TEACHING PORTFOLIO

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I. STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

There was a moment in my teaching that I regard as formative. I had been presenting an argument, and when I moved on to demonstrating ways of objecting to that argument, a student raised her hand to express confusion: 'How can you say that that premise might be false, when you just told us it was true? Aren't you contradicting yourself?' Because of this question—and the student's bravery in posing it—I realized that my students had been copying down my argument reconstruction as if each premise were a matter of fact that added up to a conclusion they were supposed to accept. I realized that I had expected them to engage critically while I hadn't taught them how.

Moments like these have led me to regard student engagement as crucial to students' learning. The student who expressed confusion contributed to my thinking about pedagogy, and students have meaningful ideas about the arguments they encounter. So, as a teacher, I craft opportunities for students to articulate their thinking about a concept, and I aim to help students recognize when to change their minds. To this end, I design courses with an eye to maximizing student involvement. When I curate course materials, I consider, *What can I use to spark meaningful disagreement? What will develop the conversation we'll be having at this point in the term?* I teach figures like Descartes, Hume, and Montaigne because I can help students see what's exciting and relevant about historical philosophical works, but I mingle historical writing with literary essays, popular articles, and podcasts. I do this for several reasons. One is that students learn that philosophy is already in (and applicable to) the media they ordinarily engage with. This helps them make connections between course content and their lives outside of class. Relatedly, students see that philosophy isn't *just* 16th-century armchair thinking, and philosophers don't always look or express themselves like Descartes, Hume, or Montaigne.

I structure time spent in class so that students always have the big picture in view. On a typical day, I open class by briefly re-describing the key takeaway from last class and how it fits within the broader discussion of the last *n* class days (I also write this on the board). Then I present the capital-Q 'Question' that will guide our discussion for the day. I always craft the Question to get us to the core, most compelling aspect of the assigned material, but I don't use it to lecture. Students develop their own answers. To this end, I have them begin with a simpler, related question, which they reflect on and answer in small groups. I do this to lower the bar for entry into discussion and to create opportunities for students to learn from each other and develop trust. For example, when I teach Descartes' *Meditations,* I ask students to recall a belief they once held—something they were confident was true—and that they later discovered was false. I get responses like, 'I used to believe superheroes were real' and 'I believed I could cast spells'. The overall effect is that students feel a sense of camaraderie for their past, somewhat silly beliefs, and they begin to see why we, like Descartes, might want to reassess the foundations of our knowledge.

One benefit of using class to answer a Question is that students see their own ideas treated as substantive philosophical views. They feel the stakes of answering the Question, and they become invested in the collective attempt to answer. Of course, treating students' views as legitimate means evaluating them with respectful rigor. In my experience, students new to philosophy tend (1) to agree *too much,* e.g., by accepting views that are inconsistent, or (2) to *merely* disagree, without weighing the reasons for an opposing view. So, as I give students feedback, I show them how their ideas take shape as views that are either compatible or mutually exclusive, helping them feel the costs and benefits of accepting one and, if necessary, letting go of another. Because I guide students through the trial-and-error process of developing views, over time, students learn to be responsible for their own views, and they learn that this kind of responsibility sometimes requires them to change their minds.

I've found that encouraging students to be actively involved in class requires helping them overcome the fear of getting something wrong. So, I often employ strategies to create distance between students and the (perceived) cost of a wrong answer. One such strategy is teaching with games. I've designed social deduction games to help students learn inference to the best explanation and, on another occasion, the epistemology of testimony. I've also introduced Rawls' theory of justice by having students play a game where they (behind a 'veil of ignorance') come up with just principles for how they would distribute an arbitrary, fixed number of 'A' grades in the class. I've found that games help students grow comfortable with trial-and-error learning, and they make for memorable days in class.

Seeing students as having something to contribute keeps me engaged in the course and excited about time spent in class. My enthusiasm is evident to students, too. They mention it in their evaluations: "[The instructor] is super passionate and made the course worth paying attention to"; "Beth…did great making the class engaging and exciting, which is especially difficult for an 8am class."; "I loved this course… It was fun, educational, and engaging." I consider this the measure of a good day in class: that even I had fun, felt engaged, and learned something.

II. AREAS OF TEACHING EXPERTISE

Introductory Undergraduate

Logic
Critical Thinking
Introduction to Philosophy
Ethics
Applied Ethics, including:
Bioethics
Medical Ethics
Animal Ethics

Intermediate/Advanced Undergraduate

Philosophy of Mind
Epistemology
Social Epistemology
Philosophy of Animal Minds

Advanced Seminars

Ability and Disability (Action/Epistemology/Ethics)
Guiding questions: What does it mean to have the ability to do something, and how does this inform our understanding of disability? Is disability simply a matter of not having a particular ability? Or is disability better understood as a social construct? On agency, we'll study the work of Romy Jaster and Joshua Shepherd. On the nature of disability, we'll study the work of Shelley Tremain and Joel Michael Reynolds. Throughout, we'll also pay attention to the ethical implications of our inquiry.

Rational Animals (Epistemology/Animal Ethics)
Guiding questions: What is the historical and philosophical context of the notion that humans are *distinctively* rational animals? How does this notion hold up to the scrutiny of contemporary comparative psychology? For historical/philosophical context, we'll study Aristotle, Descartes, and Montaigne. For contemporary research on animal minds, we'll study the work of Susana Monsó, Kristin Andrews, and Jonathan Birch.

Knowledge-How (Epistemology)
Guiding questions: What does it mean to know how to do something? Is knowing how to act a matter of having a distinctively practical kind of knowledge? If so, what must be the core features of a distinctively practical kind of knowledge? What is the relationship between *practical* knowledge and ordinary *propositional* knowledge, knowledge of facts? We'll study the work of some founding figures in the debate about know-how, such as Gilbert Ryle, Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson, and Alva Noë, then we'll work our way into the evolving landscape of the current debate. We'll consider views such as Joshua Habgood-Coote's, Benjamin Elzinga's, and Natalia Waights Hickman's.

III. Quantitative Evaluation Data

Here I've compiled the mean scores for a representative sample of evaluation criteria. Wherever possible, I've included scores for criteria regarding (a) myself as instructor and (b) aspects of my course design. For complete evaluation criteria and data, please email me at beth.reichle@univie.ac.at.

Evaluation Scores (Mean), as Instructor of Record

SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

10-point scale: 10 = 'yes'; 1 = 'no'

	Critical Thinking (fall 2024)	*Theory of Knowledge* (spring 2025)
I engaged with perspectives that deepened/expanded my thinking.	9.5	9.4
I learned concepts/ processes/techniques that contributed to the development of my work.	9.5	8
The content, activities, projects, and structure supported course learning outcomes.	9.3	9.6
Did your ability to communicate ideas in writing/speech improve as a result of this course?	9.5	6.6
The instructor was on time and prepared.	9.8	9.6
The instructor encouraged the class to engage with a range of perspectives in discussion.	9.7	8.8
The instructor fostered a respectful, inclusive and equitable learning environment.	9.8	10

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

5-point scale: 5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree

	Judgment and Decision-Making (fall 2021)	*Philosophy and Persons,* sec. 3 (fall 2022)	*Philosophy and Persons,* sec. 8 (fall 2022)	*Philosophy and Persons,* sec. 12 (fall 2023)	*Philosophy and Persons,* sec. 16 (fall 2023)
course content effectively organized	3.8	4.5	4.1	4.1	4.5
course developed critical thinking	3.6	4.5	4.3	4.5	4.5
technology aided success	3.5	4.2	3.9	4	4.2
opportunity to interact with classmates	3.3	4.4	4.1	4.4	4.5
overall course effectiveness	3.4	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.5
instructor effectively presented content	3.3	4.3	4.1	4.5	4.7
instructor provided constructive feedback	3.9	4.5	4.2	4.6	4.6
instructor cultivated inclusive environment	3.8	4.3	4.6	4.4	4.7
instructor overall effectiveness	3.4	4.3	4.2	4.5	4.7

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

5-point scale: 5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree

	Intro to Ethics (summer 2018)*	*Intro to Philosophy,* sec. 02 (fall 2018)	*Intro to Philosophy,* sec. 03 (fall 2018)	*Introductory Bioethics,* sec. 01 (spring 2019)	*Introductory Bioethics,* sec. 02 (spring 2019)
instructor was knowledgeable, enthusiastic about topic	5	4.56	4.85	4.73	4.38
instructor effectively used examples/ illustrations	5	4.19	4.75	4.54	4
instructor fostered questions/ participation	5	4.31	4.65	4.73	4.73
instructor clearly explained ideas/concepts	5	4.06	4.5	4.56	3.79
responded appropriately to questions/ comments	5	4.5	4.4	4.54	4.07
stimulated student thinking and learning	5	4.56	4.6	4.73	4.41
promoted atmosphere of mutual respect…	5	4.63	4.85	4.73	4.62

*The means for this class represent the evaluations of only two students. It was my first course as instructor of record, and I learned to encourage students to complete evaluations. The data for later classes at the University of Missouri represent the evaluations of at least 16 students (i.e., for *Intro to Philosophy,* sec. 02 of fall 2018), but they average a response rate of 23 students (courses capped at 35 students, but I do not have data for how many enrolled).

