

## Philosophy 101 – Logic, Reasoning and Persuasion

Fall 2021

### Meeting Days, Times, Places:

In-person meetings:

W 3pm-4:20pm

Hardenbergh Hall Room A7

Our other session each week will be asynchronous online.

There will be a module of asynchronous online work each week, which will open up on Monday around noon and close Sunday midnight.

We'll also have an optional synchronous online discussion section, which we'll schedule after our first in-person meeting.

### Instructor:

Professor Andy Egan, Department of Philosophy

Office: 106 Somerset St, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Room 522

Email: [andyegan@rutgers.edu](mailto:andyegan@rutgers.edu)

Virtual office hours scheduling through Calendly:

<https://calendly.com/andyegan-1/office-hours-virtual>

### Course description:

The course is called "Logic, Reasoning, and Persuasion", and while we're going to talk about all of those, what we're going to focus on most is the *reasoning* part. We'll talk about logic as a tool to help facilitate better reasoning, and we'll talk about the role of good reasoning in effective persuasion, and also about the hazards of falling victim to bad reasoning because of persuasive tricks that sometimes appear in various kinds of arguments and media.

Good reasoning is hard. Partly, it's hard just because good reasoning requires focus and care and keeping track of a lot of moving parts of potentially complicated arguments and evidence. But it's also hard because the ways our brains are wired make it very easy, and very natural, to go in for a lot of *bad* reasoning. And so good reasoning isn't just intrinsically difficult, it also requires struggling against a lot of our natural inclinations.

We'll talk a fair bit in this course about the kinds of cognitive biases and illusions that we're subject to as users of human brains, and we'll also talk a fair bit about strategies we can use in order to keep those biases and illusions from leading us into error. We'll also talk a lot about arguments and evidence – about what makes an argument a powerful one that does a good job of supporting its conclusion, and about what makes

something good evidence for some hypothesis, and how to quantify \*how\* strongly some piece of evidence supports a hypothesis.

### Learning Goals:

Over the course of this class, you should:

- 1) Become familiar with a variety of cognitive biases and cognitive illusions that make good reasoning and accurate belief formation difficult.
- 2) Become familiar with a number of strategies and techniques for reasoning better, even in the face of these cognitive biases and illusions.
- 3) Learn and practice skills and techniques for extracting a clear, explicit representation of an argument from a less-than-clear, less-than-explicit argumentative speech, essay, etc.
- 4) Learn, and have some practice applying, strategies for assessing how well an argument supports its conclusion, and how strongly a piece of evidence supports a hypothesis.
- 5) Learn, and practice applying, skills for presenting your own arguments in a clear and effective way, for making them stronger, and for defending them against objection.



This class satisfies core requirement AH(o): Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

### ***This semester, things are going to continue to be weird***

This is going to be a weird semester. This isn't the way I'm used to teaching, and it's probably not the way you're used to learning. It's also going to be the fourth weird semester in a row, which means both that we're probably all getting more used to it by now, and also that we're all facing some accumulated pandemic fatigue. So we should expect that this semester will be disrupted by the COVID pandemic in its own special, distinctive way.

The fact that it's a weird semester in which we're all working in unfamiliar territory and all likely to be dealing with lives that are complicated in a bunch of ways calls for some distinctive actions from each of us to help make things work as well as possible.

On my end, I've got three commitments that I hereby make to you:

- 1) Flexibility: I will do my best to update my teaching strategies to fit the situation. I've thought a bunch about how to run this course effectively in a hybrid format, and I've tried to build it in a way that'll be successful in that format. But there's no substitute for experience, and for hearing from students about what's working and what's not. So I'm also committed to adjusting and repairing on the fly over the course of the term, as you all let me know what's working well and what could work better.
- 2) Communication: I'm going to really focus on communication this term, because I think it's going to be important. That means both being super clear and timely about my outgoing communications to you about what you're expected to be doing when, due dates, grading criteria, etc., and also being very open to and available for incoming communications from you about what's clear and what's hard to understand, what's working administratively and pedagogically and what isn't, and about anything that's happening for you that requires particular accommodation.
- 3) Accommodation: Everybody has a lot happening right now, and a lot of us are dealing with difficulties and obstacles that make this an especially hard time to stay on top of our work and get things done as well, and as efficiently, as we'd like. (I, for example, have a couple of nine year olds at home, both of whom have had their own distinctive struggles and needs as their lives and routines have been shaken up by stupid COVID, in ways that impose demands on me that are sometimes challenging to reconcile with the demands of teaching, research, and administration.) I'm committed to doing whatever I can to be accommodating about whatever it is that's happening for you, so that this semester can go as well as can be expected given everything that's going on. So if there's some difficulty, obstacle, etc. that's getting in the way of your engagement with this course, please let me know, and let me know what kind of accommodation would be helpful. I'll do what I can. There are going to be some constraints, because we're working as part of a university that has rules and policies and stuff, but I'll work with you to try and figure out solutions wherever possible.

