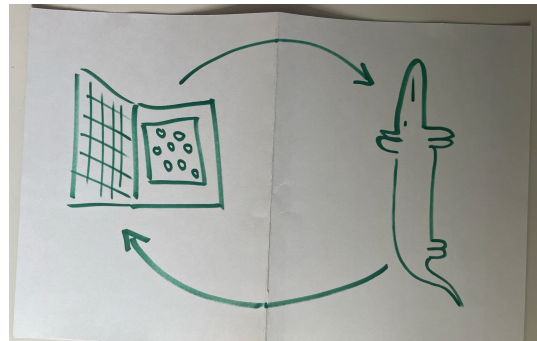


THE AGENT

Wesleyan University (Spring 2026)



COURSE DESCRIPTION

A peculiar feature of contemporary North Atlantic culture is its concern to discover, describe, obtain, and redistribute something called "agency." This course examines the cultural metaphysics of agency and action that captivates modernity in general and liberalism in particular. Considering scenes of revolution, education, devotion, technology, habit, sleep, attention, psychedelia, and therapy, we will undertake a sort of "fieldwork in liberalism," scrutinizing the form of life whose protagonists and critics are transfixed by the figure of the Agent.

READINGS

G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*
Talal Asad, "Agency and Pain"
Claire Carlisle, *On Habit*
Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy"
Ted Chiang, "What's Expected of Us" and "Story of Your Life"
Raymond Geuss, "Liberalism and Its Discontents"
Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran*
Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology*
Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"
Susan James, *Passion to Action*
Jonathan Lear, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*
Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*
Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Agency, and the Liberatory Subject"
Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection"
Eve Sedgwick, "Epidemics of the Will"
Justin Smith-Ruiu, *On Drugs*
Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*
Haytham el-Wardany, *The Book of Sleep*
Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*