faculty reading lists for Ethics (103) and Philosophy of Mind (104). For further reading on the nature of scientific explanation and the use of scientific laws see also the reading list for Philosophy of Science & Social Science (105 & 106); for questions about agency, free will, and determinism see the faculty reading list for Philosophy of Cognitive Science (125) under “Agency and Free Will”.

* Indicates a particularly helpful, insightful, or central work.

The most useful single introductory volume – covering a whole range of problems, questions, and positions in the philosophy of action – is:

[1] * O’Connor, T. & Sandis, C. (eds.), *A companion to the philosophy of action*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

§1 *General collections & anthologies:*

[2] Aguilar, J.H. & Buckareff, A.A. (eds.), *Causing human actions : new perspectives on the causal theory of action*, Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 2010.

[3] Bransen, J. & Cuypers, S.E. (eds.), *Human Action, Deliberation and Causation*, Dordrecht: Springer, 1998.

[4] * Dancy, J. & Sandis, C. (eds.), *Philosophy of Action : An Anthology*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

[5] Hyman, J. & Steward, H. (eds.), *Agency and action*, Cambridge: CUP, 2004.

[6] * Leist, A. (ed.), *Action in context*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007.

[7] Mele, A. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: OUP, 1997.

[8] * Sandis, C. (ed.), *New Essays on the Explanation of Action*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

§3 *Elizabeth Anscombe:*

[9] * Anscombe, G.E.M., *Intention*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957 (2nd ed. 1963, reprinted Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000).

[10] * Anscombe, G.E.M., *Causality and Determination : an inaugural lecture*, Cambridge: CUP, 1971 (reprinted in [13]).

[11] * Anscombe, G.E.M., “Under a Description”, in *Noûs*, 13, 1979 (reprinted in [13]).

[12] Anscombe, G.E.M., *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein : Collected Philosophical Papers Volume I*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981.

[13] * Anscombe, G.E.M., *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind : Collected Philosophical Papers Volume II*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981.

[14] Anscombe, G.E.M., *Ethics, religion and politics : Collected Philosophical Papers Volume III*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981.

§4 *Helpful guides and articles on Anscombe:*

[15] * Campbell, L., “Two notions of intentional action? Solving a puzzle in Anscombe’s *Intention*”, forthcoming in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (published online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2017.1396959>).

[16] * Ford, A., Hornsby, J. & Stoutland, F. (eds.), *Essays on Anscombe’s Intention*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011.

[17] Hornsby, J., “Actions in their Circumstances”, in [16].

[18] Moran, R. & Stone, M.J., “Anscombe on Expression of Intention : An Exegesis”, in [16].

[19] Stoutland, F., “Anscombe’s *Intention* in Context”, in [16].

[20] * Stoutland, F., “Summary of Anscombe’s *Intention*”, in [16].

[21] Teichmann, R., *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, Oxford: OUP, 2008.

[22] Teichmann, R., “Anscombe”, in [1].

[23] * Wiseman, R., *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Anscombe’s Intention*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

§5 Donald Davidson:

- [24] * Davidson, D., “Actions, Reasons, and Causes”, in *Journal of Philosophy*, 60, 1963 (reprinted in [30]).
- [25] Davidson, D., “The Logical Form of Action Sentences”, in Rescher, N. (ed.) *The Logic of Decision and Action*, Pittsburg, PA: Pittsburg UP, 1967 (reprinted in [30]).
- [26] * Davidson, D., “Mental Events”, in Foster, L. & Swanson, J.W. (eds.) *Experience and Theory*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970 (reprinted in [30]).
- [27] Davidson, D., “Agency”, in Binkley, R., Bronaugh, R. & Marras, A. (eds.) *Agent, Action, and Reason*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press (reprinted in [30]).
- [28] Davidson, D., “Thinking Causes”, in Heil, J. & Mele, A. (eds.) *Mental Causation*, Oxford: OUP, 1991 (reprinted in Davidson, D., *Truth, Language, and History*, Oxford: OUP, 2005).
- [29] Davidson, D., “Laws and Cause”, in *Dialectica*, 49, 1995 (reprinted in Davidson, D., *Truth, Language, and History*, Oxford: OUP, 2005).
- [30] * Davidson, D., *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001 (2nd ed.; 1st ed.: 1980).
- [31] Davidson, D., *Problems of Rationality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.