Evaluation Scores (Mean), as Teaching Assistant

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

6-point scale: 6 = very high; 1 = very low

	Bioethics (winter 2021)	*Modern Philosophy* (spring 2021)	*Elementary Logic II* (winter 2022)	*Theory of Knowledge* (spring 2022)	*Introduction to Philosophy* (winter 2023)	*Modern Philosophy* (spring 2023)
able to answer the students' questions adequately	5.34	5.57	4.29	5.5	4.44	5.19
well prepared for each session	5.44	5.64	5.43	5.67	4.22	5.19
communicated ideas in a clear manner	5.28	5.64	4.86	5.5	4.17	5.25
showed strong interest in teaching the course	5.47	5.71	4.43	5.67	4.67	5.47

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY (continued)

6-point scale: 6 = very high; 1 = very low

	Elementary Logic I (fall 2024)	*Moral Philosophy* (spring 2025)
able to answer the students' questions adequately	3.48	3.89
well prepared for each session	3.64	4.21

communicated ideas in a clear manner	3.84	4.16
showed strong interest in teaching the course	4.32	4.47

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

5-point scale: 5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree

	Intro to Philosophy (spring 2017)	*Logic & Reasoning, sec. 01D* (fall 2017)	*Logic & Reasoning, sec. 01E* (fall 2017)	*Logic & Reasoning, sec. 01F* (fall 2017)	*Medical Ethics, sec. 01C* (Spring 2018)
instructor was knowledgeable, enthusiastic about topic	4.38	3.76	4.05	4.13	4.55
instructor effectively used examples/ illustrations	4.23	4	4	4.20	4.32
instructor fostered questions/ participation	4.23	4	4.26	4.43	4.65
instructor clearly explained ideas/concepts	4.23	3.8	3.89	3.87	4.45
responded appropriately to questions/ comments	4.38	3.76	4.47	4.33	4.35
stimulated student thinking and learning	4.31	4.12	4.37	4.13	4.45

promoted atmosphere of mutual respect…	4.46	4.47	4.68	4.4	4.7

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI (continued)

5-point scale: 5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree

	Medical Ethics, sec. 01E (Spring 2018)	*Medical Ethics, sec. 01F* (Spring 2018)
instructor was knowledgeable, enthusiastic about topic	4.5	4.61
instructor effectively used examples/ illustrations	4.6	4.61
instructor fostered questions/ participation	4.7	4.83
instructor clearly explained ideas/concepts	4.35	4.56
responded appropriately to questions/ comments	4.45	4.78
stimulated student thinking and learning	4.70	4.72
promoted atmosphere of mutual respect…	4.79	4.83

IV. SELECT STUDENT COMMENTS

Here I've included only select student comments. For complete evaluations, please email me at beth.reichle@univie.ac.at.

As Instructor of Record, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

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Spring 2025: Theory of Knowledge

"I left this class with a brand new way of thinking that has **fundamentally impacted both my life and my art**. I feel more free than I have ever felt before and I think more critically than ever before."

"Beth's structure was near perfect. I never felt like I was doing 'busy work'; everything we did fit the course outcome goals (in fact I'd say Beth's **use of class time, readings, and projects went far beyond the course outcome goals**)."

"I HATE talking in class… However, the way Beth facilitates but never pressures was so, so, so helpful. I went from being quiet to being one of the most active class participants. This is due to both Beth's leadership as well as her choice of topics. The topics were always so thought-provoking and interesting, **I couldn't help but want to join the conversation**."

"Beth is an **amazing professor who has a great sense of organization** and knows how to align her class with her learning goals. This is a skill I admire and look for in a professor. Additionally, Beth has amazing insight and was **excellent at sharing her insight in a way that still allowed us as students to contribute and challenge her way of thinking**."

"I just wish SAIC had more classes of professors like this."

As Instructor of Record, Loyola University Chicago

Fall 2023: Philosophy and Persons (introduction to philosophy)

"This course **genuinely made me have an interest in philosophy** and piqued my interest in the content more and more every class."

"**I thought I would hate philosophy, but I liked this course a lot**."

"Beth is a **very motivated and understanding educator**. She always keeps her students' interests in mind whilst challenging them to learn. Additionally she does an amazing job **respecting and elevating** the voices of her students."

"I loved how she has **so much knowledge** on the subject and was **excited to share** it with us."

"I thought professor Barker was amazing! I genuinely enjoyed how she held the class so much and **fully looked forward to the next class** because of the discussions and lectures she would hold.

She was always so professional but always made the class a space **we could all share any thoughts** and that **we could all share a laugh** together! Loved her"

"Very calm, caring, and organized. Very interesting to listen to and learn from!"

"Beth was a **great professor**. I would recommend her to my classmates. She did well on creating **discussions that were interesting and worth participating in**."

"I like how she taught the material and **organized everything out with advice from her students**."

"Incredibly nice and friendly, **best prof. this semester**."

"Professor Beth was an **amazing professor**. She made me think in a different way when it came to subjects we discussed in class."

Fall 2022: Philosophy and Persons (introduction to philosophy)

"I **loved this course**. It taught me to think critically, and write from a philosophical perspective. It was **fun, educational, and engaging**."

"Beth was very good at seeking input from students and implementing it. She also did great making the class **engaging and exciting**, which is especially difficult for an 8am class. I really liked how Beth **made the content applicable to students' personal lives**."

"I loved the instructor. She is **super passionate** and made the course worth paying attention to. I thought she taught the course in a manner that my generation really appreciates. We did not have tests, but we had reading responses and in class discussions. **People actually participated and it was super informative**. It made me think critically."

"They are nice to the class, and work well with what the students say, which is really nice for a class about discussing the nature of minds and living things."

"I felt **very comfortable speaking in her class**."

As Instructor of Record, University of Missouri

Spring 2019: Introductory Bioethics, sec. 01

"She **cared about everyone** in the room."

"She **knew what she was talking about** and **was enthused about it**."

"You **adapted** the course content with the extreme amount of snow days instead of forcing it all."

"I loved that we were able to have discussions every day. Beth did a good job of **engaging everyone** and **letting everyone speak**. The readings were interesting."

"**She did a splendid job in teaching ways for me to understand**."

"She taught in a manner where even if the content was a topic I had little knowledge of it didn't go over my head."

"She did a really good job of **making concepts as simple as possible for the sake of evaluating the argument**. She focused on learning more than just our ability to memorize information. She made the assigned readings really interesting and **challenged my opinions** on topics. **I learned a lot in this class** and her **teaching style really allowed me to take away information** and not forget it after we change subjects."

"I really just enjoyed the teacher and the discussion."

"She did a **really good job getting concepts across**."

Spring 2019: Introductory Bioethics, sec. 02

"Beth was very **enthusiastic** about the course and made sure we discussed a wide variety of topics and viewpoints."

"The articles chosen were **very interesting and relevant**."

"I loved all the topics/articles we covered. I liked the way we talked about them openly in class."

"She was **knowledgeable** about the subject."

"The personality of the teacher was super good, and fit perfectly with the class! They are **very kind, knowledgeable, non-judgmental, and open-minded**—all very good traits to have in philosophy. The classroom setting was very **open and safe, so people felt free to speak their mind**."

"Good argumentations with students and teacher. Teacher challenged students, students challenged teacher."

"The class discussions were very good and the content itself was interesting."

"I loved the readings assigned because they offered me a new perspective on arguments that are interesting and I liked hearing what other classmates had to say about the topics."

"She was **passionate** about the topics she taught."

Fall 2018: Introduction to Philosophy, sec. 02

"The **kindness and respect** she gave all of us was good, also she was very **enthusiastic** about the subject which helped the class a bunch."

"Miss. Barker did a **great job teaching a subject 7/10 students have no background knowledge of**. She challenged students and was very approachable."

"It was an open-minded environment. The instructor was **very engaging**."

"She's **passionate** about what she teaches."

"I liked her **enthusiasm**."

"The discussion was very open, and the instructor worked to keep the topic moving."

"The information we learned in class was interesting and Beth Barker taught it really well."

"**Everything. Very excellent instructor**." (In response to "What aspects of the teaching or content of this course were especially good?")

Fall 2018: Introduction to Philosophy, sec. 03

"The **ability to adapt** the course to fit the class direction (e.g., quiz adaptation). On top of that this has become **my favorite class**." (In response to "What aspects of the teaching or content of this course were especially good?")

"Lectures were **extremely effective**."

"Philosophy is a very hard course. Beth Barker made it **easier to understand while still challenging us**. It is definitely easier now to understand philosophy because of this **amazing teacher**. She really **helped me challenge myself**."

"I liked how the class was structured—how we'd read and then discuss rather than being flat-out lectured to. I also found the topics very interesting and if I actually enjoyed writing and wasn't so far into my current major, **I'd actually consider switching to philosophy**. Thanks for a great semester, Beth!"

