**PHI 1100: ETHICS AND CRITICAL THINKING**Tuesday-Thursday

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*Office hours: Tuesday-Thursday 12:30-4\** (email in advance)

**INTRODUCTION**

Every day, we make decisions about what to believe and how to behave. Some are fairly inconsequential: what we decide to have for lunch, for example, or what movie to watch. Others, however, are more significant: should we believe the politician on the news when he says it’s in the country’s interests to go to war? Perhaps the weightiest decisions of all are ethical ones. Is it right to lie to protect a friend? Should we overlook a colleague’s unethical behavior to save our company’s reputation?

This course is all about how to get these decisions right; and what getting it “right” even means. Here’s a quick preview of some of the topics we’ll be exploring.

* What are the basic structures underlying good and bad logic and reasoning? How can you tell a good argument from a bad one?
* What are reliable and unreliable sources for our beliefs? What kinds of errors pose the greatest threat to doing the right thing?
* How does the unconscious influence our decision-making? How can unconscious biases lead good people to do bad things?
* What are some frequent mistakes we make when dealing with statistics, probability, and formal decision-making? How might this lead us to make poor judgments?
* What should we rationally base our ethical decisions on? Where do ethical reasons come from? Is ethics just a matter of culture?
* What makes people happy and successful? How should we make decisions about our own well-being and that of other people?
* When (and to what extent) we should hold others responsible for their behaviour? What provides us with reasons to justifiably criticize conduct?
* Why do humans reason ethically at all? What is the connection between ethics and reasoning, emotions, and habits?

**TEXTBOOKS**

All readings will be distributed by email. However, I definitely recommend any/all of the following books; at least one reading will be drawn from each of them and they are useful for writing assignments. Most of them are classics of modern nonfiction, as well New York Top bestsellers.

* Howard Kahane, *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric.* Wadsworth, 2010.
* James Rachels & Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 7th ed. McGraw-Hill, 2011.
* Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow.* Macmillan, 2011.
* Surowiecki, James. *The Wisdom of Crowds*. Anchor, 2005.
* Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness*. Vintage Canada, 2009.
* Leonard, Mlodinow. *The Drunkard's Walk*. Vintage Books, 2009.
* Daniel Schacter. *The Seven Sins of Memory.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002.
* Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. Harper Business, 2006.

**LEARNING GOALS:**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to: **1.** Demonstrate a sound grasp of the notions of ‘truth’, ‘soundness’, and ‘validity’ in logic, and of the basic forms of logical reasoning.  
**2.** Exhibit a clear and detailed understanding of various forms of logical fallacy and their relevance to ethical argumentation;  
**3.** Exhibit a clear and detailed understanding of what constitutes a tenable reason for a belief in general and an ethical belief in particular;  
**4.** Identify and analyze specific reasons that contribute to the justification or invalidation of ethical beliefs and positions; and, connectedly.  
**5.** Demonstrate their competence in recognizing and constructing logically well-formed ethical arguments; and,  
**6.** Demonstrate sufficient mastery over the tools and concepts of philosophical ethics to write closely argued papers and to make rigorously reasoned oral presentations which apply those tools and examine those concepts.

**CRITERIA OF EVALUATION**

Students enrolled in this course will be evaluated upon: **1.** Their ability to compose both formal essays and informal thought-pieces that demonstrate soundness of reasoning, coherence of argumentation, ethical sensitivity, and lucidity and economy of expression; **2.** Their ability to present, defend, and judge, in terms both of logical form and of ethical substance, philosophical arguments in informal oral presentations and formal classroom debates  
**3.** Their ability and willingness to participate in classroom discussions and debates; and  **4.** The depth and detail of their grasp of the concepts and ideas treated in the course.

**GRADING**

Your grade will be a function of four things: short papers, exams, quizzes, and a score for participation, attendance, and punctuality.

* **30% two short papers (15% each) –** everyone will be required to submit two short papers of about 1000 words in length. The first paper will be due the week before the midterm. The second paper will be due the week before the final exam.
* **30% midterm and final (15% each) –** we will have two exams, one in mid-March and the other in mid-May (dates to be confirmed). There will be roughly 30 questions per exam and they will be cumulative. I’ll confirm before each exam what material will be on there, but any material we cover in class (including Powerpoints, handouts, and assigned reading) could feature.
* **20% quizzes** – most Thursdays, we will have a short multiple choice quiz, for a total of *ten* quizzes. These could be on assigned reading, or they could be on material covered in the preceding class. The material for these quizzes will be announced on the preceding Tuesday, and confirmed by email. I will take your *top eight* quizzes as the basis for your score at the end of the semester. Missing one is survivable; missing two is very bad; missing three is fatal. Note that quiz scores will be posted online on Google Docs so you can track your progress. To preserve anonymity, all student will be emailed an ID number. You should memorize this for use in quizzes.
* **20% participation, punctuality, and attendance –** I expect all students to attend every class, arrive on time, and participate in class. A lot of the class will consist in debates and discussions. Please try to keep your contributions on topic, and try not to dominate discussion to the exclusion of other students. Personal reflections are welcome, but try to be clear and concise. Contribution to discussion is the main way to get a high participation score, but you can also boost your score by being engaged and on time.

