

Syllabus for *Logic, Reason, and Persuasion*: PHI-101-90

Instructor: Christopher Willard-Kyle

Email: christopher.willard.kyle@rutgers.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment

Office Location: 106 Somerset St., NB
5th Floor, Office #525 (to the right)

Introduction

Welcome to Philosophy 101, Logic, Reason, and Persuasion. If there is one guiding question of the course, it is this: Practically speaking, how should we persuade ourselves or others what to believe in the most responsible way?

Course Goals

Students will learn the basics of first-order logic. This will be done with an aim not of mastering the (important!—but for our purposes instrumental) formalisms, but the aim of learning how to construct and deconstruct arguments in a way that manifests their logical structure—to make arguments clear.

Students will learn about common heuristics that we rely on to make decisions—and how to identify when such heuristics cause us to err.

Students will learn to think and write reflectively about how different belief-forming practices shape us individually and collectively.

Required Materials

Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*

The Power of Logic (Howard-Snyder, Howard-Snyder, & Wasserman)

Consistent access to Sakai, where other readings and resources will be posted

General Description of the Course

What should a course on *reasoning* be about? One could make the case that *every* class is about reasoning at some level. A class in chemistry will expect you to learn information about bonding and isotopes and reactions, but—if the course is any good—it will also teach you how to think scientifically, which is one very important way of *reasoning well*. Similar things could be said for most other disciplines.

So what should a course on reasoning be about? We might hope to get some help from the other two words in the course title, “logic” and “persuasion.” The mention of logic suggests that this course should be about one or several of the mathematical systems in the study of logic, employed by philosophers to formally represent good arguments. Indeed, part of this class *will* be about one such formal system, but there are other courses in the university—in both the math and philosophy departments—that deal with logic more directly at various levels of complexity. This isn’t *just* a course about logic.

“Persuasion” suggests that this course should be about rhetoric, communication studies, or perhaps psychology. And indeed, we will learn something about each of those fields (mostly psychology). But this isn’t a course in the psychology department—or the communication department for that matter. It’s in the philosophy department. And so—although these important subjects are taught as their own disciplines across the university—they aren’t the focus of our class.

We will study logic, psychology, and rhetoric in this class, our study of them will be mercenary... the price paid for understanding something else.

So then what is our course on reasoning about? Applied epistemology. Epistemology is the study of knowledge and rational thinking. In applied epistemology, we care a bit less about what knowledge and rational thinking are (not, of course, that we don’t care about it at all!) and much more about what practically we should do to be good thinkers.

To achieve this, our course weaves together three strands. By reading Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, we’ll examine the psychological question of how we humans actually think, with particular attention to the heuristics we rely on that (sometimes!) lead us astray. Second we’ll work through three chapters of *The Power of Logic* by Howard-Snyder, Howard-Snyder, and Wasserman. I’ve tried to pare down our work to just the bare bones of logic required to identify the basic structure of (most) arguments. It’s amazing, actually, how much good argumentation we can model using only a handful of formal tools. The third strand will be to read philosophically-informed texts that suggest practical ways to reason more effectively. We’ll discuss where to get the news, how (if at all) to persuade rationally *without* arguments, and how to balance thinking well with acting rightly.

Course Readings: Schedule

Week 1: Jan 22-27

Kahneman: Pages 3-13 of the Introduction, Chapters 1-3

Power of Logic: 1.1, Validity and Soundness

Discussion: Introduction to the Course (syllabus)

Week 2: Jan 28 – Feb 3

Kahneman: Chapters 4-6

Power of Logic: 1.2, Forms and Counterexamples

Discussion: What Good Persuasion Looks Like (Aristotle)

Week 3: Feb 4-10

Kahneman: Chapters 7-9

Power of Logic: 1.3, Some “Famous” Forms

Discussion: Facts and Opinions—What’s the (real) Difference? (Pew Research, McBrayer)

Week 4: Feb 11-17

Kahneman: Chapters 10-12

Power of Logic: 1.4, Strength and Cogency

Discussion: Curating the News (Funnell, Beck, Lackey)