"**Everything**" (In response to "What aspects of the teaching or content of this course were especially good?")

"Beth's **personality** made the class so much more intriguing and funny."

"She **makes class enjoyable** and is **knowledgeable** over the topics we talk about. You can tell she **enjoys what she is teaching**."

"Listens to students well. **Welcomes challenges**."

"Teacher communication. Always tried to do what was best for us." (In response to "What aspects of the teaching or content of this course were especially good?")

Summer 2018: Introduction to Ethics (online)

"This is **hands down the best course I've ever had the pleasure of taking**. My professor was very fair, clear, and consistent with what was expected from us, and a good sense of humor made learning even more enjoyable. We were given enough reading and assignments to effectively learn the material but not so much that it felt overwhelming."

"I **enjoyed this class so much** in comparison to many other classes that I can't imagine what would make it much better. If anything I wish it were longer so we could cover more material!" (In response to "What changes could be made to improve the teaching or the content of this course?")

As Teaching Assistant, Northwestern University

Spring 2023: Modern Philosophy (advanced course)

"Beth was **extremely kind and easy to talk to**. She led incredibly fun discussions surrounding philosophy. She was also very **explicit in her expectations** for the papers and reading reports, which I really appreciated!"

"YOU ARE THE BEST BETH!! I absolutely adored being your student. **Your manner, knowledge, and interest made for a fantastic experience as your student**."

"Loved her! Super engaged with students and gave **great commentary on papers**."

"Very **engaging and fun to talk with**, and tried to stay very **approachable** throughout."

"She **knew her stuff** and tried to make discussion section as helpful for our learning as possible."

Spring 2022: Theory of Knowledge (advanced course in epistemology)

"Beth definitely showed strong interest in teaching the course; she **brought energy to every discussion section and clearly got joy in engaging us in conversation**. I appreciated how she read the room in section — that is, if we needed more guidance she would provide it, but she also recognized when to step back and let us have more independent conversations, sometimes jumping in with follow up questions but never dominating discussion sections with a forced/dogmatic agenda. Additionally, she was a **profound help with our papers**. She made herself available to meet even outside office hours to discuss our concerns, and always provided **great guidance and support**. She **explained things clearly**, and **made an active effort to understand our thoughts and questions**, often repeating back to us what we had said to make sure she understood. She asked interesting questions and discussion section was **always clarifying and fun**. Thanks Beth!!"

"Beth was very accommodating and understanding! She is a great TA!"

"Beth was very nice and did a nice job leading discussion. Also appreciated the good paper feedback."

"Incredibly kind TA, **distilled difficult concepts into quick and easily understandable ideas**, was generous with her time and attention. Cheerful and approachable."

Winter 2021: Bioethics (intro-level course)

"Beth was **well prepared for every section** with **questions and videos that were really helpful in stimulating our discussion**. She was also very receptive to different viewpoints and did a good job in summarizing our points, which really made it feel like **she cared about what we had to say**. Finally, Beth was really helpful when I needed to write my essay and had good advice about how to improve my thesis."

"I especially loved when she showed a scene from The Incredibles to frame our discussion about the right to refuse treatment."

"Very kind and effective TA. Our section really engaged with each week's content, and involved us with interesting media like quick videos and mini-articles that extended lecture topics."

"Made our discussions a **comfortable environment for people to share their ideas**."

"Beth was **excellent at facilitating peer discussions**."

Spring 2021: Modern Philosophy (advanced course)

"Beth is **extremely understanding**, and did her absolute best to support students in any way she could. I loved having Beth as my TA. When I was having a tough time this quarter, Beth took time to work out deadline solutions with me and **accommodate** my struggles. Thank you Beth!!"

As Teaching Assistant, University of Missouri

Spring 2018: Medical Ethics (introductory course)

"You did a very good job of asking questions that **sparked discussion** and answering any questions we had."

"Beth was **enthusiastic about the material** and genuinely worked hard to help other students better understand it! **LOVED this course**."

"Beth **made everything clear and easy to understand**."

"Beth is **very patient and attentive to details**. When answering questions, she always gave each question equal consideration and thought. She **made sure that each question was wholly answered**."

"Responded appropriately when there was not a good answer to a student's question… **fostered a good, respectful teaching environment**."

"Beth was **seriously amazing**, she **always answered everyone's questions**. Was very helpful throughout the entire semester."

"**Great at stimulating student learning and able to answer questions** that most people had. Created a **great atmosphere for everyone**."

"Beth was an ***amazing*** **TA!** She **fostered wonderful discussions, provided great feedback, and kept everything on track**. She **commands respect** in a quiet sort of way."

"Always **cheerful and prepared** for class."

"Calm presence, **very good at listening and fostering good conversations**. Also **willing to take charge** and lead class when needed."

"Beth was **passionate and knowledgeable**. She fostered in-class participation and asked thought-provoking questions."

"You were the **best TA I've had yet** in these two years."

"Very good at being patient with all our questions. Always **explained things very thoroughly**."

"Beth was very **enthusiastic** and always answered any questions we had. **Very positive and open learning environment**."

"In all honesty, most discussion sections don't help me. However, this discussion section did. Beth explained things that were unclear and **made the environment very welcoming** for class discussion."

"Beth was **extremely knowledgeable** and **did a great job of keeping discussions going**. She was also very helpful when I had to miss several class periods for university-sponsored events. Thanks Beth!"

"My TA was **really nice and respectful towards the entire class all the time**. She educated us with further detail than provided in class. Great TA!"

"**Loved the instructor**!"

"Teacher clearly is **passionate** about her career field."

V. SAMPLE SYLLABI

Here I've included three course syllabi and two course outlines, which are noted as such. All are my own design. For more syllabi or outlines, please email me at beth.reichle@univie.ac.at.

Introduction to Philosophy

I adjust aspects of my course design every time I teach intro to philosophy, but this syllabus reflects how I taught it most recently (winter semester 2026).

PHI 101 (sec. 20): Introduction to Philosophy
Mackinac Hall D-1-227
Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00pm-2:15pm

Basics

Instructor: Dr. Beth Barker
Contact: barkebet@gvsu.edu
Office: Mackinac Hall B-3-203
Student drop-in hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00am-11:15am (also by appointment)

Course description

This course introduces you to a variety of themes and methods of philosophy. In it, we'll try out possible answers to some challenging questions: What can we *know*? What kinds of things exist? What does it mean to be a person? How should we understand ourselves in relation to nonhuman animals? What's the meaning of life and what, if anything, is bad about death itself? Our aim in trying out answers to these questions is not to determine the ultimately *correct* answers, but to exercise and develop the skills required to think through complex and competing views about the way things are.

Course objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to…

Articulate main principles of several schools of philosophical thought.

Identify, explain and investigate philosophical problems.

Articulate main principles in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

Demonstrate written communication skills.

Demonstrate skills in logical and critical thinking.

Apply moral theories to relevant situations.

Knowledge Student Learning Outcomes

Explain principles and questions that define philosophy or literature and its contributions to human knowledge and civilization.

Explain the relationship between the works discussed, the cultures in which they were created, and the human concerns they illuminate.

Analyze and interpret one or more primary texts as a major portion of course content.

Essential Skills Student Learning Outcomes

For critical thinking:

Comprehensively evaluate issues, ideas, artifacts, or events before forming a conclusion.

State issues, ideas, artifacts, or events clearly and describe them comprehensibly.

Develop a position or interpretation, based on evidence, that considers the complexities of an issue, idea, artifact, or event, the limits of the position or interpretation, and other points of view.

Develop conclusions, implications, and consequences that reflect an informed evaluation based on strength of evidence.

For ethical reasoning:

Apply ethical principles and codes of conduct to decision making.

Recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex, multifaceted context and recognize interrelationships among relevant issues.

Accurately apply ethical theories or concepts to a complex issue and consider the full implications of the application.

Describe a position in detail and effectively respond to alternative ethical perspectives.

Course materials

Required materials:

(1) René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (buy a print copy for $10: https://hackettpublishing.com/meditations-on-first-philosophy)
(2) David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (buy a print copy for $10: https://hackettpublishing.com/an-enquiry-concerning-human-understanding)
(3) A notebook (paper—not a device/tablet!) and a pen/pencil

All other materials will be made available via Blackboard.

Determination of final grade

Exam 1 (both rounds together): 25% of your course grade*
Exam 2 (both rounds together): 35% of your course grade*
Attendance: 40% of your course grade

*You must take both exam 1 and exam 2 in order to receive a passing grade for this course.

Grading scale

A 93%-100%
A- 90%-92%
B+ 87%-89%
B 83%-86%
B- 80%-82%
C+ 77%-79%
C 73%-76%
C- 70%-72%
D 60%-69%
F 59% and below

Grade definitions

[A] *Outstanding*. Work displays mastery of material, exceptionally good writing or oral presentation, and creative engagement with the subject matter. This grade is reserved for those students who attain the highest levels of excellence in thought and scholarship.
[B] *Good*. Work displays accurate understanding of the material, writing is clear and free of mechanical errors.
[C] *Fair*. Work displays basic grasp of material, though there may be misunderstandings or inaccuracies. Writing quality acceptable.
[D] *Marginal*. Work displays a grasp of the material adequate for credit, but quality of work indicates lack of effort.
[F] *Unacceptable*. Excessive absences, assignments not completed, or assignments unworthy of credit.

