

HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
Philosophy 1230A: Reasoning and Critical Thinking
2018-2019

Fall Term, 2018

Prerequisites: none

Mondays, 11:30-12:30, W12

Wednesdays, 11:30-1:30, W12

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Through reasoning, and thinking more generally, each of us comes to know a tremendous amount about the world. This knowledge helps us to understand the past, anticipate the future, make rational decisions, and promote moral goods. But our thinking isn't flawless; it is subject to all kinds of *systematic errors*. Even worse, we don't often *recognize* when we're in error, or how we got there. Consequently, our errors often go uncorrected, and our views about such important topics as politics, ethics, economics, health, and happiness are distorted. The good news is that our views are *predictably* distorted, and therefore subject to *correction*. We can learn how to *recognize* and *mitigate* the sources of our mistakes. This is *critical thinking*. In this course, you will learn about some of the biases, illusions, and weaknesses that afflict *all* human minds. These shortcomings affect how we evaluate arguments, reconstruct events, predict the future, make decisions, and moralize. Our principal aim will be to generate strategies for effectively minimizing the impact of these phenomena on our thinking, and the thinking of others, so that we are able to reach more accurate conclusions about the things that matter to us most.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Formulate, explain, and defend strategies for identifying and correcting some of the systematic errors in their thinking.
2. Distinguish the contexts in which they are liable to make cognitive errors from those in which their thinking is more reliable.
3. Manifest the knowledge and ability to use group deliberation to improve their thinking, and the thinking of the groups they're in.

CLASS METHODS

This course consists of two highly interactive lectures per week. The lectures will include PowerPoint slides, discussions, questions, and in class assignments. *Lecture notes will **not** be made available to students outside of lecture under **any** circumstances. If you miss a class, you should ask a trustworthy peer for their lecture notes.

You are welcome to use a laptop to take notes in lecture, though you should be aware that students who do so tend to do worse on average than students who take notes with pen and paper. However, if you are caught using your laptop for any other purpose, you will be asked to leave class

and receive a grade of 0 on any assignment you miss. When you use your laptop for social or entertainment purposes, you distract others, and do yourself a disservice. It is NOT ACCEPTABLE behavior and it WILL NOT BE TOLERATED in my classroom.

Please do not take your phone out at any point during class. If you are caught looking at your phone during lecture, you will be asked to leave class and receive a grade of 0 on any assignment you miss. If there are extenuating circumstances that necessitate you checking your phone during class, please inform me BEFORE the beginning of class.

TEXT

There are *no required readings* for this course. A list of supplementary readings and videos is posted on OWL, under the 'Further Learning' tab. You are encouraged to engage these resources in an effort to deepen your understanding of the course material, and to get as much as possible out of the assignments.

METHODS OF EVALUATION

20% Participation questions (due in class)

Every lecture will include questions that you will be asked to answer **in class**. The purpose of these questions is to stimulate your interest and involvement in discussion, and to reveal some of the principles that govern the way you think. All questions must be completed in class, so it is very important that you bring **a pen and paper** with you to every class. Answers submitted outside of class **will not be accepted**.

50% Rules of critical thinking (due one week of the relevant lecture)

You should come away from this course with a set of strategies for avoiding some of the systematic errors people commonly make when thinking. To facilitate this end, you will be required to submit a set of critical thinking rules that accurately summarizes and expands on the material presented in lectures #3-7. Each entry in this list must include: a rule that's meant to help you and others think critically, an explanation of the rule, a rationale for the rule, and an example of how the rule is to be applied. These rules must be submitted **within one week of the conclusion of the relevant lecture**.

LATE PENALTY: the penalty for submitting these rules late is 5% per day, including weekends.

30% Critical thinking handbook (due on December 5th)

In assigned groups of 3-4, you will be required to compile a list of 15 critical thinking rules that do the best job of summarizing the most important and beneficial lessons of the entire course. **Each** group member will also be responsible for submitting a description of how the group decided on their rules, as well as the role that they themselves played in encouraging critical thinking within the group.

These handbooks **must** be submitted on the last day of class. **Late handbooks will not be accepted.**

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

| Week | Topic |
|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Lecture 1 | Introduction |
| Lecture 2 | How We Think |
| Lecture 3 | Argumentation |
| Lecture 4 | Confirmation Bias |
| Lecture 5 | Causation and Probability 1 |
| Lecture 6 | Causation and Probability 2 |
| Lecture 7 | Rationality and Decision Making |
| Lecture 8 | Debiasing and Group Thinking |
| Lecture 9 | Moral Reasoning |
| Lecture 10 | Effective Altruism |



The Appendix to Course Outlines is posted on the OWL course site.