PHIL 1250: REASONING AND RATIONAL DECISION MAKING

Spring 2018: Online
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CORE COURSE INFORMATION

I. Class description

- Being a critical thinker involves the ability to support and criticize claims in a rational manner, i.e. by identifying reasons and providing arguments. This, in its turn, requires being well-informed and possessing reliable reasoning skills.
- The objective of this course is to help you develop and refine those skills, by: (a) providing you with a tool kit of concepts and reasoning methods; (b) giving you the opportunity to apply them over a range of situations and (c) encouraging you to improve, your ability to express arguments in written form.

II. Objectives of the course

- At the end of the semester, the students will:
  - appreciate the importance of basing claims, judgments and decisions on well-founded reasons.
  - become acquainted with the biases inherent to our cognitive capacities.
  - correctly identify, reconstruct and represent the structure of arguments and their components.
  - be familiar with different standards of reasoning (deductive and non-deductive) and their application to the detection of good and bad arguments.
  - be familiar with the main concepts of deductive logic (including the notion of valid argument form), as well as with its inference rules.
  - have a grasp of basic probabilistic thinking (and its common pitfalls).
  - recognize common fallacies in everyday reasoning.

III. Texts


IV. Mechanics of the course

This course is organized by weeks. On a typical week, I will post, by Monday: (a) the week’s corresponding video lectures and reading assignments. (b) the homework assignments (if they haven’t been posted earlier), which will be due by the end of the following Monday. (c) at least one discussion question related to the class material.

V. Expectations and Requirements

The evaluation will consist in: (a) four exams, each worth 10% of the final grade, for a total of 40%. For each of the exams, there will be an announced period of 5 days, during which the student must take the exam once, at the time and place of her/his convenience. (b) Weekly homework assignments, which collectively constitute 45% of your final grade. (c) Participation on class discussions (15%). To get full participation credit, you must participate on at least 10 weeks out of the 15 weeks of the course.