§6 Discussions and collections on Davidson’s work:

- [32] LePore, E. & McLaughlin, B. (eds.), *Actions and Events : Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985.
- [33] Malpas, J. (ed.), *Dialogues with Davidson : acting, interpreting, understanding*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.
- [34] Stoecker, R., “Davidson”, in [1].
- [35] * Stoutland, F., “Interpreting Davidson on Intentional Action”, in [33].

§7 Overview of the Development of Philosophy of Action:

- [36] Hyman, J., “Agency and the Will”, in [105].
- [37] * Stoutland, F., “Three Conceptions of Action”, in Stachowiak, H. (ed.), *Pragmatik*, Vol. 3: *Allgemeine philosophische Pragmatik*, Hamburg: Meiner, 1989.

See also: [19].

§8 *Explanation of Action & Behaviour:*

- [38] Davidson, D., “Psychology as Philosophy”, in Brown, S.C. (ed.) *Philosophy of Psychology*, London: Macmillan Press, 1974 (reprinted in [30]).
- [39] Davidson, D., “Hempel on Explaining Action”, in *Erkenntnis*, 10, 1976 (reprinted in [30]).
- [40] Dray, W., *Laws and Explanation in History*, Oxford: OUP, 1957.
- [41] Gardiner, P., *The Nature of Historical Explanation*, Oxford: OUP, 1952.
- [42] * Hempel, C., “The Function of General Laws in History”, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 39, 1942.
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- [44] * Hempel, C., “Rational Action”, in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 35, 1962.
- [45] Levi, Y., “Intentional action first”, in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 91, 2013.
- [46] * Mayr, E., “The Problem of Human Agency”, in [REF].
- [47] Sehon, S., “Teleological Explanation”, in [1].
- [48] * Smith, M., “The Possibility of Philosophy of Action”, in [3].
- [49] Stoutland, F., “The Problem of Congruence : Rational Explanation and Neuroscience”, in Niiniluoto, I. & Vilkkko, R. (eds.), *Philosophical Essays in Memoriam : Georg Henrik von Wright*, Helsinki: Philosophical Society of Finland, 2005.
- [50] Taylor, C., *The Explanation of Behaviour*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.
- [51] von Wright, G.H., *Explanation and Understanding*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.
- See also: [1], [2], [3], [4], [6], [8], [20], [30], [31], [32], [35], [53], [56], [60], [107], [112], [116].

§9 *Reasons & Causes:*

- [52] Alvarez, M., *Kinds of Reasons : An Essay on the Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: OUP, 2010.

- [53] * Alvarez, M., “Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation”, in Zalta, E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/reasons-just-vs-expl/>.
- [54] Dancy, J., *Practical Reality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.
- [55] Finlay, S. & Schroeder, M., “Reasons for Action: Internal vs. External”, in Zalta, E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/reasons-internal-external/>.
- [56] * O’Connor, T., “Reasons and Causes”, in [1].
- [57] Ridge, M., “Reasons for Action: Agent-Neutral vs. Agent-Relative”, in Zalta, E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/reasons-agent/>.
- [58] * Smith, M., “The Humean Theory of Motivation”, in *Mind*, 96, 1987.
- [59] Stoutland, F., “The Logical Connection Argument”, in Malcom, N. & Rescher, N. (eds.), *Studies in the theory of knowledge : essays*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970.
- [60] * Stoutland, F., “The Real Reasons”, in [3].

See also: [1], [2], [3], [4], [6], [7], [8], [24], [32], [48], [49], [101], [107], [112].

§9 Basic Actions:

- [61] Baier, A., “The search for basic actions”, in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 8, 1971.
- [62] * Danto, A., “Basic Actions”, in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2, 1965.
- [63] * Lavin, D., “Must there be basic actions?”, in *Noûs*, 47, 2013.
- [64] * Sandis, C., “Basic Actions and Individuation”, in [1].
- [65] Stoutland, F., “Basic actions and causality”, in *Journal of Philosophy*, 65, 1968.

See also: [27], [48], [81], [82], [89], [101], [112].

§10 Deviant Causal Chains:

- [66] Chisholm, R., “Freedom and Action”, in Lehrer, K. (ed.), *Freedom and Determinism*. New York: Random House, 1966.
- [67] Davidson, D., “Freedom to act”, in Honderich, T. (ed.), *Essays on Freedom and Action*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973 (reprinted in [30]).

[68] * Frankfurt, H., “The problem of action”, in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 15, 1978.

[69] Moya, C., “Wayward Causal Chains”, in [112].

[70] * Stout, R., “Deviant Causal Chains”, in [1].

See also: [48], [82], [114], [116], [117].

