Philosophy 101 – Logic, Reasoning and Persuasion

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Virtual office hours/discussion periods:
> These are likely to move around over the course of the term, in order to make sure that they fit with everybody's schedules at least some of the time. But we'll start off having them at the following times (all times are New Brunswick NJ time):
>
> Tuesday 10am-11am
> Thursday 1pm-2pm
>
> We'll also start off using my personal Zoom meeting ID, so I don't have to send new links all the time, and see how that works.
> Link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3970479781?pwd=K2tnTWlveElRNXczNUtscXZOMVFYUT09
>
> > Meeting ID: 397 047 9781
> > Passcode: 6bQIiv
>
> Please don't hesitate to reach out by email if those times don't work for you – we can set up something else.

Course description:
> The course is called "Logic, Reasoning, and Persuasion", and while we're going to talk about all of those, what we're going to focus on most is the *reasoning* part. We'll talk about logic as a tool to help facilitate better reasoning, and we'll talk about the role of good reasoning in effective persuasion, and also about the hazards of falling victim to bad reasoning because of persuasive tricks that sometimes appear in various kinds of arguments and media.
>
> Good reasoning is hard. Partly, it's hard just because good reasoning requires focus and care and keeping track of a lot of moving parts of potentially complicated arguments and evidence. But it's also hard because they ways our brains are wired make it very easy, and very natural, to go in for a lot of *bad* reasoning. And so good reasoning isn't just intrinsically difficult, it also requires struggling against a lot of our natural inclinations.
>
> We'll talk a fair bit in this course about the kinds of cognitive biases and illusions that we're subject to as users of human brains, and we'll also talk a fair bit about strategies

we can use in order to keep those biases and illusions from leading us into error. We'll also talk a lot about arguments and evidence – about what makes an argument a powerful one that does a good job of supporting its conclusion, and about what makes something good evidence for some hypothesis, and how to quantify *how* strongly some piece of evidence supports a hypothesis.

Learning Goals:

Over the course of this class, you should:

1) Become familiar with a variety of cognitive biases and cognitive illusions that make good reasoning and accurate belief formation difficult.
2) Become familiar with a number of strategies and techniques for reasoning better, even in the face of these cognitive biases and illusions.
3) Learn and practice skills and techniques for extracting a clear, explicit statement of an argument from a less-than-clear, less-than-explicit argumentative speech, essay, etc.
4) Learn, and have some practice applying, strategies for assessing how well an argument supports its conclusion, and how strongly a piece of evidence supports a hypothesis.
5) Learn, and practice applying, skills for presenting your own arguments in a clear and effective way, for making them stronger, and for defending them against objection.
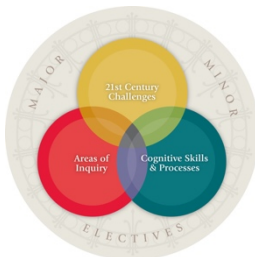
This class satisfies core requirement AH(o): Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

Format and resources:

This is an asynchronous online course. That means there aren't any required course events that you need to be present for at any particular time. Instead here's what we'll do:

- Every week there will be two sets of assignments and activities – we'll call them "modules" – and two 48-hour time windows in which to do them.
  - There'll be one module that opens early in the evening on Sunday and closes 48 hours later.
  - Then there'll be another that opens early in the morning on Thursday and closes 48 hours later.
  - In each case, your job will be to do the reading and complete the assignments associated with that module within its 48 hour window.
- I'll also have regular synchronous office hours where I'll discuss whatever people want to talk about with whoever turns up, in real time.

This course will be mostly on the Top Hat LMS, but it'll also be connected to Canvas (and you can get to the Top Hat site via Canvas).

Canvas site:
https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/67467

You need to buy a subscription to Top Hat, and also the textbook, *Reason Better*, by David Manley (which is an online text integrated into Top Hat). The bookstore is working on getting access so you can buy access there, but you can also buy directly from Top Hat via the invitation you should have received by now. Please get in touch with me immediately if you're having trouble getting access – you won't be able to complete the required work for the course without access to Top Hat and *Reason Better*.

Course Requirements and Grading

By far the largest contributor to your grade will be the regular questions associated with the course modules. Some of these will be questions about content of the assigned reading (viewing, listening, etc.), or about the application and/or significance of the ideas therein. Some will be discussion questions, in which you're asked to engage critically with the content and/or with other students' discussion contributions.

So it's a really good idea to stay on top of the modules as they come up. **You will not, in general, be able to make up content from old modules once you've missed them**. (With the exception of the first couple weeks of term, in order to accommodate adding/dropping of courses at the beginning of the semester.)

