Logic and Reasoning: Syllabus

Philosophy 130H
TR 10:20-11:40
Fall 2012

Professor:
Michael O’Rourke, S. Kedzie 508, orourk51@msu.edu,
http://www.msu.edu/~orourk51/
Office hours: 12:00-1:00 T, 1:00-2:00 R, or by appointment

Class Meetings:
We will meet in A332 Wells Hall.

Texts:
The required text for the class is Understanding Arguments, 8th edition, by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Robert Fogelin (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010). It should be available through the bookstore; if you purchase it elsewhere, please be sure you have the 8th edition. I will supplement this text with handouts that will elaborate and extend topics treated in the text. You will be held responsible for the material on these handouts. The lectures, handouts, and homework assignments will be available on my homepage.

Reasoning Logically, Thinking Critically

I will teach this section of “Logic and Reasoning” as a course in critical thinking. A course in critical thinking is a course in self-improvement. It is a chance to look inside yourself and examine your own ability to think. It is a place where you can learn about the difference between good thinking and bad thinking. It is an opportunity to acquire reasoning skills that should serve you well in whatever pursuit you engage in after this semester.

Chances are, you haven't thought too much about thinking in the past. How does one go about it? One way is to close your eyes (the tighter the better), purse your lips, and concentrate really hard on what's going on inside your head. This method doesn't yield much in the way of insight, however. Another method is to look for the nature of thinking in a more objective and public place, for example, in the language that we use. Much of our intellectual development over the past couple of centuries is predicated on the realization that we can examine thought by attending to language because the structure of thought is mirrored in language. Thus, by studying the structure and meaning of language, we should be able to identify the structure and content of thought. Through the analysis of language and its use, we reveal the dynamic power
of thought.

Given this, you shouldn't be too surprised to learn that we will spend a significant amount of time talking about language. We begin by investigating language as we find it, and then we focus on the use of language in arguments. It is in arguments that we exploit relationships between thoughts and work toward the discovery of new thoughts. When we make an argument, we string thoughts together, relying primarily on their structure to underwrite the quality of the reasoning. Thus, the nature of argument is grounded in the structure of thought, and since the structure of thought is revealed in the structure of language, investigation of the structure of language can ground an understanding of argument. We will do this informally through analysis of pieces we find in newspapers and commercials we see on television (to name two), as well as somewhat more formally through the study of the logical character of the language we use.

At this point, you might be wondering why I put so much emphasis on argument; after all, there is quite a lot of thinking we do that does not involve argument. Creative thinking, for example, as well as certain types of problem solving. If we are interested in learning about thinking, shouldn't we also attend to these modes? I grant this point, but we need to remember that this is a course in critical thinking. In the sense intended, “critical” does not mean only criticism; rather, it implies care and precision in all forms of evaluation and judgment. This suggests two responses to the concern. First, creative thinking and problem solving involve evaluation and judgment, and care and precision will be rewarded there just as elsewhere; thus, those modes of thinking will also embed critical reasoning of the sort we study in here. Second and more generally, consider that we evaluate and make judgments in the process of learning about things, i.e., acquiring knowledge. This is true whether you are learning in school, in conversation with friends, or in mind-melding with the television. If you know about a topic, then you have beliefs about it that you can justify, and this justification can always be cast in the form of a claim supported by reasons. This, however, is simply an argument. Thus, our attempts to understand ourselves and the world around us and articulate that in various ways will be successful only if they enable us to argue for the things they reveal.

A final point deserves mention. In this class, we will study argument skills in the abstract, at a remove from the specific subject matters that you study in other courses. While many critical thinking skills are subject specific, there are forms of reasoning and other facts about good thinking that pervade all subject matters. We will focus on these general skills throughout the first part of the course, but during the end of the course we will have an opportunity to study some more subject specific skills.

Goals & Objectives:

As a Michigan State student, you are part of an educational institution that has certain, well-defined learning goals and objectives. You have a right to expect that these goals and objectives will guide your instructors as they design their courses. Just as a reminder, here are the
Michigan State University learning goals and outcomes (from http://undergrad.msu.edu/learning):

**Analytical Thinking (AT)**
The MSU graduate uses ways of knowing from mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and arts to access information and critically analyzes complex material in order to evaluate evidence, construct reasoned arguments, and communicate inferences and conclusions.