Week 5: Feb 18-24

Kahneman: Chapters 13-15

Power of Logic: 2.1, Arguments and Nonarguments

Discussion: Implicit Bias Part I (Project Implicit, Gendler §1-2)

Week 6: Feb 25 – Mar 3

Kahneman: Chapters 16-18

Power of Logic: 2.2, Well-Crafted Arguments

Discussion: Implicit Bias Part II (Gendler)

Week 7: Mar 4-10

Kahneman: Chapters 19-21

Power of Logic: 7.1, Symbolizing English Arguments

Midterm

Week 8: Mar 11-15

Kahneman: Chapters 22-24

Power of Logic: 8.1, Implicational Rules of Inference

Discussion: Does it Make Sense to Agree to Disagree? (Feldman)

**** Spring Break: Mar 16-24 ****

Week 9: Mar 25-31

Kahneman: Chapters 25-28

Power of Logic: 8.2, Five Equivalence Rules

No Discussion (extra time to work on the rules so far)

`Week 10: April 1-7

Kahneman: Chapters 29-30
Power of Logic: 8.3, Five More Equivalence Rules
Discussion: Telling Instead of Arguing (Nelson)

`Week 11: April 8-14

Kahneman: Chapters 30-32
Power of Logic: 8.4, Conditional Proof
Discussion: Imagination, Fiction, and Perspectives (Camp)

`Week 12: April 15-21

Kahneman: Chapters 33-34
Power of Logic: 8.5, *Reductio Ad Absurdum*
Discussion: Telling Truth in Fiction (Le Guin, Chiang)

`Week 13 April 22-28

Kahneman: Chapters 35-36
Power of Logic: 8.6, *Proving Theorems*
Discussion: Reason in Fiction (Chiang, Steinberg)

`Week 14: April 29 – May 6

Kahneman: Chapters 37-38, Conclusions
Power of Logic: Flex Week
Discussion: Rational or Irrational Animals? (Kahneman)

Finals Week

Final Exam

Discussions Questions

Week 1: Complete the “introductions” project in the assignments folder on Sakai. No replies to comments required.

Reading: Syllabus

Week 2: Critically evaluate *either* Aristotle’s claim that “it is not right to pervert the judge by moving him to anger or pity—one might as well warp a carpenter’s rule before using it”—are appeals to emotion in the search of truth always improper?—or his claim that “things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites”—is this too optimistic?

Reading: Highlighted portions of Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* Book 1, parts 1-3.

Week 3: What is the difference between a fact and an opinion? How can we tell the difference (if there is one) between factual statements and opinion statements?

Reading: Take the Pew Research quiz, Pew Research Center's *Fact and Opinion Report*, McBrayer's "Why our Children don't Think there are Moral Facts"

Week 4: Write a letter to a high school student advising them on the best way to get the news.

Reading: Funnell's "Bubble Trouble," Beck's "This Article won't Change your Mind," and Lackey's "Echo Chambers Not the Problem"

Week 5: Write a letter to a high school student discussing strategies for identifying and overcoming one's own implicit biases.

Reading: Complete at least two of the implicit bias quizzes from Project Implicit, preferably on different topics (e.g. if the first is on racial bias, consider doing a second on gender or religion); read Gendler's "On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias" §1-2

Week 6: Toward the end of her paper, Gendler writes, "living in a society structured by race appears to make it impossible to be both rational and equitable." Is this overly pessimistic? Why or why not? If this is true, when should we choose to be rational and when should we choose to be equitable?

Reading: Gendler's "On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias"

Week 8: Imagine being someone who has either (a) different religious beliefs or (b) different political beliefs from yours. Should (imagined) you think that someone with your beliefs is rational? Why or why not? What would it mean for you to tolerate this person's beliefs?

Reading: Feldman's "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"

Week 10: Is it rational to persuade people without arguments? Why or why not?

Reading: Nelson's "Telling it like it is: Philosophy as Descriptive Manifestation"

Week 11: TBD

Reading: selections from Camp's "Perspectives in Imaginative Engagement with Fiction"

Week 12: Write an additional scene of Chiang's documentary. Introduce at least two different characters.