There will also be a midterm assignment due toward the middle of the term, and a final assignment due toward the end. The idea behind these is to give you an opportunity to bring together what you've learned so far in the course and apply it. You'll have a number of options for what to do here, and we'll discuss the details more in the first few weeks of the course.

Grade breakdown will be as follows:
- Regular reading and discussion questions 60%
- Midterm assignment 20%
- Final assignment 20%

Academic integrity and plagiarism

Short version: Don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. It cheapens and diminishes everybody's academic experience, and it's a violation of the trust that's required for successful learning and teaching. You're also very likely to be caught, and the penalties can be extremely severe, including suspension or expulsion from the university.

Longer version: The university's policy on Academic Integrity is available at http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/home/academic-integrity-policy/. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with this document, both for this class and for your other classes and future work.

Judgments about plagiarism and academic integrity can be subtle. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask for guidance from me or from your TA. (Really! We are very happy to talk about this stuff, and we'll be happy that you asked.)

This semester (maybe this whole academic year) is going to be really weird

This is going to be a weird semester. This isn't the way I'm used to teaching, and it's probably not the way you're used to learning. So we're all going to be finding our way through this new educational landscape together. I am confident that we will, by and large, figure out how to make it all work out ok, and hopefully we'll find some aspects of this way of doing things that work well enough that we'll want to carry them back over when things go back to normal, or closer to it.

The fact that it's a weird semester in which we're all working in unfamiliar territory calls for some distinctive actions from each of us to help make things work as well as possible.

On my end, I've got three commitments that I hereby make to you:
1) Not trying to do the same old thing: I will do my best to update my teaching strategies to fit the medium we're now all using. I've done some of that already - I've been doing a ton of online-teaching trainings this summer and I've thought a lot about how to run this course effectively online. But there's no substitute for experience, and for hearing from students about what's working and what's not. So I'm also committed to adjusting and repairing on the fly over the course of the term, as you all let me know what's working well and what could work better.
2) Communication: I'm going to really focus on communication this term, because I think it's going to be important. That means both being super clear and timely about my outgoing communications to you about what you're expected to be doing when, due dates, grading criteria, etc., and also being very open to and available for incoming communications from you about what's clear and what's hard to understand, what's working administratively and pedagogically and what isn't, and about anything that's happening for you that requires particular accommodation.
3) Accommodation: Everybody has a lot happening right now, and a lot of us are dealing with difficulties and obstacles that make this an especially hard time to stay on top of our work and get things done as well, and as efficiently, as we'd like. (I, for example, have had a couple of eight year olds, who don't have school or camp or basically anything else happening to distract them, in my face all day

for much of the spring semester and much of the summer, which has made it harder than usual to do my class prep.) I'm committed to doing whatever I can to be accommodating about whatever it is that's happening for you, so that this semester can go as well as can be expected given everything that's going on. So if there's some difficulty, obstacle, etc. that's getting in the way of your engagement with this course, please let me and/or Isaac know, and let us know what kind of accommodation would be helpful. We'll do what we can. There are going to be some constraints, because it's a big course with a lot of people in it, but we'll work with you to try and figure out solutions wherever possible.

On your end, I have two requests:

1) Communicate. If something about the course is really working for you, let me know about that so I make sure to keep doing that. If something about the course isn't working for you, let me know about that too, so I can look for ways to change things up. If something comes up and you need some accommodation about something, let me know and we'll see what we can do.

2) Stay engaged. Do the reading etc. when it's assigned, participate in the discussions, ask questions, come to synchronous office hours once in a while if that's logistically possible for you. All the stuff I've been reading about online courses suggests that this is super important for having a successful experience with an online course. So I'm going to try and provide a bunch of structure that promotes regular engagement, and I ask you to do your best to stay engaged regularly during the term.

Course structure, and why it's structured that way
Here's how the course will be put together:
- A typical week will be broken into two chunks.
- There'll be two modules, each containing some stuff to read (or watch, or listen to, or some combination of the above), and some questions to answer.
- Each module will have a 48 hour window for you to complete it.
- In a typical week, the first module will open up Sunday night and close Tuesday night, and the second module will open up Thursday morning and close Saturday morning.
  - In a typical week, the first module will be about
    - taking in and processing some new content – usually a chapter of our textbook, *Reason Better*, and
    - identifying something (or some things) about that content that you think could use additional discussion.
    - (That could be because part of the reading was unclear or hard to understand, or because the author said something that seemed wrong, or because some idea from the reading has a real-world application that you think it'd be interesting to talk more about, or for any number of other reasons.)

