Critical Reasoning
University of Oregon - Summer 2013
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Office Hours: Thursdays 10-12, PLC 317

Course Description:
The object of this course is twofold: to facilitate an understanding of the significance of the concept of reason within the history Western philosophy, and to allow for the development of critical reasoning skills in an efficient and engaging manner. Major topics to be addressed include the centrality of reason to concepts of human nature; the dangers of over-centralizing reason; the formation, understanding, and criticism of arguments; deductive and nondeductive reasoning; the identification of fallacies; and the role of reasoned decision making in a responsible life. By course’s end, students will have developed a critical understanding of the basic concepts of critical reasoning and will have fostered critical reasoning skills of their own, which they can immediately begin employing in their writing and their lives.

Evaluation:
- Attendance/Quizzes: 20%
- Paper on the Philosophical History of Reason: 20%
- Identifying and Defining Arguments Exam: 20%
- Evaluating and Critiquing Arguments Exam: 20%
- Paper on Reasoning in the Real World: 20%

Attendance will be taken every day, and each day’s attendance will account for 1% of your total course grade. You must have the reading to be discussed on the day in question in hand or your desk to count as present. Electronic copies are permitted, but you must have the document loaded and visible to me at the beginning of class. Occasionally, quizzes pertaining to the reading assigned for the day in question will also be administered. These will be graded pass/no pass, and failure to pass a quiz will result in a loss of attendance points for the day the quiz in question was administered.

The paper on the philosophical history of reason will ask you to reflect on two or more of the philosophers we will have read the week before, with specific attention to the way reason is either celebrated or critiqued in their writing. The film screened during the final day of week one will also be able to be incorporated into this assignment.

The two exams will each be given on a Monday. These will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions relating to the readings and topics covered in the previous week.

The final paper on reasoning in the real world will ask you to apply the critical reasoning skills developed throughout the course to an analysis of one or more arguments found in the real world. Newspaper editorials, political brochures, and other materials will be offered as possible subject matter, though students will have the option of finding and suggesting their own real-world arguments, as well.

While not evaluated as such, active participation—whether through discussion and in-class activities, visiting office hours, or communicating your thoughts via email—is strongly encouraged. The ideas we will discuss can be extremely challenging when approached for the first time. So please, raise your hand in class and/or let me know independently about any difficulties you may be having.
The following rubric reflects the general standards of the Philosophy Department at the University of Oregon, which I will follow in my overall evaluation for this course:

A = excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.
B = good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.
C = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
D = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
F = failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a real lack of effort.

Required Texts:

All required readings for this course are available free of charge on blackboard. Additionally, there is a course packet of all necessary readings available to copy at “The Copy Shop” on 13th street. I recommend either printing out or copying the entire term’s worth of reading in one batch as soon as possible, rather than putting off printing each individual reading as the class unfolds.

Course Schedule:

**Week One – Reason in the History of Western Philosophy**

Session 1  Course Introduction: Introducing Reason and Reasoning
Session 2  **Reading:** from Aristotle’s *Politics* and Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*
Session 3  **Reading:** from Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?* and Nietzsche’s *Human, All Too Human*
Session 4  **Reading:** from Adorno/Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Derrida’s *Rogues*
Session 5  Film: “Chinatown” (1974)

**Week Two – Reasoning and Argumentation I: Identifying and Defining Arguments**

Session 1  Introducing Argumentation – **Reading:** *Logic*, 1.1, 1.2 (*First Paper Due In-Class*)
Session 2  The Components of Arguments – **Reading:** *Logic*, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1
Session 3  Deductive Arguments – **Reading:** *Logic*, 2.2
Session 4  Inductive Arguments – **Reading:** *Logic*, 2.3
Session 5  Identifying and Defining Arguments Review

**Week Three – Reasoning and Argumentation II: Evaluating and Critiquing Arguments**

Session 1  **Identifying/Defining Arguments Exam** – Introducing Evaluating/Critiquing Arguments
Session 2  Evaluating Arguments – **Reading:** *Logic*, 2.4
Session 3  Critiquing Arguments – **Reading:** *Logic*, 4.1
Session 4  Types of Fallacies – **Reading:** “Fallacy Worksheet”
Session 5  Evaluating and Critiquing Arguments Review

**Week Four – Reasoning and Argumentation in the Media**

Session 1  **Evaluating/Critiquing Arguments Exam** – Introducing Reasoning in the Media
Session 2  Real-World Case Study One – **Reading:** TBD
Session 3  Real-World Case Study Two – **Reading:** TBD
Session 4  Real-World Case Study Three – Course Conclusion: The Ups and Downs of Reasoning
Session 5  [No Class – Instructor at Conference]

Final’s Week  **Paper on Reasoning in the Real World Due via Email by 11:59pm, Wednesday, July 24th**