Policies

Communication. Throughout the term, I will use Blackboard announcements to let you know about upcoming assignments, any changes to the course schedule, and so on. You are responsible for reading these announcements and planning accordingly.

Attendance. Attendance in this course is required. Your first two absences will be excused, no matter the reason for absence. All absences after the first two will reduce your course grade by ~2%, no matter the reason for absence.

Electronics. When you attend class, you must be *present.* So, the use of electronic devices (e.g., phones, smart watches, tablets, laptops, etc., etc.) in class is prohibited. You will be counted 'absent' for any class in which you use a phone, smart watch, tablet, laptop, etc., etc.

AI. The use of generative artificial intelligence for any aspect of your work in this course is prohibited.

Recording. Recording sound, video, or taking pictures in class is prohibited.

Late work/missing an exam. If you need an extension on an assignment or you face a scheduling conflict with an exam, you must let me know *in advance* of the assignment/exam due date. You will be allowed an extension/reschedule *only* if you let me know in advance of your need for one.

Make-up work. There will be no opportunity for 'make-up' work in this class (e.g., to compensate for missing class), and there will be no assignments for extra credit.

Changes to grades. I will not change your grade for any reasons unrelated to your performance in this course, and I will not respond to emails requesting an arbitrary change of grade.

Accessibility. If you need accommodations because of a learning, physical, or other disability, please contact Student Accessibility Resources (SAR) at (616) 331-2490, or https://www.gvsu.edu/accessibility. Once you have documentation from SAR recommending accommodations for you, please present the documentation to me so we can work out a plan for your success in this course.

Plagiarism. Submitting or presenting any phrases, sentences, ideas, illustrations, or other expression or media from another source as if it were your own (i.e., without citing any other source) is plagiarism. If you intentionally plagiarize an assignment in part or in whole, you will receive a failing grade for the plagiarized assignment. Find more information about plagiarism and corresponding GVSU policies at the links below.

Plagiarism Specific Language:
https://www.gvsu.edu/policies/policy.htm?policyId=87CF73DD-A256-C282-67158E337ECCE471&search=plagiarism

Student Code of Conduct:
https://www.gvsu.edu/policies/category.htm?categoryId=2D0C8EF7-9959-9B01-959C403E725313F3

GVSU course policies. Find them at this link: https://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/.

Fire statement. Immediately proceed to the nearest exit during a fire alarm. Do not use elevators. More information is available on the University's Emergency website located at: http://www.gvsu.edu/emergency. If for any reason you think that you may need assistance evacuating

this classroom and/or building in an emergency situation, please make me aware so we can develop a plan to assist you.

Changes. I reserve the right to adjust aspects of this course during the term in order to help students meet course objectives.

Schedule

The schedule is subject to change as the term proceeds. I will notify you of any changes via Blackboard announcements.

PART I: FUNDAMENTALS FOR DOING PHILOSOPHY

Week 1: Introduction to the course, methods
Aims: *Get to know each other, learn methods for developing creativity, formulate strategies for focus.*

1/13 Introduction to the course (no assignment)

1/15 Watch 'Why We Can't Focus': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QltxZ-vPMc;
In class, we'll do creative thinking exercises

Week 2: The value of disagreement
Key questions: *What makes disagreeing about something good, when it is good, and what we might gain from fruitful disagreement?*

1/20 Read two pieces by Katherine Dormandy:
(1) https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/openfordebate/the-benefits-of-disagreement/; then
(2) https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/openfordebate/the-human-ingredient-needed-for-productive-disagreement/

1/22 No assignment;
In class, we'll expand on ideas from Tuesday's readings;
(Tip: look ahead and begin reading for our next class, on 1/27!)

PART II: KNOWLEDGE AND RATIONALITY

Week 3: The rationality of certainty
Key question: *What, if anything, can we know for certain?*

1/27 Read meditations I-III, from Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*

1/29 Listen to Bragg, 'Cogito Ergo Sum': https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b010mvcp

Week 4: What we learn from *experience*
Key questions: *What can we take ourselves to know on the basis of what we observe? Is it ever rational to be certain of something?*

2/3 Read Hume, *Enquiry,* excerpts;
Listen to Bragg, 'David Hume': https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b015cpfp

2/5 No assignment; in class, we'll expand on ideas from Tuesday's materials

Week 5: Rational animals
Key questions: *Are humans the only rational creatures? Should we think humans are rational at all?*

2/10 Read Michel de Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond,* excerpts;
Listen to 'Peter Godfrey Smith on Understanding Minds':
https://philosophybites.com/podcast/peter-godfrey-smith-on-understanding-minds/
(optional) Listen to 'Jonathan Birch on the Edge of Sentience':
https://philosophybites.com/podcast/jonathan-birch-on-the-edge-of-sentience/

2/12 No assignment; in class, we'll expand on ideas from Tuesday's materials

Week 6: Review and exam

2/17 A day of review

2/19 Exam 1, round 1

Week 7: Animal ethics
Key question: *Are humans the only creatures capable of morally good (or bad) action?*

2/24 Read Borchert and Dewey, 'In Praise of Animals'

2/26 *Instructor away—no class*

Week 8: Revisions

3/3 Exam 1, round 2

3/5 No assignment;
In-class activity (to-be-discovered)

Week 9: A well-earned break!

3/10 Spring break—no class

3/12 Spring break—no class

PART III: METAPHYSICS OF IDENTITY

Week 10 Personal identity

Key questions: *What is a self? What does it mean for a person to be themselves?*

3/17 Read Perry, 'A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality': https://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil201/Perry.pdf
(optional) Listen to Lam, 'Cannibals': https://hiphination.org/season-5/s5-episode-10-cannibals/

3/19 No assignment;
In class, we'll expand on ideas from Tuesday's materials

Week 11 Transformative experiences and rational decision-making
Key questions: *What does making a rational decision require? Is it possible to decide on life-altering experiences rationally? If not, how should we approach life's significant decisions?*

3/24 Listen to 'L. A. Paul on Transformative Experience': https://philosophybites.com/podcast/l-a-paul-on-transformative-experience/;
Or listen to Lam, 'Vampires': https://hiphination.org/season-5/s5-episode-8-vampires/

3/26 Read Kind, 'Imagination as Transformative': https://philpapers.org/archive/KINIAT-14.pdf

PART IV: VALUE THEORY, OR WHAT MATTERS AND WHY

Week 12: Valuing philosophy
Key questions: *What's the value of philosophy? What does it mean to you now, and what philosophical questions do you think are important?*

3/31 Read Plato, *Apology*;
Listen to Bragg, 'Socrates in Prison': https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00274xs;
(optional) Listen to 'Agnes Callard on Lessons from Socrates': https://philosophybites.com/podcast/agnes-callard-on-lessons-from-socrates/

4/2 No assignment;
In class, we'll expand on ideas from Tuesday's materials

Week 13: Death
Key questions: *Is death itself a bad thing? If so, what makes it bad? Should we fear death?*

4/7 Read Nagel, 'Death';
Read Blackburn, *Ethics,* 'Birth and death' (pp. 82-92);
(optional) Listen to 'Steven Nadler on Spinoza on Death': https://philosophybites.com/podcast/steven-nadler-on-spinoza-on-death/

4/9 Read Monsó, 'Animals' understanding of death can teach us about our own': https://time.com/7093845/animal-death-essay/;

(optional) Listen to Lam, 'The Wishes of the Dead': https://hiphination.org/complete-season-one-episodes/episode-one-the-wishes-of-the-dead/

Week 14: Friendship and the good life
Key questions: *Is friendship a necessary ingredient in a good life? If so, what does a friendship that contributes to a good life look like?*

4/14 Read Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Book VIII: https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.8.viii.html; Listen to Bragg, 'Friendship': https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p003hyd3

4/16 No assignment; in class, we'll expand on ideas from Tuesday's materials

Week 15

4/21 A day of review

4/23 Exam 2, round 1

Final exam: Tuesday, April 28, 12:00pm-1:50pm

Theory of Knowledge

I taught this course at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago last semester (spring 2025).

HUM 3330: THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE
SPRING 2025

Fridays, 8:30am-11:15am in Maclean 617

Instructor: Beth Barker
Contact: bbarker@saic.edu
Office hours: by appointment (via zoom or in-person)

In this course, we'll cover a variety of issues in the study of knowledge, known as *epistemology*. We'll consider ways to answers to questions like these: What does it mean to be rational? When do we have the right to believe something? What kinds of considerations do we owe each other as 'knowers'? Can it be morally wrong to have certain beliefs? How should we resolve disagreement between peers? And how does what we know inform what we do?