- In a typical week, the second module will be about
  - Following up on the things from the first module that people identified as deserving of further discussion, and
  - Expanding on, illustrating, applying, and clarifying the ideas from the first module.
  - Part of that will happen in student discussion threads, and part of that will come from me by way of recorded videos addressing popular & important questions from the first module, and/or supplemental readings, videos, podcasts etc. as appropriate.
- So in a typical week what you'll be responsible for is:
  - Reading, watching, listening to, etc. the assigned content for each of the two modules.
  - Answering some factual, comprehension-check type questions about the content.
  - Contributing to class discussion, by:
    - In the first module, contributing a question that you think might warrant further discussion about the first-module content.
    - In the second module, contributing to the class discussion in which we follow up on the questions people asked in response to the first-module content.
- This two-48-hour-modules structure will be in place for the whole term, though the details of the work you're doing are likely to change a bit from week to week. I will strive to make sure that it's always super clear what you're expected to do for each module. In addition to this regular module-based work, there will also be one more-substantial assignment due in the middle of the term and another at the end.
- I'll also hold office hours each week. That's intended as a time when you can ask individual questions (either about content or about the mechanics of the course) in a live, real-time format, and also where, if we get a bunch of people turning up, we can do some real-time discussion of questions people want to bring up.

Plan for the semester:
This is the tentative plan as of August 24, before we've actually made contact with the term. There is an approximately 0% chance that we'll wind up doing just exactly this. Updated schedules will be posted to the course Canvas and/or Top Hat sites as changes are made.

Week 1: Setting up for the term
    Module 1 (Opens 9/1, closes 9/3)
- Syllabus & course orientation on Top Hat
- Complete "Succeeding in Online Courses" module from Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences (on Canvas)

Module 2(Opens 9/3, closes 9/5)
- Cognitive biases and cognitive illusions

Week 2: Manley Chapter 1
Module 1 (opens 9/6, closes 9/8)
- Manley chapter 1
- Propose Chapter 1 discussion question

Module 2 (opens 9/10, closes 9/12)
- Manley Ch1 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up

Week 3: Manley chapter 2
Module 1 (opens 9/13, closes 9/15)
- Manley chapter 2
- Propose Chapter 2 discussion question

Module 2 (opens 9/17, closes 9/19)
- Manley Ch2 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up

Week 4: Manley Chapter 3
Module 1 (opens 9/20, closes 9/22)
- Manley chapter 3
- Propose Chapter 3 discussion question

Module 2 (opens 9/24, closes 9/26)
- Manley Ch3 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up

Week 5: Manley Chapter 4
Module 1 (opens 9/27, closes 9/29)
- Manley chapter 4
- Propose Chapter 4 discussion question

Module 2 (opens 10/1, closes 10/3)
- Manley Ch4 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up

Week 6: Entailment and Logic
Module 1 (opens 10/4, closes 10/6)
- Entailment, logic and arguments

Module 2 (opens 10/8, closes 10/10)
- Discussion, elaboration, practice

Week 7: Manley Chapter 5
Module 1 (opens 10/11, closes 10/13)
- Manley chapter 5
- Propose Chapter 5 discussion question

Module 2 (opens 10/15, closes 10/17)
- Manley Ch5 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up

Week 8: Catch up, review, application
Module 1 (opens 10/18, closes 10/20)

Module 2 (opens 10/22, closes 10/24)
- Midterm assignment due

Week 9: Manley Chapter 6
Module 1 (opens 10/25, closes 10/27)
- Manley chapter 6
- Propose Chapter 6 discussion question

Module 2 (opens 10/29, closes 10/31)
- Manley Ch6 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up

Week 10: Manley Chapter 7
Module 1 (opens 11/1, closes 11/3)
- Manley chapter 7
- Propose Chapter 7 discussion question

Module 2 (opens 11/5, closes 11/7)
- Manley Ch7 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up

Week 11: Manley Chapter 8
Module 1 (opens 11/8, closes 11/10)
- Manley chapter 8
- Propose Chapter 8 discussion question

Module 2 (opens 11/12, closes 11/14)
- Manley Ch8 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up

Week 12: Updating and Evidence review, practice and application
Module 1 (opens 11/15, closes 11/17)

Module 2 (opens 11/19, closes 11/21)

Week 13: Application and final project choice
Module 1 (opens 11/22, closes 11/24)

(No 2nd module – thanksgiving break)

Week 14: Manley Chapter 9
Module 1 (opens 11/29, closes 12/1)

Module 2 (opens 12/3, closes 12/5)

Week 15: Manley chapter 10
Module 1 (opens 12/6, closes 12/8)

Module 2 (opens 12/8, closes 12/10)
- Final assignment due