

Philosophy 004 – Critical Thinking

Fall 2013

M/W/F 8:00 AM – 8:50 AM

Room: Douglas Hall 110

Satisfies General Education Area A3 (see course objectives/requirements below)

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 10:00 AM –
11:00 AM, Mendocino Hall 1032

I do not feel obligated to believe that the same God who endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect had intended for us to forgo their use...

- Galileo Galilee (1564 – 1642)

Course Description

Course Catalogue: “Study of the basic skills of good reasoning needed for the intelligent and responsible conduct of life. Topics include: argument structure and identification, validity and strength of arguments, common fallacies of reasoning, use and abuse of language in reasoning, principles of fair play in argumentation.”

When questioned about the beliefs that one holds, many individuals will claim that their beliefs are strong, secure and qualify as knowledge. This makes sense. After all, the beliefs that we hold (which number far more than we may initially think) form the basis of our understanding of the world around us. In essence, our beliefs determine how we interact with that world and how we interact with others whom we live with. However, there is a problem. Many of these beliefs that are determined to be true are either outright false or based on faulty reasoning. The question is how do we know this? How *can* we know this? How *can* we evaluate beliefs that are so vital to our daily lives? How can we evaluate the beliefs of others? To state that it is often confusing and, more than not, difficult is certainly an understatement. It is important to understand, however, that difficulty does not necessitate ignoring the problem.

This class is designed to help us understand the proper forms of reasoning and the methods we can use to determine the strength of our beliefs and the beliefs of others through an understanding of proper and improper argument forms. We will discuss what good reasoning is, different argument forms, effective methods of communication (both verbal and written) how to evaluate information and we will review various logical fallacies that we often encounter but fail to recognize.

Required Textbook

The textbook for this class can be found at the following link:

<http://www.csus.edu/indiv/d/dowdenb/#logicalreasoning>

It may also be linked through Prof. Dowden’s personal webpage at

<http://www.csus.edu/indiv/d/dowdenb/index.htm>)

Learning Objectives

- Students will study about and consciously develop skills in critical thinking
- Students will learn how to identify proper methods of reasoning and argumentation
- Students will learn to identify proper relationships between argument premises and argument conclusions
- Students will learn to identify the basic (and often encountered) formal and informal fallacies
- Students will learn and develop proper forms of rational/logical communication and will be required to express proper methods of argumentation in written and verbal form
- Develops basic skills, applicable to a variety of academic subjects and to the fulfillment of such roles as citizen, consumer, leader and moral agent by demonstrating the following:
 - o Skill in evaluating the validity, strength and relevance of arguments
 - o A sense of logical structure of both inductive and deductive forms
 - o Awareness of uses and abuses of argument language, including connotation, ambiguity and definition
 - o Skill in handling a variety of arguments in variety of contexts
 - o Ability to argue fairly and to handle bias, emotion, and propaganda
- Student Learning Objectives for Area A3 courses can be viewed at:
<http://www.csus.edu/acaf/Portfolios/GE/geareaA3.stm>

These learning objectives will be met through a variety of practical assessments including quizzes, group work, essay writing and verbal communication (class/group participation).

Student Standards of Conduct

Plagiarism and/or cheating will not be tolerated in this class. All those who engage in these activities will receive a zero on the associated assignment. In addition, all incidents of cheating and/or plagiarism will be reported to the department chair and to the Judicial Officer in the Office of Student Affairs. It is your responsibility to both know and adhere to Sac State's Academic Honesty Policy. This policy can be found at the following address:
<http://www.csus.edu/umannual/student/UMAO0150.htm>

Purposely "obstructing" the viewpoint of another student in the classroom during classroom discussions is prohibited. This class will involve many discussions concerning the material assigned for homework and the material presented during the classroom lectures. This being a philosophy course, many of these discussions *may* challenge certain beliefs that you hold. Open dialog and proper methods of argumentation are not only expected but required for this class.

Attendance/Participation: Students are expected to attend each class session. This class will involve many in-class discussions and in-class group work. Students are expected to have completed the readings and participate in all in-class discussions.

Cell Phones and Computers: Please set your phone to vibrate before class! Cell phones are not to be used in class. If you must take a call (which I discourage unless an emergency) please step outside before you answer. No texting or Internet use will be allowed in class (unless directed by me). This is especially true during exams. Students may use computers in class but will be required to sit in the front row to ensure academic honesty.

If you have a disability and require accommodations, you will need to provide disability documentation to SSWD, Lassen Hall 1008, (916) 278-6955. Please discuss your accommodation needs with me after class or during my office hours early in the semester.

Evaluation/Homework Assignments

Quizzes: Every Friday there will be a *group* quiz where students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the material discussed that week. You will be evaluated as a group, and each quiz will be worth a total of 15 points. The lowest score on one quiz will be dropped at the conclusion of the semester. Students will be assigned to a group on Friday, September 6th (the second day of class) and will remain with that group throughout the semester. There will be a total of 210 possible points at the conclusion of the term. There will also be a number of in-class group exercises throughout the semester.

I certainly understand that most people do not enjoy working in a group environment. However, being able to work in groups is essential, for you will not be able to avoid working with others no matter how hard you try. A group or a team is defined in terms of a shared goal. As such, each of us, in some way, is already a member of a group. This includes our families, friends, sports teams, jobs, etc. It is important to understand that the majority of the time we will not be able to choose the groups that we are in. Being able to function well within a group setting will not only help us understand how to work with others who are often different from us (an important skill in its own right) but the positive impact that such work will have on our daily lives. In addition, in terms of our academic lives, various studies have shown that academic group work dramatically increases student performance and learning.¹ All this means that group work is important and beneficial to you as a person and as a student. In order to ensure academic integrity, as the semester draws to a close, students will be asked to evaluate each member of his or her group.