On your end, I have two requests:

- 1) Communicate. If something about the course is really working for you, let me know about that so I make sure to keep doing that. If something about the course isn't working for you, let me know about that too, so I can look for ways to change things up. If something comes up and you need some accommodation about something, let me know and we'll see what we can do.
- 2) Stay engaged. Do the reading etc. when it's assigned, participate in the discussions, ask questions, come to synchronous office hours/discussions once in a while if that's logistically possible for you. All the stuff I've been reading about education lately suggests that this is super important for having a successful experience with courses generally, and all the more so as the courses move toward being more on line and less in person. So I'm going

to try and provide a bunch of structure that promotes regular engagement, and I ask you to do your best to stay engaged regularly during the term.

***Attendance:***

Short version: This is a hybrid course, which meets in person once a week. But (because pandemic) there's no attendance requirement, and no part of your grade will be determined by attendance.

Longer version with explanation and nuance: Normally, I have an attendance requirement and there's a chunk of everybody's grade that's determined by constructive participation in in-class discussion. This term I'm not going to do either of those things, because I don't want to push people toward coming to class when it's not a good idea for them to do so. So I'm not going to take attendance, and no part of your grade will be attendance or discussion based. If you feel sick, don't come to class, and take care of yourself: get tested, get treatment, etc. as appropriate.

If you can foresee that you're going to miss the in-person classes a lot, please let me know. You may want to consider finding a totally online course to switch into. But if that's not a good option, contact me and I'll work with you on figuring out ways to make the course work given whatever your constraints are.

That said, my guiding vision for the course is as a hybrid, where we're in person talking through philosophical issues once a week, with a blackboard and stuff. One thing I've learned over the last year and a half is that I'm pretty good at teaching philosophy that way – better than I am at teaching it over zoom and with recorded lectures and stuff. So other things equal, it's a good idea to come to class, because I think that's going to maximize how much you get from the course. But I totally recognize that other things might not be equal in some people's cases, and if that's you, I'm committed to working with you to figure out how to get as much from the course as possible.

***Masks:***

University boilerplate: In order to protect the health and well-being of all members of the University community, masks must be worn by all persons on campus when in the presence of others (within six feet) and in buildings in non-private enclosed settings (e.g., common workspaces, workstations, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Masks must be worn (and worn properly – covering the nose and mouth) during class meetings; any student not properly wearing a mask will be asked to leave.

My own commentary: For real. You have to wear a mask. So do I. It's going to be super annoying but we're going to do it in order to protect our own and each others' health. I've got kids at home who are too young to be vaccinated and I don't want to bring the most recent exciting COVID mutation back to them. I'm sure others in the class have got relevantly similar situations. If you're not wearing a mask (and wearing it properly) in class I'll remind you. (If I forget, or mine slips out of position or something during class,

please remind me too!) People who continue to not wear a mask properly will be asked to leave, and I'll report the incident to Student Conduct. For all of our sakes, I'm not going to mess around about this, and it's not negotiable.

If for whatever reason this isn't tolerable for you, you shouldn't come to class. In that case see the attendance policy above – talk to me and we can work out a way for you to complete the course without attending the in-person meetings.

### ***Academic integrity and plagiarism***

Short version: Don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. It cheapens and diminishes everybody's academic experience, and it's a violation of the trust that's important for successful learning and teaching. You're also very likely to be caught, and the penalties can be extremely severe, including suspension or expulsion from the university.

Longer version: The university's policy on Academic Integrity is available at <http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/home/academic-integrity-policy/>. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with this document, both for this class and for your other classes and future work.

Judgments about plagiarism and academic integrity can be subtle. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask for guidance from me. (Really! I am very happy to talk about this stuff, and I will be happy that you asked.)

### ***Format and resources:***

This is a hybrid course. That means that, instead of meeting twice a week in person for 80 minutes, we'll meet once a week in person for 80 minutes, and replace the other in-person meeting with asynchronous online work.

Here's how it's going to work:

- Every week there will be two sets of assignments and activities – we'll call them "modules".
  - One will be things to do before we meet in person, and will usually be designed to set up our discussion and activities in our in-person meeting. It will open up on Sunday, and stay open until right before class on Wednesday.
  - The other will open up on Monday morning and close on Sunday night. This one will be work to do sometime during the week, doesn't matter when.
- Assuming there's enough demand for it, we'll have an optional discussion section that meets synchronously online during the period between in-person meetings. We'll talk about setting this up in our first meeting.

This course will be mostly on the Top Hat LMS, but it'll also be connected to Canvas (and you can get to the Top Hat site via Canvas).

You need to buy a subscription to Top Hat, and also the textbook, *Reason Better*, by David Manley (which is an online text integrated into Top Hat). The bookstore should be set up so you can buy access there, but you can also buy directly from Top Hat via the invitation you should have received by now. Please get in touch with me immediately if you're having trouble getting access – you won't be able to complete the required work for the course without access to Top Hat and *Reason Better*.

We'll also be using a tool called ThinkerAnalytix when we start doing argument mapping in week 2. We'll talk more about this when we meet and there'll be announcements about how to get set up with it.