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you should…
Be familiar with key concepts in epistemology, and why they matter outside of epistemology.
Know how to participate critically and creatively in discussions.
Know yourself better as a thinker and reasoner.
Know when to change your mind.
Have a sense of epistemic camaraderie!

MATERIALS

Required: Richard Fumerton's *Epistemology* (https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Epistemology-p-9781405125673#tableofcontents-section; cost: ~$37)

Recommended: Plato's *Theaetetus* (e.g., this one: https://hackettpublishing.com/theaetetus; cost: ~$13)

Recommended: a good notebook and pen or pencil!

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance. Everyone is allowed a **maximum of two absences**. **If you miss more than two classes during the semester, you will not be eligible to receive credit for this course**. There are only two exceptions to this rule. Exception 1: If you have an accommodation letter from the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) that allows you to miss an additional class *and*

you have emailed this letter to me, your instructor, you will be allowed to miss one additional class while maintaining eligibility for course credit. Exception 2: If you encounter unexpected or prolonged life circumstances that interfere with your attendance (e.g., but not limited to illness, injury, or grief), you will be allowed to complete makeup work to receive course credit *only if* I receive notification from your academic advisor notifying me of the fact that you're facing such difficulty (but I respect your right to privacy here—you do not owe me any details). Additionally, please keep in mind that in some cases it may be best for you to drop the course. Dropping a course doesn't mean you're a bad student!

Finally, please keep in mind that it's important for you to be on time to class so we can begin class without delay. **If you're more than 15 minutes late, you will be counted absent for that day.**

Coursework. We'll have a total of eleven "content weeks" during this course (i.e., weeks when one or more readings is assigned). For each content week, you *should,* before class (1) read at least one of the chapters/articles assigned for that week and (2) write and submit a reading response about the chapter/article you read for class. However, **you *must* submit at least nine out of eleven reading responses** (which means you must do *at least* nine readings!) **in order to receive course credit**. Note that **only reading responses that receive a grade of "2" or higher count toward this total**. If you receive a grade of "1" on a reading response, you may rewrite and resubmit the response *before* our next class meeting in order to receive credit for the response. I will not accept late reading responses (or makeup responses submitted *after* the start of the following class), and you will not be allowed to submit a reading response for a week you are absent (for credit, anyway—you can still submit it for feedback, though, if you like).

Accommodations. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago is committed to full compliance with all laws regarding equal opportunities for students with disabilities. If you know or suspect you have a disability, such as a Reading/Writing Disorder, ADD/ADHD, and/or a mental health condition, and you think you would benefit from assistance or accommodations, first contact the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) to schedule an appointment. DLRC staff will review your disability documentation and work with you to determine reasonable accommodations. They will then provide you with a letter outlining the approved accommodations for you to deliver to all of your instructors. **This letter must be presented before any accommodations will be implemented.** You should contact the DLRC as early in the semester as possible. The DLRC is located on the 13th floor of the MacLean Center, 112 S. Michigan Ave., and can be reached via phone at 312.499.4278, or email at dlrc@saic.edu.

About AI-Generated Content. **All work that you submit for this course must be your own work,** not the work of another person, and not the work of any other 'content generator' (including but not limited to ChatGPT). It's not worth my while to grade ChatGPT's work, or work that doesn't belong to *you,* and it would be a waste of your time and effort to be in this class if you don't complete assignments by your own effort (this is how we learn!). For these reasons, no student will receive credit for unoriginal work. I will use Canvas's 'Turnitin' function to determine whether a given submission represents a student's work. For this reason, I cannot accept work that's *not* submitted via Canvas.

Academic Misconduct. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago prohibits "dishonesty such as cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the School" (Students' Rights

and Responsibilities, Student Handbook). Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. One plagiarizes when one presents another's work as one's own, even if one does not intend to. Find out more about plagiarism and how to avoid it here: https://www.saic.edu/lifeatsaic/%20academicadvising/.

Academic Freedom and Free Expression. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago is a community of educators, students, and staff whose artistic, design, and scholarly work is characterized by an ethos of intellectual and imaginative curiosity, the love and production of knowledge, art, and design, and the joy of creating. This ethos can be sustained, and the above learning goals can be achieved, only in an institutional and cultural framework of academic freedom, freedom of expression, and equality. This is the only framework within which learning, research, and creative output can flourish. It allows members of communities whose speech has historically been silenced to fully and equally participate in the same free expression that has historically been the privilege of only some segments of society. It also helps us navigate conflict and tension—vital aspects of educational, creative, and intellectual growth—and it helps us differentiate tension, or offense, from harm, discrimination, and harassment.

HOW TO GET CREDIT

In order to get credit for this course, you must do all of the following:

1. Attend *at least* 12 out of 14 class sessions.
2. Earn a grade of "2" or higher for *at least* 9 out of 11 possible reading responses. (This requires doing the reading for at least 9 out of 11 "content classes," defined above.)
3. Fulfill midterm paper requirements. (Instructions distributed on 2/14.)
4. Fulfill final project requirements. (Instructions distributed on 4/4.)

SCHEDULE

Please note: **I reserve the right to change or adjust scheduled readings and assignments** as our time together develops and reveals interests or pitfalls, as the case may be. I will always discuss changes and adjustments with you, in class, in advance of implementing them. And I will always—when a change or adjustment is settled upon—provide you with written notice of the change (for this reason, you must keep up with our course's Canvas page!).

1/24: Introduction to the course and subject, get to know each other

PART I: WHY CARE ABOUT KNOWLEDGE?

Goals: reason about what our concept of 'knowledge' is for, as well as *how* and *why* we form beliefs

1/31: S. Goldberg, "On Being Entitled to One's Own Opinion," (https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/openfordebate/on-being-entitled-to-ones-opinion/);
P. Stokes, "No, You're Not Entitled to Your Own Opinion," (https://theconversation.com/no-youre-not-entitled-to-your-opinion-9978);

M. Rowlands, "A Right to Believe?" (https://aeon.co/essays/everyone-is-entitled-to-their-beliefs-if-not-to-act-on-them)

2/7: *Ethics of Belief*: read William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," and William James, "The Will to Believe"; recommended: Berislav Marušić, "The Ethics of Belief"

PART II: BUILDING BLOCKS. WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

Goals: become familiar with knowledge as 'JTB' and with theories of 'J' (i.e., justification); grapple with 'Gettier cases' and the possibility that we don't know what we think we know: skepticism!

2/14: *What is knowledge?* read Plato's *Theaetetus*; we'll also cover Fumerton ch. 2, "The Analysis of Knowledge" (recommended but not required reading)
receive midterm paper instructions

2/21: *Justification*: read Fumerton ch. 3, "Epistemic Rationality and Its Structure," and Fumerton ch 4, "Traditional (Internalist) Foundationalism"

2/28: *Externalism and the Gettier Problem*: read Fumerton ch. 5, "Externalist Versions of Foundationalism," and E. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

3/7: *Skepticism*: read excerpts from M. Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond,* and excerpts from P. Bayle, "Pyrrho"

3/14: *Midterm Paper Workshop*

3/21: Spring break! (no class)

PART III: APPLICATIONS

Goals: become familiar with some themes in *social* epistemology; reason about what epistemic community might require; think about the relationship between *knowledge* and *action*

3/28: *Bias*: G. A. Cohen, "Paradoxes of Conviction," and T. Gendler, "On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias,"

4/4: *Epistemic Injustice*: read K. Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression," and V. Ivy, "Epistemic Injustice"
receive final project instructions

4/11: *Flex Week* (What we do will depend on your interests: we'll either continue with the topic of 4/4, or we'll move on to a new theme in applied epistemology)

4/18: *Practical Knowledge*: G. Ryle, "Knowing How and Knowing That," and J. Fodor, "The Appeal to Tacit Knowledge in Psychological Explanation," *The Journal of Philosophy*

4/25: *Friendship*: read J. Kawall, "Friendship and Epistemic Norms," and S. Goldberg, "Against Partiality in Friendship: Value-Reflecting Reasons"

5/2: Critique Week! (no class)

5/9: Wrap-Up and Review
present final projects

FINAL PROJECT OPTIONS

Each will include an in-class presentation/discussion element.

1. Choose a real-world disagreement between experts on a topic that interests you. Your task is to find and articulate the core of this disagreement, recommend a principled resolution, and articulate reasons for this resolution. You may write this as a paper, or we can discuss other possible media. You might also consider drafting a letter to a relevant expert and seeing what they think of your proposal.
2. Think of your own Gettier case and find a way to represent or illustrate it. Plan and conduct a poll (must be approved in advance): how many people judge that your subject *knows* that P? How do your findings bear on the theories of knowledge we've discussed? Write up your results and analysis.
3. Write a response to one of the articles we've read for class (or a related article that I've approved). Articulate new reasons to think the author's view is correct or somehow mistaken.

Critical Thinking

I taught this course at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). In future iterations, I'll curate materials so students won't need to purchase a textbook. In particular, I'd like to curate a set of literary essays to guide students through the process of analyzing arguments diffuse in longer texts.