Reading: Le Guin's "Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*", Chiang's "Liking What You See: A Documentary"

Week 13: Chiang and Steinberg both consider protagonists who come to believe that reason is either incapable of demonstrating even basic mathematical truths or capable of demonstrating mathematical absurdity. Both envision protagonists who discover that reason fails, and both protagonists despair. Imagine what response you might have if you discovered that reason failed in either of these ways. What does that response tell us about the role of reason in human life?

Reading: Chiang's "Division by Zero," Selections from Steinberg's "As a Driven Leaf"

Week 14: Aristotle is often credited with the view that humans are “rational animals.” On one reading of Kahneman, he supports the thesis that humans are more irrational than they are rational. Discuss.

Reading: Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (No new reading, simply reflect on and refer to what you’ve already read throughout the course)

The Weekly Structure

Throughout the whole course, we’ll read Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. His psychologically-informed approach will help us stay attuned to the biases and heuristics that color our thinking. Progress will be assessed by weekly quizzes. We’ll also make our way through excerpts of *The Power of Logic*. Each unit will be accompanied by a short problem set that you will turn in. The centerpiece of (almost) every week will be a discussion on an article or collection of short papers that addresses a question about good reasoning practice.

Here is a template for a normal week’s schedule. Responsibilities for **students** are in **green**. Responsibilities for the **instructor** are in **blue**.

Monday: (a) **quiz on TFS due by 10 pm**, (b) **mini lecture previewing logic**, (c) **mini lecture previewing discussion**.

Tuesday: (a) **problem sets from the previous week graded**

Wednesday: (a) **upload comment on discussion to Sakai by noon**, (b) **upload any questions to question folder**

Thursday: (a) **reply to comment on discussion board**, (b) **turn in problem set by 10 pm**

Friday: (a) **mini lecture wrapping up discussion**, (b) **response to the most asked questions**, (c) **discussion comments and replies graded**

It’s up to you to set your own pace of work throughout the course. The quizzes will always be up at least one week early, and the discussion questions and logic assignments a couple weeks early. You may certainly work ahead if that is better for your schedule. (Obviously, you will not be able to reply to a comment in a discussion forum unless someone else has already contributed to that discussion.)

Occasionally, the academic calendar or the particularities of our week’s workload will cause us to deviate somewhat from this schedule. When this is the case, you will always receive an email well in advance letting you know the revised expectations. Otherwise you should always assume that this accurately represents when things are due in a given week.

Here’s a breakdown of the categories:

Quiz on *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: The quizzes are open book, open note, but must be done independently (e.g. no googling or working in groups). Quizzes will always be posted the Monday before the quizzes are due at 10:00 pm.

Mini Lectures: These lectures will be short, 5(-ish) minute videos posted on Sakai. They are not intended to be replacements of the reading but supplements to it. The Monday lectures will be up by the beginning of the day and the Friday lectures will be up by the end of the day.

Discussion Comment: Your discussion comment should be between 300-400 words (it's ok if it's a bit longer, but don't send us a book!) and posted *by noon* to Sakai in the "Forums" section, where other students will have the chance to respond to it the next day. It's important that they are posted on time so that other students have a chance to read and respond to them. Accordingly, late submissions will not receive credit. Discussion comments will be graded on a 10 point scale to assess whether they (a) show engagement with the assigned reading and (b) make a thoughtful response to the question.

Discussion Reply: Each week, you must respond to at least one discussion comment or someone else's reply by the end of Thursday. You could ask a clarificatory question, make an objection, or expand upon the author's original point. The reply need not be long, but must show genuine engagement with the class. Not posting a reply will result in a 2 point deduction from the grade for the discussion comment. Replies must, of course, be respectful of all participants.

Question Folder: If you have a question about the content of the course—whether it be about Kahneman, a tricky problem from the logic homework, or a question about the discussion—you can submit it to the question folder. Other students are encouraged to read and—if they wish—respond to these. These questions will serve the basis to my response to the most asked questions on Friday.