**QUIZ PRIZES**

Note that in addition to the above rubric, five prizes of 2.5% each will be awarded. This is a flat 2.5% bonus added to students’ final overall percentage score, after all other parts of the student’s grade have been calculated. These prizes include:

* Two prizes of 2.5% each for the students who do most to foster intelligent discussion.
* One prize of 2.5% for the student who writes the best single paper.
* One prize of 2.5% for whoever improves most in the final relative to the midterm.
* One prize for the student who accumulates the most points in quizzes.

**TIPS ON DOING WELL IN CLASS**

* Attend every class so you don’t miss material.
* Participate in discussion, and think of something smart to say when I call on you.
* Do all of the required reading, ideally 1-2 days before class (so your brain can digest it).
* Make careful notes: some questions in the Midterm and Final won’t be fully covered in the textbook and Powerpoint.
* Study for exams and quizzes with classmates, using readings, notes, and Powerpoints.
* Do as much as you can earlier in the semester – your life will only get more busy. Start thinking about your first paper as early as you can.
* If English isn’t your first language (or if you don’t have experience with formal writing), book an appointment with the Writing Center.
* **Get everything done on time.**

**READING AND WRITING PHILOSOPHY PAPERS**

Note that reading and writing philosophy papers is unlike reading and writing papers in any other subject, so if you’re relatively new to philosophy, you’ll be required to develop new skills. As a guideline, you should expect to spend at least five minutes reading each page. You should not expect to understand every idea or grasp every reference, but you should try to get an overall understanding of the piece.

Three quick tips: (i) skim read the whole article once, ignoring things you don’t understand; (ii) re-read it again a second time much more slowly, taking at least five minutes per page; (iii) write a brief summary of the article as you read it, and make annotations as you go. In general, expect a ten page philosophy article to take between an hour and an hour and a half to read.

Writing philosophy papers is quite tricky, but we will discuss this in some detail together in class. Jim Pryor has some excellent guidelines on how to read and write philosophy papers. See http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/index.html. We will also discuss these issues in class. Additionally, for assistance with citation formats, see the Newman Library’s online guide: http://newman.baruch.cuny.edu/help/tutorial/Specific\_Topics/cit\_guides.htm.

**SCHEDULE**

Note that most quizzes will be drawn from recommended readings. However, the topic of each quiz will be confirmed the first Tuesday of each week.

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| **WEEK** | **TOPIC** | **RECOMMENDED READINGS** |
| 1 | **Introduction to reasoning:** course overview; reasoning in everyday life; some differences between moral and non-moral reasoning. Premises, conclusions, and arguments. Formal and informal reasoning. Cultural relativity and reasoning. | Kahane Ch. 1 |
| 2 | **Arguments and reasoning**: validity and soundness. How to tell if an argument is valid. Contradiction and consistency. The major forms of valid and invalid argument. The problem of deducing ethical truth. Fallacies. | Kahane Ch. 2;  Fallacies handout |
| 3 | **Persuasion, manipulation, and influence.** Common fallacies and deceptive arguments. The dangers of persuasion and authority. The Milgram Test. Groupthink. | Cialdini Ch. 1 |
| 4 | **Perception and memory: reliable witnesses?** The limits of perception; illusions; the constructive nature of perception. The limits of memory. | Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory* Ch.1 |
| 5 | **The psychology of decision-making:** how we decide. Weakness of will. Why good people can do bad and stupid things. Biases and heuristics. Cognitive dissonance. The role of the unconscious in decision making. | Kahneman Ch. 1 |
| 6 | **Writing workshop:** How to write a critical paper. Introductions, theses, and the role of counterarguments. | Kahane Ch. 9 |
| 7 | **Statistics, probability, and decision theory:** why we get statistics wrong (and why it costs lives). Simpson’s Paradox. Expected utility. Problems of probability and decision theory. | Mlodinow, *The Drunkard’s Walk*, Ch. 6 |
| 8 | **Selfishness, altruism, and the origins of ethics:** Egoism andaltruism. Game theory, punishment, and the origins of morality. The challenge of cultural relativism; scientific bases of ethical reasoning. | Skyrms, *The Stag Hunt and the Evolution of Social Structure*, Ch. 1; Rachels, Ch. 2 |
| 9 | **Happiness and well-being:** pleasure and satisfaction. The threat of the experience machine. The science of happiness. | Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness* Ch. 2 |
| 10 | **Conflicts and dilemmas:** conflicts in ethical decision making. Theories of conduct. The double effect principle and the dirty hands problem. | Rachels Ch. 8 and 9 |
| 11 | **Accountability and judgment:** the bases of ethical responsibility. The problems ofmental illness, coercion, and ignorance. Legal responses to judgment. | Harris, *Free Will*, 65-83. |
| 12 | **Moral psychology:** the connections between ethics, emotion, and reasoning. The challenge of situationism and the power of habit. | Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail”. |
| 13-14 | **Overspill, recap, and revision:** reasoning, ethics, and psychology |  |

