

Action

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Abstract

Action refers to ‘doing things’, and technically is the cause of everything done — from the fundamentals of agriculture to the abstraction of art.

1 Gamut of nuances

Action (from *agere* [L], to act, to do; originally from *άγειν* [Gk], to drive, conduct — *cf.* strategy, pedagogy) indicates the fact or process of doing something — typically to achieve an aim, which implies intention and consciousness. A number of Greek and Latin words capture action in various nuances (Table 1). It is worth noting that the principal linguistic means to communicate action are verbs (from *verbum* [L], word), which become the single indispensable grammatical element.

SOURCE	MEANING	DERIVATIVES
δράσις[Gk]	action	drastic
πράξις[Gk]	action, deed	pragmatic
πράγμα [Gk]	deed, fact	pragmatic
<i>agere</i> [L]	to do, act	active
δράν [Gk]	to act	drastic
πράτειν [Gk]	to do, act	practical
<i>facere</i> [L]	to do, make	manufacture
<i>actus</i> [L]	thing done, event	act
δράμα [Gk]	thing done, event	dramatic
<i>factum</i> [L]	thing done	factual

TABLE 1 Nuances (or shades — from *nubs* [L], cloud) of ‘action’

The equivalent of ‘action’ in Greek is *δράσις*; similarly, the equivalent of *actus* [L] is *δράμα* [Gk] — from *δράν* [Gk], to act. The extensive use of ‘drama’ as *enactment* or ‘thespian¹ action’, raises philosophical questions with regards to what is ‘true’ and what is simulated. This relates to the concern that ‘life tends to imitate art stronger than art imitates life’ (Wilde, 1891; Perdicóulis,

¹Thespis was a 6th C. BC Greek dramatic poet, regarded as the founder of the dramatic art and [Greek] theatre.

2013). When in doubt, facts — from *facere* [L], to do, make — easily connect back to reality. In a general, more pragmatic — from *πράτειν* [Gk], to do, act — approach, deeds (from the verb ‘to do’) are as close to reality as possible.

2 Doing it right: function and performance

Action is a general value, as it makes ‘things go round’ and creates the much appreciated ‘dynamism’: constant change, moved by ‘forces’ (*δύναμη* [Gk], force). Dedicated actions are known as ‘functions’ — from *fungor*² [L], perform, execute, discharge. Following the duties implied by function, performance — from *par*, through, to completion + *fournir* [F], to furnish, provide — is appreciated as the way of applying the action and/ or bringing about the intended outcomes.

SOURCE	MEANING	DERIVATIVES
<i>fungor</i> [L]	to perform, execute, discharge	function
<i>fingir</i> [L]	to fake, pretend	fingido (faked)
<i>fournir</i> [F]	furnish, provide	performance

TABLE 2 Appreciated (and not) aspects of action

3 Work and wealth

Performing an action is also known as ‘work’ — of Germanic origin, related to *Werk* [De], from an Indo-European root shared by *ἔργον* [Gk], work — Table 3. The Latin equivalent of *ἔργον* is *opus* [L] (plural: *opera* [L], works), which bears a strong artistic connotation. Once again, like with drama, the action is taken to the theatrical stage.

SOURCE	MEANING	DERIVATIVES
<i>Werk</i> [De]	work (activity/ object)	workaholic
<i>ἔργον</i> [Gk]	work (activity/ object)	ergonomics
<i>opus</i> [L] (pl. <i>opera</i>)	work (activity/ object)	operation
<i>opes</i> [L]	wealth, affluence	opulence
<i>apnas</i> [Skt]	revenue, possession	opulence (and probably <i>opus</i>)

TABLE 3 Hard work, theatrical aspirations, and opulence

The Sanskrit *apnas* [Skt], revenue, possession (Le Littré, 2008) provides some insight — or, rather, raises questions — about early land economics. Being the root of (a) *ops* [L], power, might, influence, resources/ wealth (Aversa and Whitaker, 2008), or land (Le Littré, 2008) and (b) *opes* [L], wealth, affluence, could it also be the root of *opus* [L], work? And if it is, then is it possible that the wealth as in *opulence* (from *opes*) was considered a product of accumulated hard work (*opus*) put into the land?

²Cf. Portuguese: *fingir* [Pt], to fake — perhaps through an ironic use.

Documentation

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