Critical Thinking and Moral Reasoning

PHIL 3300

Instructor Information

Instructor

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Email

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Office Hours

Tues/Thurs. 3:30 – 4:30

Office:

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General Information

Catalog Description

A study of major areas of investigation in traditional and modern philosophy. Included are discussions of philosophies of knowledge, ethics, logic, aesthetics and metaphysics. Recommended for students who wish to take only one semester of philosophy.

Description of Course Content

When you see "SO_P," what letter do you fill in the blank with? The answer could depend on whether we've been talking about food—in which case you may say "U"—or whether we've just been talking about personal hygiene—in which case you may say "A." This is called the Availability Heuristic—we give recent or memorable cases more weight in drawing general conclusions.

That may seem insignificant, but now consider: Your company has made you the head of the hiring committee. You see that an otherwise stellar applicant attended State University—and you've just been reading about a huge scandal there. Can you be sure that this fact—largely irrelevant to the applicant's file—won't taint your assessment of the applicant?

This example shows not only a cognitive bias, but how it could lead to unethical decision-making. In this course, we'll learn about both sides of this example. On the one hand, we'll learn about both the light side and the dark side of reasoning: how it should go and how it can go (predictably) wrong. On the other hand, we'll learn about ethics—from the heights of ethical theory to the detail of applying that theory to real-world cases. We'll integrate these two aspects by learning how to reason about ethics, and how cognitive heuristics/biases can inform ethical decision-making, either for better or worse.

Course Objectives

- Understand the major positions in ethical theory

- Apply ethical theories to business ethics cases
- Evaluate deductive arguments as valid or invalid
- Reconstruct arguments for ethical conclusions using the tools of deductive logic
- Identify various cognitive heuristics and biases

Course Materials

Required Materials

- Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*
  - ISBN: 978-0-374-53355-7

All other materials will be made available on Canvas

Course Schedule

Note: "DK" refers to our course textbook—Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. All readings outside this text are marked with an asterisk (*) and will be provided on Canvas.

Week	Topic	Readings and Major Assignments
Week 1	**Unit 1: Logic** Introduction and Syllabus/ Basic Logic	**Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking,* sections 1.1, 1.2, 1.6
Week 2	**Unit 1: Logic** Logic	**Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking,* sections 1.3-1.5
Week 3	**Unit 1: Logic** Logic	**Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking,* sections 1.7-1.9 **Logic Exam**
Week 4	**Unit 2: Ethical Theory** Utilitarianism	*Mill, excerpt from *Utilitarianism* *Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"
Week 5	**Unit 2: Ethical Theory** Utilitarianism	*Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"
Week 6	**Unit 2: Ethical Theory** Kant	*Kant, selection from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
Week 7	**Unit 2: Ethical Theory** Kant	*Arnold and Bowie, "Sweatshops and Respect for Persons"

Week	Topic	Readings and Major Assignments
Week 8	**Unit 2: Ethical Theory** Aristotle	*Aristotle, excerpt from the *Nicomachean Ethics*
Week 9	**Unit 2: Ethical Theory** Aristotle	*[Reading TBD]
Week 10	**Unit 3: Heuristics and Biases**	DK, chs. 1, 4
Week 11	**Unit 3: Heuristics and Biases**	DK, chs. 7, 8
Week 12	**Unit 3: Heuristics and Biases**	DK, chs. 9, 10
Week 13	**Unit 3: Heuristics and Biases**	DK, chs. 11, 12
Week 14	**Unit 3: Heuristics and Biases**	DK, chs. 13, 14
Week 15	**Final Exam**	Final Exam: Timed but taken at student's discretion during a multi-day period.

Evaluation

Quizzes | 30%

Logic Exam |15%

Argument Reconstructions | 15%

Final Exam| 25%

Kahnemann Exercises | 15%

Quizzes. Quizzes will be over the week's reading, and will be done in-class. They will typically be short, low-stakes, and gauge *basic* understanding of the reading. Quizzes cannot be made up but several will be dropped (which could include some you miss and subsequently get 0's on).

The **logic exam** will help you develop the ability to construct and evaluate formal arguments.

Argument Reconstructions. After the logic unit, we will start class most days with an "argument reconstruction." Your job in this part of class is to take an excerpt and accurately and validly reconstruct its core argument. I will circulate through class to help you construct and revise it.

Final Exam. This will be cumulative and will be multiple choice and true/false.

Kahneman Exercises. These will usually be open-response (think "short essay") assignments based on the Kahneman reading. Many will ask you to integrate what you're learning about cognitive processing in Kahneman with what you learned in the ethics unit.

*All written assignments will be completed in Google Docs, with more specific instructions given in Canvas

Grading Scale

A: 90-100%

B: 80-89%

C: 70-79%

D: 60-69%

F: 0-59%

Course Policies

AI Use

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

For this course, I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments and class activities to support your learning. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in mastering course learning objectives. For this course, I expressly

forbid using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stages of the work process, including brainstorming. Deviations from these guidelines will be considered a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code and academic honesty values.

Attendance

Attendance will be counted, if necessary, by timely completion of assignments.

Communication Policy

I communicate outside of class primarily over email. I will reply to emails within 48 hours (not counting weekends/holidays). Sometimes an email slips through the cracks—I get a lot of email. If you haven't gotten a reply in this timeframe, you will not offend me by politely sending another reminder email.

Makeup exams

Exams can be made up in this course only in the rarest of circumstances, involving documented emergencies. This is because each exam will open with ample time to complete it in the case of foreseeable events. (I.e., you will always have multiple days in which to take the exam.)

Plagiarism

Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. In cases where it occurs, penalties may range from failure of the assignment to failure of the course. You will also be turned in to UT-Tyler's Office of Student Conduct and Intervention, and the university will assess further penalties. You are responsible for knowing what counts as plagiarism, and penalties will be assessed regardless of intent.

Late Submissions

Late submissions will be penalized at 5% of the total possible points of the assignment per day.