### *Course Requirements and Grading*

We're going to use a *specifications grading* scheme. We'll talk more about this when we meet, and there'll be a separate explainer document for it. But the central idea is that we'll give you clear specifications for what a successful completion of an assignment looks like, and then the grading for each assignment is binary – either you met the specifications for the assignment or not. For every assignment (or assignment-type), you'll have more than one opportunity to attempt it, so if you don't meet specifications the first time we'll give you feedback and you can try again. Then rather than assigning variable numbers of points for each assignment and adding them up at the end of the term to determine final grades, there are requirements for which of the assignments offered in the course you need to successfully complete in order to earn a particular letter grade for the course.

The system's probably unfamiliar and so it'll take some explanation and some getting used to – we will talk about this a lot, and there will be lots of opportunities to ask questions, in the early weeks of the term. (And later in the term too, but it's especially important early.)

I'm doing things this way because I think (a) it's a better way to make the tools we're using for assessment line up constructively with actually learning stuff and mastering the skills we're trying to teach, (b) it removes a lot of problematic subjective judgment calls (about exactly how much partial credit to award, for example) from the grading system, (c) it should give you, the students, a clearer picture of what you need to do in order to get the grade you want, and gives you some clearer parameters for making choices about how much and what kind of work you want to do, depending on what kind of grade you care about earning.

Specifications of the packages for various grades are below – you shouldn't expect these to be totally transparent yet. We'll talk a bunch more about this, and there'll be another document just about assignments and grading, in the first couple weeks of term.

Requirements for an A grade:



- 95% or higher on all chapter assignments
- 12 reflection questions
- Complete all ThinkerAnalytix modules
- Complete all argument mapping levels
- 90% or higher on two cumulative assessments
- Success on integrative project

Requirements for a B grade:

- 90% or higher on all chapter assignments
- 10 reflection questions
- Complete all TA modules
- Complete 3 argument mapping levels
- 80% or higher on two cumulative assignments

Requirements for a C grade:

- 80% or higher on all chapter assignments
- 8 reflection questions
- Complete 8 TA modules
- Complete 2 argument mapping levels
- 70% or higher on two cumulative assignments

Requirements for a D grade:

- 80% or higher on 8 chapter assignments
- 8 reflection questions
- Complete 6 TA modules
- Complete 1 argument mapping level
- 60% or higher on two cumulative assignments

Plus grades: Fulfill all the requirements for the base grade, and two for the next one up.

### *Academic integrity and plagiarism*

Short version: Don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. It cheapens and diminishes everybody's academic experience, and it's a violation of the trust that's required for successful learning and teaching. You're also very likely to be caught, and the penalties can be extremely severe, including suspension or expulsion from the university.

Longer version: The university's policy on Academic Integrity is available at <http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/home/academic-integrity-policy/>. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with this document, both for this class and for your other classes and future work.

Judgments about plagiarism and academic integrity can be subtle. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask for guidance from me or from your TA. (Really! We are very happy to talk about this stuff, and we'll be happy that you asked.)

Plan for the semester:

This is the tentative plan as of the beginning of term, before we've actually started meeting. There is an approximately 2% chance that we'll wind up doing just exactly this. Updated schedules will be posted to the course Canvas and Top Hat sites as changes are made.

Week 1: Setting up for the term

In person meeting on 9/1:

- Syllabus & course orientation on Top Hat before class

Remote component:

- Cognitive biases and cognitive illusions

Week 2: Manley Chapter 1, start argument mapping

In person meeting on 9/8

- Manley chapter 1

Remote component:

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 0

Week 3: Manley chapter 2

In person meeting 9/15

- Manley chapter 2
- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 1

Remote component:

- Manley Ch2 discussion, elaboration, and follow-up
- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 2

Week 4: Manley Chapter 3

In person meeting 9/22

- Manley chapter 3

Remote component:

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 3

Week 5: Clarity cont'd



In person meeting 9/29

- Clarity & Argument Mapping exercises

Remote component

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 4

Week 6: Entailment and Logic

In person meeting 10/6

- Manley Ch4

Remote component:

- Discussion, elaboration, practice

Week 7: Manley Chapter 5

In person meeting 10/13

- Manley chapter 5

Remote component

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 5

Week 8: Catch up, review, application

In person meeting 10/20:

- TBD – catch up, review

Remote component:

- Cumulative assignment 1

Week 9: Manley Chapter 6

In person meeting 10/27

- Manley chapter 6

Remote component

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 6

Week 10: Manley Chapter 7

In person meeting 11/3

- Manley chapter 7

Remote component

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 7

Week 11: Manley Chapter 8

In person meeting 11/10

- Manley chapter 8

Remote component:

- Cumulative assignment #2

Week 12: Updating and Evidence review, practice and application

In person meeting 11/17

- TBD – review, catchup, etc.

Remote component:

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 8

Week 13: Applications

Optional synchronous online meeting 11/24

Remote component:

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 9

Week 14: Manley Chapter 9

In person meeting 12/1

- Manley Ch9

Remote component

- ThinkerAnalytix lesson 10

Week 15: Manley chapter 10

In person meeting 12/8

- Manley ch10

Final exam period: (Our scheduled time is 12/22 4pm-7pm, but it'll be an online assignment like the other two cumulative assignments.)

- Cumulative assignment #3