**COURSE POLICIES**

**(i) Late paper policy**  
All papers are due by 12 noon on the due date given. Your papers are to be submitted by email. Extensions will be granted only for compelling academic reasons (e.g., conflicts with other due dates) and only with advance notice of at least 24 hours, or for personal reasons to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Late papers will be marked down by 2% of the total grade per day. No late paper will be accepted more than a week after it was originally due.

**(ii) Attendance**If you miss more than 4 classes without having legitimate and compelling reasons for doing so, you will get a WU grade. WU means ‘unofficial withdrawal’ and counts as an F on your transcript. What amounts to a legitimate and compelling reason will be decided by me on a case-by-case basis.

**(iii) Cheating and Plagiarism:**Cheating and plagiarism are extremely serious offenses in all academic areas. The following definitions are based on the College's Academic Honesty website:  
   
*Cheating is the attempted or unauthorized use of materials, information, notes, study aids, devices or communication during an academic exercise. Examples include but are not limited to: (a) copying from another student during an examination or allowing another to copy your work; (b) unauthorized collaborating on a take home assignment or examination; (c) using unauthorized notes during a closed book examination; (d) using unauthorized electronic devices during an examination; (e) taking an examination for another student; (f) asking or allowing another student to take an examination for you; (g) changing a corrected exam and returning it for more credit; (h) submitting substantial portions of the same paper to two classes without consulting the second instructor; (i) preparing answers or writing notes in a blue book (exam booklet) before an examination; (j) allowing others to research and write assigned papers including the use of commercial term paper services.  
 Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person's ideas, research or writing as your own. Examples include, but are not limited to (a) copying another person's actual words without the use of quotation marks and footnotes (a functional limit is four or more words taken from the work of another); (b) presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging them; (c) using information that cannot reasonably be considered common knowledge without acknowledging the source thereof; and (d) failure to acknowledge collaborators on homework and other assignments.*

For more, seehttp://www.baruch.cuny.edu/academic/academic\_honesty.html. A tutorial on plagiarism may be found at http://newman.baruch.cuny.edu/plagiarism/index.htm.

My policy for this course is to give a failing grade to any assignment that has been plagiarized or an exam in which you have cheated. If you commit a second offense, you will receive an F (a failing grade) in the whole course. In addition, I am required by College policy to submit a report of suspected academic dishonesty to the Office of the Dean of Students. This report becomes part of your permanent file. I might add that you must not think you will be able to get away with cheating or plagiarism – in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, you will be found out. It would be foolishly optimistic of you to try to buck those odds.

**(iv) Electronic devices**

All instruments, including but not limited to mobile phones, that beep, chirp, tinkle, chime, ring, or make other annoying electronic noises must be turned off *before* you enter the classroom. This is a non-negotiable rule, and it will be enforced. Any student who uses an electronic device during class will first be asked to turn it off, and then asked to leave the room. Repeated offenders will face severe penalties to their participation score.

**(v) Other policies**

* Show up on time. I notice students who are late, and their final grade will take a hit.
* At the end of the class, please don’t begin packing up until I explicitly signal that the class session has ended; it’s distracting and disrespectful.
* Believe it or not, I look at students continually throughout the class. If you’re secretly reading a text message, or sleeping, or have your eyes glazed over, I’m almost guaranteed to call on you. Plus, your participation score will take an instant hit.
* In discussion, be respectful to me and to your fellow students. Especially to your fellow students.
* Please treat your email correspondences with me as professionally as possible. You should

include your full name and your course section in the body of the email, and should avoid using cheesy slang or netspeak. If you’re asking me to do you a favour – like giving you extra assistance writing a paper – then ask me nicely. More advice on how to email professors can be found here: http://goo.gl/5FNnBl

* Before you email me to ask a question, check whether it’s covered in this syllabus or in my emails.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Baruch College provides reasonable accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities to ensure that no student with a disability is denied the benefits of, is excluded from participation in, or otherwise is subjected to discrimination under the education program or activity operated by the College because of the absence of educational auxiliary aids for students with disabilities. Arrangements for adapting class procedures without compromising course content and standards may take time. Therefore, students who require accommodations or modifications should speak with me as soon as possible.