HUM 3311: CRITICAL THINKING
Fall 2024
Fridays 3:30-6:15, Lakeview 203

Syllabus

Instructor: Beth Barker (she/her)

Contact: bbarker@saic.edu

Office: by appointment—please reach out!

Introduction

Formally, critical thinking is a matter of knowing and implementing a set of rules or facts about what amounts to a *good* set of reasons to believe something, about what makes a good *argument.* Arguments are everywhere—whether we realize it or not, we encounter them all the time—so critical thinking is the kind of skill you already have ample opportunity to exercise. The primary goal of this course is to help you recognize arguments in a variety of media, and to cultivate your skills for discerning good arguments from bad ones. Additionally, throughout this course, we'll be testing the hypothesis that critical thinking requires *creative* thinking. So we'll be finding and implementing creative methods of argument formation, analysis, and improvement.

Formal objectives: By the end of this course, you should…
be able to identify a variety of argument forms.
be able to detect and articulate hidden premises (reasons).
be able to find and evaluate arguments in a variety of media.
be able to craft and improve arguments.

Big-picture objectives: By the end of this course, you should…
be able to creatively collaborate with peers.
be able to recognize when to change your mind.
have a sense of epistemic (intellectual) pride!

Materials

Required:
A Concise Guide to Critical Thinking, by Lewis Vaughn, any edition. ISBN: 9780197768365
(Note: You don't have to buy your own copy of the text if you can find a friend willing to go in on a copy with you—this is feasible, but be sure to agree on terms for sharing, etc.)

Recommended:

A real notebook, and a good pen or pencil. (In fact, I *strongly* recommend this!)

Creativity for Critical Thinkers, by Anthony Weston. ISBN: 9780195306217
(Note: Some of our in-class exercises will come from this book, but you won't need to have a copy of it.)

What makes the difference between a 'credit' and 'no credit' grade in this course?

To receive credit for this course, both of these statements must be true of you by the end of the semester:

(1) You've satisfactorily completed both core assignments.
(2) You've capital-'P'-Participated (a technical term) in at least 12 out of our 14 class sessions.

Here's what this means:

There will be two 'core' assignments. These are your 'mid-semester presentation' (due 10/18) and your 'final semester project' (due 12/13). At least three weeks before each due date, I'll provide you with assignment details as well as a rubric, letting you know what *satisfactory* completion of the assignment looks like. The basic idea, in each case, is that you'll creatively apply what you've learned up to that point in the semester.

What does capital-'P'-Participation amount to? The time we spend together in class will very much depend on how you've prepared, what you bring to class. So Participation requires preparing for class *before* showing up to class, and then actively contributing to in-class activities (e.g., team-based activities, problem solving, reflective journal entries). See the course schedule for what you should do to prepare for a given class. Your journal entries (which you'll upload to Canvas) will serve as the primary record of your Participation.

A note about participation: **you shouldn't be using electronic devices in class** unless you have either (a) an accommodation for a disability (see statement below) or (b) explicit permission from me. Using a phone or another device without permission during class can put your Participation for that day in jeopardy. I'll let you know if your Participation is in jeopardy, and we'll discuss whether you've nonetheless counted as Participating that day.

What if something comes up, and you have to miss more than two classes because of illness or an emergency? I will not punish you for encountering unexpected circumstances! **Please communicate with me!** Here's what you should do: notify me via email as soon as you realize that you'll be missing a third class (but please don't write to me with details of any illness—there are some things I don't need to know). Then, together, we'll figure out what's best for you in your circumstances: how you should make up work for missed Participation so you can still earn credit for the course!

Preview of Assignments

Core assignments:

> For your mid-semester project, you'll find, reconstruct, and evaluate an 'unexpected' argument. I know this isn't a lot of information yet, but trust me: you'll be prepared for this when the time comes!
>
> For your final semester project, you'll design a sort of 'public service announcement' (PSA) with a critical thinking theme. The idea is that you'll choose a medium for sharing a bit of 'critical thinking advice' with a particular audience outside of class, and you'll design a PSA in that medium. Again, you'll be prepared for this when the time comes!

Ongoing assignments:

> In-class team-based exercises—you'll have a team that you work with on in-class activities throughout the semester. In-class activities will vary with the course content, but your team won't. You should be able to count on each other!
>
> Reflective journal entries—we'll end each class session with time for you to reflect and jot down a few sentences about what you learned that day. The idea is that you should write down whatever you'd like to remember as the key takeaway from that class (no wrong answers!). Having this information will turn out to be useful for your final project, and it will serve as a record of your Participation. (See Canvas for how this works.)

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago is committed to full compliance with all laws regarding equal opportunities for students with disabilities. If you know or suspect you have a disability, such as a Reading/Writing Disorder, ADD/ADHD, and/or a mental health condition, and you think you would benefit from assistance or accommodations, first contact the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) to schedule an appointment. DLRC staff will review your disability documentation and work with you to determine reasonable accommodations. They will then provide you with a letter outlining the approved accommodations for you to deliver to all of your instructors. **This letter must be presented before any accommodations will be implemented.** You should contact the DLRC as early in the semester as possible. The DLRC is located on the 13th floor of the MacLean Center, 112 S. Michigan Ave., and can be reached via phone at 312.499.4278, or email at dlrc@saic.edu.

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free expression that has historically been the privilege of only some segments of society. The framework also helps us navigate through conflict and tension—themselves vital aspects of educational, creative, and intellectual growth—and it helps us differentiate between the concepts of tension or offense on the one hand, and those of harm, discrimination, and harassment on the other.

Academic Misconduct Statement

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Course Schedule

Please note: I reserve the right to change or adjust scheduled readings and assignments for this course as our time together develops and reveals interests or pitfalls, as the case may be. I will always discuss changes and adjustments with you, in class, in advance of implementing them. And I will always—when a change or adjustment is settled upon—provide you with written notice of the change (for this reason, you must keep up with our Canvas page!).

PART I: WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING? WHY THINK 'CRITICALLY'?

Goals: reflect on the purpose of critical thinking as an activity, cultivate comradery, learn what an argument is

8/30: Introduction to the course and subject of analysis—what is critical thinking? And what are arguments, where do we find them?

9/6: What are arguments for?
Please read the syllabus!

And read these three blog posts:

S. Goldberg, "On Being Entitled to One's Own Opinion,"
(https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/openfordebate/on-being-entitled-to-ones-opinion/)
P. Stokes, "No, You're Not Entitled to Your Own Opinion," (https://theconversation.com/no-youre-not-entitled-to-your-opinion-9978)
M. Rowlands, "A Right to Believe?" (https://aeon.co/essays/everyone-is-entitled-to-their-beliefs-if-not-to-act-on-them)

We'll also cover content from ch. 1* (in this case, you may either read ahead or discover in class)
*note that all 'ch. #' references are to chapters in our main text, *Concise Guide to Critical Thinking*

PART II: ARGUMENT FORMS AND FALLACIES

Goals: become familiar with argument forms, learn the fallacies associated with these, and practice recognizing, evaluating, and improving on 'found' arguments

9/13: How to Find Arguments 'Out There'
Ch. 3: Identifying and Evaluating Arguments, pp. 54–70

Low-stakes assignment due: bring a short blog piece/video/text excerpt to share in class. Together, we'll test these pieces of media for arguments.

9/20: Deductive v. Inductive arguments
Ch. 4: Deductive Argument Patterns, pp. 78–84

and

Ch. 5: Inductive Arguments and Statistics, pp. 90–106

9/27: Inductive Arguments: Causal
K. Setiya, "'The Colour out of Space': Lovecraft on Induction," (http://www.ksetiya.net/uploads/2/4/5/2/24528408/grue.pdf)

Ch. 9: Causal Arguments, pp. 185–195

receive instructions for mid-semester project and presentation, due in class on 10/18

10/4: Inductive Arguments: Inference to the Best Explanation
Ch. 10: Inference to the Best Explanation, pp. 203–225

10/11: Arguments Gone Wrong: Informal Fallacies
C. Thi Nguyen, "The Limits of Data," (https://issues.org/limits-of-data-nguyen/)

Selections from ch. 12: Fallacies and Persuaders

10/18: *mid-semester project presentations*
In class: (1) you'll present the arguments you've found, analyzed, and improved (5 minutes/student, max!); (2) you'll fill out a midterm evaluation of this course.*

*This evaluation will be anonymous, and it will provide me with invaluable information about your experience in the course (so far). This helps me know what kinds of adjustments to make so that the next half of the course will be *even better*.