Problem Sets: Each week, there is a problem set for homework from *The Power of Logic* due at 10 pm on Thursdays. Each week, I will collect your work through Sakai. Please either type it or take a scan of your work in clear, legible handwriting. I will check the homework for completion and grade the same three (unannounced) questions for each student. You will receive 70% for completing the homework (less, obviously, if it is incomplete) + 10% for each of the three graded questions that you get right. (There are answers for some but not all of the problems in the back of the book. You are encouraged to use these to check and correct your own work!)

Assessments

Your grades on individual assignments will be combined to form your course grade in the following way:

Quizzes: 15%

Problem Sets: 20%

Discussion Comments: 25%

Midterm: 20%

Final: 20%

At the end of the course, I will drop your lowest quiz, problem set, and discussion comment grade.

Here is a rough sketch of what various grades mean in this course:

A: 90-100% Truly excellent work that goes above and beyond the baseline requirements for the course. Work that achieves the level of an A exhibits mastery of the material taught in the course and the ability to build on that mastery to contribute something creative, rigorous, and ambitious of your own thought to the assignment.

B+: 85-90%

B: 80-85% Solid, commendable work that fulfills all of the project requirements. B-level work exhibits competence with the course material and genuine insight that goes beyond the confines on what was taught. There may, however, be small errors, or the paper may lack the full rigor or creativity of an A paper.

C+: 75-80%

C: 70-75% Decent work that fulfills most of the project requirements. C-level work may, however, show gaps in understanding of the course material or substantial defects in the argument presented.

D: 60-70% Incomplete work that exhibits a poor understanding of the course material and makes a weak contribution to the discussion.

F: <60% Dishonest or disingenuous work

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted.

Extensions may be requested. The granting of extensions will be decided on a case by case basis. Although I'm quite willing to talk about extensions before an assignment is due, except in extreme circumstances, extensions should always be requested well in advance (at least 48 hours, ideally more).

Plagiarism and Citations

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own. Don't do it. Give proper credit whenever you are using another person's words, arguments, or ideas. When in doubt, cite.

Citing well isn't just a way to avoid plagiarism--it's an opportunity to demonstrate that you have engaged seriously and in good faith with other thinkers. Citing well also (perhaps counter-intuitively!) highlights where you have made an original contribution, making it easier for your readers to see what distinguishes your work from that of others.

When citing printed material, always include the author's name, date of publication, and page number.

Plagiarism will result in an F on the assignment and reported to the dean. If the plagiarism is blatant or repeated, it will result in an F in the course.

The university's policy on academic integrity can be found here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Email Guidelines and Office Hours

You should feel free to email me at any point for any course-related or philosophy-related questions!

Email is an excellent medium for short, specific questions about the course. I will always aim to get a response to you within 48 weekday hours. Feel free to gently remind me if I seem to have overlooked your email.

Email is *not* a good medium (in general) for long or open-ended questions. In such cases, I am happy to set up office hours to meet with you as a more efficient forum. Send me an email to set up a time, and we can meet via Skype.

As a general rule, I don't answer emails on weekdays after 6 or on the weekends. This isn't because I don't want to answer your questions! It is because I need some boundaries between family life and work life.

I have no set office hours. But I am very happy to set up office hours by arrangement.

Expectations for Discussion

All discussion in this class must be performed in a respectful and charitable way. The Rutgers Philosophy department writes:

"In our community we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other's views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way."

Here are three small recommendations that I think go a long way toward making philosophical discussions better:

1. Adopt a general attitude that you and your classmates are involved in the common pursuit of the truth, even when defending contrary theses.
2. Name other students when you're responding to their idea. This shows that you've been listening to them and gives them credit for their contributions. Even when you are (politely) disagreeing, mentioning them communicates that you think their comment is worthy of discussion.
3. Explain references to extra-course material—don't name drop. Name dropping forces other students into the awkward position of either confessing their ignorance (which is a good but hard thing to do) or not understanding the discussion.

Finally, if I do anything that doesn't promote good dialogue in our class, please let me know! I'm still learning how to be a good philosophical interlocutor as well, and some of my best feedback comes from you.

Accessibility

Please get in touch with the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu) if there is any way at all that this course can be made more accessible for you. I want to make this course as accessible for everyone as possible!

Other Services for Students

Student-Wellness Services

[Just In Case Web App](#)

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS):

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA):

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /

www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and

stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.