

PRACTICAL REASONING

PHIL XXXXX · Semester Year · Class Time · Class Meeting Place

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Course Description: Theoretical reasoning is reasoning about how things stand, while practical reasoning is reasoning about what to do. Thus, practical reasoning is directed towards action. The aim of this class is to discuss possible solutions to the following question: *what inference patterns are legitimate methods of arriving at decisions or intentions to act?* We will review some of the major threads in the literature, and we will explore a position known as *practical empiricism* in depth at the end of the course. By the end of the course, you should have an understanding of the major positions in practical reasoning, and you should be able to articulate and to argue for a particular position yourself. Since practical reasoning is largely drawn from moral philosophy, a working knowledge of the three major normative theories, i.e., utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue theory, will be helpful for your success in this class.

Check the course webpage frequently for updated information about this course: [enter course website here]

Required Text: Millgram, Elijah (ed.) (2001). *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Millgram, Elijah (1997). *Practical Induction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

More suggested texts citations are available on the course website.

Requirements: Actually doing philosophy involves class discussion, in which students dialogue back and forth with the instructor and with each other. This is a seminar style class that places a premium on class discussion. Since this is the case, attendance is vital for success in the course.

Participation (15%). You should come to class prepared to talk about the article(s) you read for that day. By raising a question, a comment, or criticism of the reading, you earn participation points. The participation grade will be based on the extent to which you participate in discussion and the quality of your comments.

Presentation (15%). You will be expected to present one/two articles to the class. A presentation consists in outlining at least the main argument of the reading. You may also include some of the auxiliary arguments if they are

important components of the main argument of the paper. An exceptional presentation will include a few criticisms of the main argument. You need to demonstrate that you have command of the argument. If you are too confused by the argument, then summarize what you think the main argument of the reading is and present a few questions.

Mini-papers (30%). You will be responsible for completing two mini-papers of no more than 5 pages (strict limit). The first paper is due DUE DATE, and the second paper is due DUE DATE. For each of them, I will prepare a few questions for you to use as a guide for writing the paper. If you want to create your own topic to write about, then please make an appointment with me to discuss it.

Final Paper (40%). The student will be expected to complete one 10-12 page paper on a topic of the student's choice. More information, i.e., suggested topics, will be distributed sometime toward the middle of the semester. The student must submit a brief prospectus of the paper by DUE DATE, a bibliography by DUE DATE, and a detailed outline by DUE DATE.

Failure to complete any of these requirements will severely effect your grade.

Policies:

Cheating. Cheating on any course requirement shall not be tolerated. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, copying from one's own clandestine notes, from someone else's paper, or quoting or paraphrasing an author without crediting the source (plagiarism). If the student is caught cheating, then s/he will receive a 0 on the work and will be subject to disciplinary action.

Students with Disabilities Act. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, cognitive, systemic, learning, and psychiatric impairments. Please contact the instructor at the beginning of the course to discuss any such accommodations that you may require for this course. For more information, the student should contact the Center for Disability Services.

Notice. The student is advised. All material contained herein, including course design, content, lectures, correspondence, Internet content, and written material, is the intellectual property of the instructor. In addition, the instructor reserves the right to change, revise, or alter any portion of this syllabus at any time, at his sole discretion, for any reason, without further notification to the student. This syllabus is in accordance with the [university or college handbook].

Grading:

There are no averages in this class, so put your calculators away. Grades will be determined according to a linear point scale. The more points you accumulate the higher your grade. In-class participation is worth a total of 100 points, each presentation is worth 50 points (100 total points available),

each mini paper is worth 100 points (200 points total), and the final paper is worth a total of 250 points. The total number of points available equals 650.

The grading scale is as follows: 585 for an A-, 520 for a B-, 455 for a C-, 390 for a D-. Anyone who fails to earn 390 points fails the class.

**Course
Schedule &
Assignments:**

The course schedule is available online at the class website. Since this is an advanced philosophy class that emphasizes discussion in the classroom (and outside the classroom) the schedule may change frequently. The class website and blog will be the primary forms of communication with the student, and the student should check these website regularly.

Reading Assignments	Homework Assignments (TBD)
Introduction to Practical Reasoning: Millgram, “Practical Reasoning: The Current State of Play” and Elijah Millgram, excerpts from <i>Practical Induction</i> (chapters 1, 2, 5, and 7)	Week 1
Nihilism: James Dreier, “Humean Doubts and Categorical Imperatives” and Christine Korsgaard, “Skepticism about Practical Reason” (Section 3)	Week 2
Instrumentalism: Christoph Fehige, “Instrumentalism”	Week 3
Internalism: Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons, with Postscript”	Week 4
Responses to Internalism: Brad Hooker, “Williams’ Argument Against External Reasons” and Christine Korsgaard, “Skepticism about Practical Reason”	Week 5
Internalism and Theories of Motivation: John Robertson, “Internalism, Practical Reason, and Motivation” and excerpts from Michael Smith, <i>The Moral Problem</i>	Week 6
Incommensurability of Ends: Martha Nussbaum, “The <i>Protagoras</i> : A Science of Practical Reasoning”	Week 7
Satisficing: Michael Slote, “Moderation and Satisficing” and some excerpts from the work of Gerd Gigerenzer	Week 8
Reasoning with Maieutic Ends: David Schmidtz, “Choosing Ends”	Week 9
Plans and Intentions to Act: Michael Bratman, “Taking Plans Seriously” and excerpts from his <i>Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason</i> or <i>Faces of Intention</i>	Week 10
Specificationism: Aurel Kolnai, “Deliberation is of Ends” and David Wiggins, “Deliberation	Week 11

and Practical Reason”	
Responses to Specificationism: Sarah Broadie, “The Problem of Practical Intellect in Aristotle’s Ethics” and Henry Richardson, “Specifying Norms as a Way to Resolve Concrete Ethical Problems”	Week 12
Coherence-Driven Reasoning: Paul Thagard, “How to Make Decisions: Coherence, Emotion, and Practical Inference”	Week 13
Practical Empiricism: Elijah Millgram, “Pleasure in Practical Reasoning” and excerpt from Millgram’s <i>Practical Induction</i> (chapter 6: How to Keep Pleasure in Mind)	Week 14
Practical Empiricism: Elijah Millgram, excerpts from <i>Practical Induction</i> (chapters 3, 4, and 8)	Week 15