PART III: APPLYING OUR SKILLS, FINDING THE LIMITS OF CRITICAL THOUGHT

Goals: apply your skills to arguments in select contexts, become familiar with obstacles to critical thinking, formulate strategies for avoiding these obstacles (when possible), discuss challenges to 'epistemic agency' (a technical term I'll introduce)

10/25: Arguments in Advertising
Ch. 8: Advertising: Commercial and Political

11/1: Conspiracy Theories
Ch. 13: Critical Thinking and Extremism, pp. 308–316

Recommended: Hi Phi Nation, "Chamber of Facts," (https://hiphination.org/complete-season-two-episodes/s2-episode-10-chamber-of-facts/)

11/8: Epistemic agency and responsibility
H. Joshi, "Socially Motivated Belief and Its Discontents,"
(https://soar.suny.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.12648/14805/2023-2024.%20Joshi.%20Socially%20motivated%20belief%20and%20its%20epistemic%20discontents%20021.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

Selections from ch. 2: Psychological Obstacles

Recommended: C. Thi Nguyen, "Seductions of Clarity,"
(https://philpapers.org/archive/NGUTSO-2.pdf)

11/15: Is Critical Thinking Always Required?
M. Huemer, "Is Critical Thinking Epistemically Responsible?" (find on Canvas)

11/22: J. Matheson, "Why Think for Yourself?" (find on Canvas)

discuss expectations for final assignment

11/29: Holiday break! (no class)

12/6: Critique Week! (no class)

PART IV: CONCLUSION

12/13: It's been a long time since we've had class!
In our final class: you'll take the lead, presenting the final projects you've designed. But we'll also have a concluding discussion. For this, please read a short blog post about changing our epistemic environments in social media:

P. Faulkner, "'I hate cyclists!'" (https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/openfordebate/i-hate-cyclists/)

Animal Minds

This is an outline for an advanced course on animal minds. I've drawn the readings from philosophy and comparative psychology/cognitive science, but I could easily adapt this in one of two ways: (1) to center the methods and findings of comparative psychology/cognitive science, or (2) to center the connections between our concepts of rationality, intelligence, and what it means to be human.

ANIMAL MINDS

CORE TEXTS

Kristen Andrews, *How to Study Animal Minds* (available here, free: https://philpapers.org/archive/ANDHTS-3.pdf)

Michel de Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (recommended: Hackett ed., $14, https://hackettpublishing.com/apology-for-raymond-sebond)

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (recommended: Hackett ed., $9, https://hackettpublishing.com/discourse-on-method)

Apart from these texts, links (or Canvas access) will be provided for all assigned readings.

RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER READING

Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*

Robert W. Lurz, *Mindreading Animals: The Debate over What Animals Know about Other Minds*

CORE OBJECTIVES

To cultivate self-understanding.
To cultivate curiosity about the world around us.
To become familiar with some of the diverse capacities of other creatures.
To become familiar with a variety of methods of studying minds.

SCHEDULE

Week 1. Introduction to the course and to each other

day 1: introduction, ice-breaking, team building

day 2: Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?'; recommended: podcast interview, Jonathan Birch, https://manyminds.libsyn.com/the-space-of-possibly-sentient-beings

PART I. HISTORICAL THINKING ABOUT ANIMAL MINDS

Week 2. Humans as rational animals

day 1: Aristotle's *De Anima,* excerpt

day 2: Sophia Connell, 'Animal Cognition in Aristotle'

Week 3. Humans as *distinctively* rational animals?
day 1: Gilbert Ryle's 'A Rational Animal'

day 2: Giacomo Melis and Susana Monsó, 'Are Humans the Only Rational Animals?'

Week 4. Animals as machines
day 1: Descartes' *Discourse on Method,* excerpt

day 2: read Carruthers, *Human and Animal Minds,* ch. 1 (available on Canvas)

Week 5. Animals as reasoners
day 1: wrap up discussion of Descartes and Carruthers

day 2: Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond,* excerpt

Week 6. Animals as reasoners, continued
day 1: Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond,* excerpt

day 2: wrap up discussion of Montaigne and cf. Descartes

PART II. CONTEMPORARY COMPARATIVE COGNITIVE SCIENCE
Week 7. Intro to comparative cognitive science/psychology
day 1: Alexandria Boyle, 'Disagreement and classification in comparative cognitive science'

day 2: Kristen Andrews, *How to Study Animal Minds,* read ch. 1: 'Methods of Comparative Psychology'; and ch. 2: 'Conscious Animals in Comparative Psychology', (pp. 1–29)

Week 8. Methodology and obstacles
day 1: Kristen Andrews, *How to Study Animal Minds,* read ch. 3: 'Objectivity and Bias in Comparative Psychology'; and ch. 4: 'Biases in Ape Cognition Studies', (pp. 30–64)

day 2: Joanna S. Brebner et al., 'Through an animal's eye: The implications of diverse sensory systems in scientific experimentation' (https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/full/10.1098/rspb.2024.0022); recommended: podcast interview, Ximena Nelson, https://manyminds.libsyn.com/consider-the-spider

Week 9. Speech and Metacognition
day 1: Tereza Roubalová et al., 'Comparing the productive vocabularies of grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) and young children' (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10071-024-01883-5)

day 2: Lorraine Subias et al., 'Metacognition in wild Japanese macaques: Cost and stakes influencing information-seeking behavior' (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10071-024-01851-z)

Week 10. Problem-Solving
day 1: Eli Shupe, 'The Irreconcilability of Insight' (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10071-024-01844-y)

day 2: Laure Cauchard et al., 'How to solve novel problems: The role of associative learning in problem-solving performance in wild great tits *Parus major*' (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10071-024-01872-8)

receive final project instructions

Week 11. Tools

day 1: Erno Vincze et al., 'Are comparable studies really comparable? Suggestions from a problem-solving experiment on urban and rural great tits' (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10071-024-01885-3)

day 2: Anna A. Smirnova et al., 'Hooded crows (*Corvus cornix*) manufacture objects relative to a mental template' (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10071-024-01874-6)

Week 12. Sociality

day 1: Rhys Borchert and Aliya R. Dewey, 'In Praise of Animals'

day 2: Kathrin S. Kopp, et al., 'The proximate regulation of prosocial behaviour: Towards a conceptual framework for comparative research' (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10071-024-01846-w)

Week 13. Culture

day 1: Lori Marino, 'Cetacean Cognition'

day 2: Ross Anderson, 'How First Contact with Whale Civilization Could Unfold' (https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2024/02/talking-whales-project-ceti/677549/)

Week 14. Reflection

day 1: Christine Korsgaard, 'Facing the Animal You See in the Mirror'

day 2: Mark Rowlands and Susana Monsó, 'Animals as Reflexive Thinkers: The Aponoian Paradigm'

Week 15. Wrap-up and Review

present final projects

FINAL PROJECT OPTIONS:

1. Choose a creature and an aspect of cognition; design and propose a study—how would you conduct the study? What would it aim to show? What might be some potential pitfalls?
2. Write a thesis-defense paper in response to one of the studies discussed in class (or, with permission, another study that you have an interest in responding to).
3. Write a thesis-defense paper that revives an idea from Descartes or Montaigne—did either have a key insight worth revisiting in light of current research?

VI. Sample Assignments

Mid-Semester Project, Critical Thinking

This is the mid-semester project I assigned my students in Critical Thinking. By the time students receive this assignment, they've already practiced each of its elements. This project asks them to apply their skills to two arguments that they find in familiar media.

HUM 3311: Critical Thinking Mid-Semester Project

Instructions

Overview: for this project, you'll find, reconstruct, evaluate, and improve two arguments. You'll present *some* of your work in class and submit documentation for *all* of your work on Canvas.

Steps:

(1) **Find two arguments**.* You should look for these arguments somewhere 'out there', or 'in the wild' (i.e., not from a textbook!). The best way to do this is to pay attention to media you already interact with, such as news media, popular media (blogs, social media), literature, visual art, public signage, etc.

*__Requirement__: at least one of these arguments must come from a *text* (something written or transcribed). So you couldn't, for example, pick two pieces of visual art for your argument reconstructions.

(2) Once you have two arguments to work with, you'll **reconstruct them**. The end product for each argument should be this: two premises (each must be a complete sentence, as succinct as possible!) and a conclusion.

1. Premise
2. Premise

3. Conclusion

You've already practiced this, but here are the steps for reconstructing each argument:

a. **Identify the conclusion** by asking, *What's the main idea being advanced here?* What am I supposed to *believe* based on what's given? What's the takeaway? (Note: the author might have left their conclusion unstated! So you'll have to do some interpretive work.)

b. **Identify the reasons** that the author gives for accepting the main idea/conclusion. Why does the author think that *you* should think that the main idea/conclusion is true? (Some reasons might also be left unstated.)

c. Boil the reasons down to **two key premises**. (You'll have to simplify on the author's behalf. And don't worry—if you think you're leaving out too much, you'll have the chance to add implied premises later.)

(3) **Evaluate each argument**. Keep in mind that in order to evaluate each argument, you'll first need to correctly identify the kind of argument you've found (e.g., is it a modus ponens or modus tollens? enumerative induction? abduction?)

   a. To the best of your knowledge, are the premises true? (You might have to do a little sleuthing to find out whether they're true, but don't get carried away at this stage since this isn't a research project.)
   b. What kind of support do the premises provide for the conclusion? (Do they guarantee the truth of the conclusion? Or, is the support strong or weak?)