Essays: There will be two essays in this class. You will be provided with complete assignment details and a grading rubric two weeks prior to the due date for each essay. However, in short, you will be required to choose and properly defend a position concerning a contemporary moral issue.

Essay #1 Due: Friday, October 11th

Essay #2 Due: Friday, December 13th

Examinations: There will be two examinations in this class (a midterm and a final exam). There will be a comprehensive review held on the Friday before each exam.

Midterm Exam: Monday, October 21st (Week 8)

Final Exam: TBA (Held during finals week December 16th – December 20th)

Grading Scale

All exams/essays will be graded based upon a 100 pt scale where 1pt = 1% of the total.

A Outstanding (96 – 100 pts)
B+ Above Satisfactory (86 – 89 pts)
B- Below Satisfactory (80 – 82 pts)

A- Very Good (90 – 95 pts)
B Satisfactory (83 - 86 pts)
C+ Above Average (76-79 pts)

¹ Bucher, Richard and Patricia L. Bucher. (2009) Diversity Consciousness: Opening Our Minds to People, Cultures, and Opportunities, 3rd Edition. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

C Average (73 – 75 pts)
D Poor (60 – 69 pts)

C- Below Average (70 – 72 pts)
F Unacceptable (59 and lower pts)

Total Point Breakdown

Quizzes 210 possible pts

Essays 200 possible pts

Examinations 200 possible pts

Participation (determined through class participation, group participation and evaluations) 50 possible points

Total 660

Final Grade Breakdown: A 660 – 631 pts; A- 630 – 591 pts; B+ 590 – 565 pts; B 564 – 545 pts; B- 543 - 525 pts; C+ 523 – 499 pts; C 498 - 479 pts; C- 478 – 459 pts; D 458 – 393 pts; F 392 or lower points

Reading Schedule

- Week 1: Class Introduction – What Is Philosophy, What Is Critical Thinking and Why We Are Not Entitled to Our Opinions?
Reading: For Wed/Fri: Chapter 1 – “How to Reason Logically”
- Week 2: How To Reason Logically
*Reading: For Mon/Wed: Chapter 1 Cont. – “How to Reason Logically”
Friday: In-Class Group Work & Discussion*
- Week 3: Effective Communication
*Readings: For Mon/Wed: Chapter 5 – “Obstacles to Better Communication”
Friday: In-Class Group Work & Discussion*
- Week 4: Evaluating Information
*Reading: For Mon/Wed: Chapter 4 – “How to Evaluate Information and Judge Credibility”
Friday: In-Class Group Work & Discussion
Review For Essay #1*
- Week 5: Claims, Issues and Arguments: what is an argument?
*Reading: For Mon/Wed: Chapter 2 – “Claims, Issues and Arguments”
Friday: Chap 2 Cont.*
- Week 6: Writing Logically
*Readings: For Monday: Chapter 3
For Wednesday: Chapter 6
Due Friday, October 11th: Essay Number 1*
- Week 7: Understanding That Bad Information Is All Around Us
*Reading: For Mon/Wed: Chapter 7 – “Defending Against Deception”
Friday: Review for Midterm Examination*

- Week 8: Midterm Exam (Monday) & Wed/Fri Group Exercises (How Consistent Are Our Beliefs & Building a God)
Monday: **Midterm Exam**
Wed/Friday: Group Exercises (Material Provided In-Class)
- Week 9: Fallacies and Being Consistent
Readings: *For Monday: Chapter 8 – “Detecting Fallacies”*
For Wed/Friday: Fallacies Cont. & Chapter 9 – “Consistency and Inconsistency”
- Week 10: Deductive Reasoning
Reading: *For Mon/Wed: Chapter 10 – “Deductive Reasoning”*
For Friday: Deductive Reasoning Cont. and Group Practice
- Week 11: Logical Forms and Evaluations
Readings: *For Monday: Chapter 11 – “Logical Form and Sentential Logic” Pgs 330 – 351*
For Wednesday/Friday: Chapter 11 – “Logical Form and Sentential Logic” Pgs 351 – 363
For Friday: Truth Table Group Exercise
- Week 12: The Birth of Logic in Aristotle and How to Evaluate Using Venn Diagrams
Readings: *For Wednesday: Chapter 12 – “Aristotelian Logic and Venn-Euler Diagrams” Pgs. 374 – 380*
For Friday: Chapter 12 – “Aristotelian Logic and Venn-Euler Diagrams” Continued Pgs 380 – 393
Holiday: Monday, November 11th
- Week 13: Venn/Euler Diagrams Continued – Learning to Diagram Arguments
Assignments:*In-Class/Group Work on Categorical Arguments and Venn Diagrams*
Review of Essay #2
Holiday: Thursday & Friday, November 28th and 29th
Group Quiz on Wednesday of Week 13
- Week 14: Inductive Reasoning
Reading: *For Monday: Chapter 13 – “Inductive Reasoning” Pgs. 404 - 422*
For Wednesday: Chapter 13 – ”Inductive Reasoning” Pgs. 422- 441
For Friday: Group Practice – Coming Up With Inductive Claims
- Week 15: Every Effect Must Have a Cause
Reading: Chapter 14 – “Reasoning about Causes and Their Effects”
Due Friday, December 13th: Essay Number 2
Friday: Review for Final Examination
- Week 16: Final Examination (Review for the exam will be held on the final day of class)

Welcome to Philosophy 004!