

PHILOSOPHY 23705/33705
RATIONALITY
University of Chicago, spring 2009

Course Instructor: Jason Bridges
Office hours: Monday 3:00-4:30pm, Stuart 231C

Course Assistant: Tucker McKinney
Office hours TBA

DESCRIPTION

In one sense of the term, “rationality” stands for the capacity—perhaps possessed by human beings alone among animals—to recognize and be moved by reasons. In another sense, “rationality” names an achievement, understood variously as consisting in coherence, freedom from bias, judiciousness, dispassion, etc. This course explores both concepts, and their joint role in structuring our attempts to understand and explain the thoughts and activities of other people and ourselves. Topics include: the appropriateness of viewing non-human animals as rational, the role of rules or principles in thinking, the role of consistency as an ideal, the assumptions of decision theory, the structure of deliberative reflection, and the nature of irrationality.

Prerequisite: at least one previous course in philosophy or permission from the course instructor. Some background in symbolic logic will occasionally be assumed. Note that the readings for this course are challenging.

READINGS

The following text is required and will be available for purchase at the Seminary Cooperative Bookstore:

T.M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Harvard University Press, 2009)

The remaining course readings will be available through the course’s Chalk website. (The schedule of readings given on the second page of this syllabus may be subject to slight modification as the quarter unfolds.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

First paper:	3 pages	due April 22 nd in class	worth 25% of course grade
Second paper	5 pages	due May 18 th in class	worth 30%
Final paper:	7 pages	due June 10 th in Professor Bridges’ mailbox (Stuart 202)	worth 45%

Paper topics for the three papers will be uploaded to the Chalk site in advance of the due dates. Late papers will be docked a grade per day (e.g., B+ to B) unless you have received approval ahead of time. No papers will be accepted after June 10th.

Graduate students may either write the three papers above on the assigned paper topics, or write one 15-page paper on a topic approved by Professor Bridges. A topic will be approved only if it concerns issues and readings discussed in class.

Undergraduate attendance of discussion sections is mandatory.

There is no final exam.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

Part I: Rational animals

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1	Course overview	[no reading]
2	Rationality as responsiveness to reasons	Fred Dretske, "Minimal rationality" John McDowell, "Conceptual capacities in perception"
3	Rationality in non-human animals?	Susan Hurley, "Animal action in the space of reasons" Jason Bridges, "Davidson's transcendental externalism" <i>Further reading:</i> David Finkelstein, "Holism and animal minds"
4	Associative vs. rational processes I	David Papineau and Cecilia Heyes, "Rational or associative? Imitation in Japanese quail" Nicola Clayton et. al, "The rationality of animal memory: complex caching strategies of western scrub jays"
5	Associative vs. rational processes II	David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , chapters 3-5
6	Unmediated reasons	Nelson Goodman, <i>Fact, Fiction and Forecast</i> , chapter 3 John Searle <i>Rationality in Action</i> , pp. 17-22

Part II: Rational norms, first look

7	Wide-scope consistency norms	John Broome, "Normative requirements"
8	Against norms of consistency	Niko Kolodny "Why be rational?"
9	Apparent norms of rationality	Jason Bridges "Rationality, normativity and transparency" Niko Kolodny, "Reply to Bridges"

Part III: The structure of deliberation

10	The topic of theoretical deliberation	Nishi Shah, "How truth governs belief"
11	The topic of practical deliberation	Nishi Shah, "How action governs intention"
12	Deliberation-based limitations on the scope of reasons	Jason Bridges, "Reasons and attitudes"
13	Applications: exclusionary reasons	Joseph Raz, <i>Practical Reason and Norms</i> , second edition, pp. 35-48, 178-199
14	Applications: permissibility and meaning	T.M. Scanlon, <i>Moral Dimensions</i> , chapter two
15	Instrumentalism and its discontents	Aurel Kolnai, "Deliberation is of ends"

Part IV: Formal theories of rationality

16	Classical decision theory	R. Duncan Luce and Howard Raiffa, <i>Games and Decisions</i> , chapter two
17	Can decision theory offer any guidance to decision makers?	Martin Peterson, <i>Non-Bayesian Decision Theory</i> , pp. 26-30 Michael Resnik, <i>Choices</i> , pp. 21-25 James Dreier, "Decision theory and morality", p. 160

Part V: Rational norms, second look

18	Broad rationality and rational dispositions	Niko Kolodny, "Why be disposed to be coherent?" John Elster, <i>Sour Grapes</i> , pp. 1-26, 148-157
19	Loose ends	[no reading]