(4) **Improve each argument**. Here you make recommendations for how one would "fix" the shortcomings you identified in step (3). Use some creative thinking here! Some suggestions for how to go about this (use your judgment about which of these—or other strategies—is best):

   a. If one of the premises isn't true, can you replace it with a premise that is true?

   b. If the premises provide only weak support for the conclusion, can you recommend a way to gather the evidence/data needed to strengthen their support for the conclusion?

   c. Are there any hidden or "implied" premises that you can supply/fill in on the author's behalf? (If so, at this stage you can show what the argument looks like with more than two premises—just be sure to mark which premises are implied.)

   d. Is there some aspect of the topic that the author has failed to consider? Or do they make any ungrounded assumptions? If so, what are they? How would acknowledging these assumptions change the argument?

(5) **Reflect**. How does this argument change your thinking about its topic? If you don't find the argument convincing, why not? Or, if you think the argument is important and more people should pay attention to it, why?

IN-CLASS PRESENTATION

You'll **choose just one of your arguments** to present in class on October 18. You should:

(1) **Present** your reconstruction. (Say a little about how you identified the premises/conclusion, and note any challenges that arose in interpreting the author's argument.)
(2) **Demonstrate** your evaluation of the argument.
(3) **Make** your recommendations for improvement—what does the improved argument look like?
(4) **Share** some of your reflections about the argument, as well as any takeaways you have from the process of reconstructing it.

Important: you have only **five minutes (max!)** for your presentation, so you will probably not have time to cover everything fully—you'll need to use your judgment about what's most important.

Medium of presentation: you may use computer/PowerPoint, you may bring handouts, you may use the dry erase board(s)—whatever you think best! Just two requirements: **others in the class must be able to see/read your reconstruction and evaluation** (this means you can't *just* speak, or read from a script, for example).

Note: **if your presentation requires any amount of set-up, you must let me know** what this involves at least **24 hours before class**! (So we can avoid delays.)

CANVAS DOCUMENTATION

On Canvas, you'll submit a PDF or .doc or .docx file with all of the following:

Argument 1

(1) Link to (or picture of) original content (wherever it is your reconstruction 'comes from'). Cite the source.
(2) Your reconstruction—two premises and conclusion, in this format:

1. Premise
2. Premise

3. Conclusion

(3) Your evaluation (~a paragraph of your own writing; cite any sources you use in determining whether the premises are true!)
(4) Your improved argument (with a paragraph of explanation—why you improved it in the way you did).

Argument 2

(1) Link to (or picture of) original content (wherever it is your reconstruction 'comes from'). Cite the source.
(2) Your reconstruction—two premises and conclusion, in this format:

1. Premise
2. Premise

3. Conclusion

(3) Your evaluation (~a paragraph of your own writing; cite any sources you use in determining whether the premises are true!)
(4) Your improved argument (with a paragraph of explanation—why you improved it in the way you did).

RUBRIC

How you'll be assessed: I'll give you written feedback, as well as a score (1 through 5) for each of the questions below. What this means:

5 = Excellent!
3 = Good.
1 = Needs improvement.

Note: In order **to receive credit** for the mid-semester project, you need an average (mean) score of 3.

Content:

Is the argument reconstruction *accurate*?

Is the argument reconstruction *charitable*?

Are the premises and conclusion of the reconstruction succinct?

Does the evaluation make use of *key concepts* learned in class?

Do the evaluation and improved argument *demonstrate understanding* of what makes for a good argument of that type?

Does the argument improvement *exhibit creativity*?

Technical:

Are the argument reconstruction and improved argument represented in standard argument format? (pictured above)

Is the content of your in-class presentation organized clearly?

Did the presentation fit within the allotted time?

Is the content of your Canvas documentation organized clearly?

In-Class Activity

I wrote this social deduction game to get students to practice forming and evaluating inferences to the best explanation (and to discuss how Sherlock Holmes doesn't do as much 'deducing' as he claims). I find that playing games like this helps re-energize students in the middle of the semester. This is a draft that's been revised based on helpful feedback from my students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and my students at Grand Valley State University.

Note: I customize the game based on the class. For my students who will have just read Descartes' *Meditations,* for example, I introduce a Descartes character who must, every round, say to someone 'I doubt it', or else he ceases to exist in the game. This helps give them more information to work with in the game, and I'm always delighted when students get the joke.

A STUDY IN ABDUCTION
A Social Inference-to-The-Best-Explanation Game

STARTING CHARACTERS
(randomly assigned)

Sherlock (in disguise, knows Watson and Lestrade)
Watson (knows Sherlock and Lestrade)
Inspector Lestrade (knows Watson and Sherlock)
Moriarty (knows henchpersons)
Henchperson 1 (knows other henchpersons, Moriarty)
Henchperson 2 (knows other henchpersons, Moriarty)
Henchperson 3 (knows other henchpersons, Moriarty)

Other characters: Ordinary citizens!

There are **two teams** competing to win: those on the side of 'Justice' (Sherlock, Watson, Lestrade, and all ordinary citizens), and those on the side of 'Crime' (Moriarty and all henchpersons)

HOW TO WIN
Justice wins if and only if Lestrade arrests Moriarty.

Crime wins if either of the following conditions is met:
(a) Moriarty recruits Sherlock or Lestrade.
(b) Moriarty successfully evades Lestrade—time runs out!

HOW TO PLAY
The game is played over a series of rounds. Each round has four phases:

Phase 1. Everyone has five minutes to walk around, ask questions to gain information from each other, and begin forming theories. Goal: Learn what others are thinking, try to determine who's hiding their identity… Method (write on the worksheet): *Who is Moriarty? Who is Sherlock?*

Phase 2. Trial. Three different people may each make *one* accusation—'So-and-so is Moriarty!'—in order to influence Lestrade's decision-making. Accusers must offer *reasons* for their accusations. Those who are accused may briefly respond in their own defense.

Phase 3. Everyone has their heads down/eyes closed, except when called on, so all of the following communication happens secretly:

(1) Sherlock and Watson learn the identity of one individual of their choice.
(2) Lestrade makes an arrest.
(3) Moriarty recruits a new henchperson.

Phase 4. Everyone discovers what happened—who (if anyone) was arrested and who was recruited by Moriarty.

MOTIVATIONS—what is your character trying to do?

Sherlock is in disguise—he wants to discover Moriarty without allowing Moriarty to discover him!

Watson wants to protect Sherlock while helping Lestrade identify Moriarty!

Moriarty is in hiding—he wants to avoid being discovered by Sherlock, Watson, or Lestrade! (They may want to recruit anyone who seems close to finding them out!)

Henchpersons want to deflect suspicion from Moriarty!

Ordinary citizens want to help Lestrade discover and arrest Moriarty!

THE GOAL

To form and evaluate theories. You're observing behaviors and inferring to the best explanation: That so-and-so must be lying! That so-and-so must be Moriarty!

A STUDY IN ABDUCTION

Ordinary Citizen's Journal…

Round 1 Theories

Who is Sherlock, and what's your evidence for this?

Who is Moriarty, and what's your evidence for this?

Round 2 Theories

Who is Sherlock, and what's your evidence for this?

Who is Moriarty, and what's your evidence for this?

Round 3 Theories

Who is Sherlock, and what's your evidence for this?

Who is Moriarty, and what's your evidence for this?

Round 4 Theories

Who is Sherlock, and what's your evidence for this?

Who is Moriarty, and what's your evidence for this?

VII. LETTER OF OBSERVATION

Spring Quarter 2023

The following is an evaluation of my performance as a TA for a course offered by Baron Reed (Northwestern University). I also have three confidential letters regarding my teaching (including one from a former student), which I am happy to send via Interfolio upon request.

TEACHING ASSISTANT EVALUATION

Quarter/Year Spring 2023 Student Beth Barker

Instructor Reed Course Number PHIL 210-3

Course Title History of Philosophy: Early Modern

Please comment on the student's performance as a teaching assistant in this class, including such matters as quality of instruction, collegiality, punctuality, preparedness, responsiveness to faculty communications, organization and promise as an instructor.

Beth was an outstanding TA for this course. She was meticulous and prompt in handling all the course details, and her students and I appreciated her student-focused to teaching. She was proactive in bringing potential problems to my attention before they became serious, and this gave us additional time to work with students on addressing them.

Beth's grading was on-time and fair, and she offered many insightful comments to her students.

I attended one of Beth's discussion sections and was very impressed with the rapport she had built with her students. The issue under discussion was Locke's account of personal identity, and Beth provided a very modern take on the question by asking the students how they might track TV characters Rick and Morty through their appearances in different realities. Beth broke the full group into small groups to answer this question, then reconstituted the full class to discuss their initial answers. She then sent them back to small groups to talk about a more sophisticated version of the question, and then she again had them report back to the class as a whole. The students' enthusiasm for the discussion was palpable, both in the small group discussions and in the entire class. Most of the students participated in the full discussion, and the level of discourse was quite sophisticated.

It was a pleasure to work with Beth in this capacity, and I would welcome doing so again.

On the basis of performance as a teaching assistant for this course, seeking reassignment as a TA for my future courses is:

Encouraged