§11 The “Standard Story” of action & its critics

[71] Bratman, M., “Two Problems About Human Agency”, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 101, 2001 (reprinted in [102]).

[72] * Davis, W.A., “The Causal Theory of Action”, in [1].

[73] * Hornsby, J., “Agency and actions”, in [5].

[74] Hornsby, J., “Agency and alienation”, in de Caro, M. & Macarthur, D. (eds.), *Naturalism in question*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004.

[75] * Hornsby, J., “The Standard Story of Action : An Exchange (2)”, in [2].

[76] Leist, A. “Introduction: Through Contexts to Action”, in [5].

[77] Moore, M., “Renewed Questions about the Causal Theory of Action”, in [2].

[78] Velleman, J.D., “What happens when someone acts?”, in *Mind*, 101, 1992 (reprinted in [118]).

[79] Small, W., “Bodily Movement and Its Significance”, in *Philosophical Topics*, 44, 2016.

[80] Smith, M., “The Structure of Orthonomy”, in [5].

[81] * Smith, M. “The Standard Story of Action : An Exchange (1)”, in [2].

[82] * Smith, M. “Four objections to the standard story of action (and four replies)”, in *Philosophical Issues*, 22, 2012.

See also: [35], [48], [63], [101], [102], [107], [120].

§12 Ontology of Actions: events, processes, and alternative views:

[83] * Alvarez, M. & Hyman, J., “Agents and their Actions”, in *Philosophy*, 73, 1998.

[84] Chisholm, R., “Events and Propositions”, in *Noûs*, 4, 1970.

[85] Chisholm, R., “States of affairs again”, in *Noûs*, 5, 1971.

- [86] Davidson, D., “The individuation of events”, in Rescher, N. (ed.), *Essays in Honor of Carl G. Hempel*, Dordrecht : Reidel, 1969 (reprinted in [30]).
- [87] Davidson, D., “Events as Particulars”, in *Noûs*, 4, 1970 (reprinted in [30]).
- [88] Ford, A., “Action and Passion”, in *Philosophical Topics*, 42, 2014.
- [89] * Lavin, D., “On the Problem of Action”, published (in German) as “Über das Problem des Handelns” in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 61, 2013 (available in English online: <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/9887629>).
- [90] * Lowe, E.J., “Action Theory and Ontology”, in [1].
- [91] * Steward, H., *The Ontology of Mind : Events, Processes, and States*, Oxford: OUP, 1995.
- [92] Steward, H., *A Metaphysics for Freedom*, Oxford: OUP, 2012.
- [93] Steward, H., “Actions as Processes”, in *Philosophical Perspectives*, 26, 2012.
- [94] * Stout, R., “Processes”, in *Philosophy*, 72, 1997.
- [95] Stout, R., “What are you causing in acting?”, in [2].
- [96] von Wright, G.H., *Norm and Action*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963.
- See also: [16], [30], [60], [106], [112], [117], [119].

§13 Agent & substance causation:

- [97] Bishop, J., “Agent-causation”, in *Mind*, 92, 1983.
- [98] * Clarke, R., “Agent Causation”, in [1].
- [99] Lowe, E.J., *Personal Agency : The Metaphysics of Mind and Action*, Oxford: OUP, 2008.
- [100] * O’Connor, T., *Persons and Causes : The Metaphysics of Free Will*, Oxford: OUP, 2000.

See also: [66], [83], [92], [113].

§14 Other prominent philosophers & works on action:

- [101] Audi, R., *Action, Intention, and Reason*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- [102] * Bratman, M., *Structure of Agency : essays*, Oxford: OUP, 2007.
- [103] Goldman, A., *A Theory of Human Action*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970.
- [104] Ginet, C., *On Action*, Cambridge: CUP, 1990.

- [105] * Hyman, J., *Action, Knowledge, and Will*, Oxford: OUP, 2015.
- [106] Hornsby, J., *Actions*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.
- [107] * Hornsby, J., *Simple Mindedness : In defense of naive naturalism in the philosophy of mind*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997.
- [108] * Kenny, A., *Action, emotion, and will*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963.
- [109] * Mayr, E., *Understanding Human Agency*, Oxford: OUP, 2011.
- [110] Melden, A., *Free Action*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961.
- [111] Mele, A., *The Springs of Action*, Oxford: OUP, 1992.
- [112] Moya, C., *The Philosophy of Action : An Introduction*, Oxford: Polity, 1990.
- [113] * Nagel, T., *The View From Nowhere*, Oxford: OUP, 1986.
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- [115] Ryle, G., *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson, 1949.
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