- Acquires, analyzes, and evaluates information from multiple sources
- Synthesizes and applies the information within and across disciplines
- Identifies and applies, as appropriate, quantitative methods for defining and responding to problems
- Identifies the credibility, use, and misuse of scientific, humanistic and artistic methods

**Cultural Understanding (CU)**
The MSU graduate comprehends global and cultural diversity within historical, artistic, and societal contexts.

- Reflects on experiences with diversity to demonstrate knowledge and sensitivity
- Demonstrates awareness of how diversity emerges within and across cultures

**Effective Citizenship (ECit)**
The MSU graduate participates as a member of local, national, and global communities and has the capacity to lead in an increasingly interdependent world.

- Understands the structures of local, national, and global governance systems and acts effectively within those structures in both individual and collaborative ways
- Applies knowledge and abilities to solve societal problems in ethical ways

**Effective Communication (ECom)**
The MSU graduate uses a variety of media to communicate effectively with diverse audiences.

- Identifies how contexts affect communication strategies and practices
- Engages in effective communication practices in a variety of situations and with a variety of media

**Integrated Reasoning (IR)**
The MSU graduate integrates discipline-based knowledge to make informed decisions that reflect humane social, ethical, and aesthetic values.
• Critically applies liberal arts knowledge in disciplinary contexts and disciplinary knowledge in liberal arts contexts
• Uses a variety of inquiry strategies incorporating multiple views to make value judgments, solve problems, answer questions, and generate new understandings

This course is related most closely with the first and last of these goals and outcomes. My primary goal in this class is to help you learn how to think more clearly. This is the information age, and we are inundated with information of varying quality. To survive and thrive in this age, one must be a discerning consumer of information, and this requires that we think clearly about what we believe and what we are asked to believe. By semester's end, you should be able to:

• Identify and reconstruct arguments in columns, editorials, science articles, etc. (AT, ECit, IR)
• Distinguish between deductive and non-deductive argumentation (AT)
• Identify and evaluate specific types of deductive and non-deductive arguments (AT)
• Identify a wide range of fallacies in argumentative discourse (AT)
• Spot and evaluate non-argumentative attempts at persuasion (AT, IR)
• Critically evaluate arguments that you encounter (AT, ECit, IR)
• Construct good arguments for claims you support (AT, ECit, ECom, IR)
• Express in writing argument reconstruction and evaluation (AT, ECom)

Lectures:

I plan to lecture a fair bit this semester, but I also hope to set aside quite a few days for discussion and group work. You are encouraged to ask questions when they come to you. Remember: you are paying for this educational opportunity, so keep me honest. Ask questions, issue challenges, make corrections, and do what you need to do to get the most out of it.

Requirements:

Attendance. Attendance is required in this class, and is worth 100 points of the final point total. You will be permitted two unexcused absences, but after that, every unexcused absence will result in a decrement of 10 points from the 100-point attendance allocation.
Assignments. There will be 8 homework assignments. The first will be worth 20 points and all subsequent assignments 100 points apiece. Two of assignments 2 through 8 will be group papers and the rest will be devoted to working through exercises found in the text or short, analytical papers on topics that I provide. In calculating your final grade, the lowest grade received on assignments 2 through 8 will be dropped.

- **Assignment #1:** The first homework assignment is due by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, 9/7. You are to send me an e-mail message at orourke51@msu.edu in which you answer the following questions:
  1. What are you majoring in?
  2. Why did you decide to enroll in this class?
  3. What do you hope to get from the class?

Please send these from the email account you use most often, and put “Phil 130” in the subject line. Each message received that conforms to these requirements will earn its author 20 points—points don't come any easier than this. I plan to reply to all the messages I receive.

- **Group Assignments (#3 and #5):** Two short (two page) group papers will be prepared in class early in the semester. (One in September and one in October—see the Tentative Schedule.) Most of the work for these projects will be completed in class, including the writing, which will be done collectively in groups. Each group paper will occupy two class sessions, a reflection/analysis session and an outlining/writing session. More detail will be supplied about this assignment in the next week, but for now here is a description:
  1. Groups of 4 or 5 students, arranged in advance, will come together in the first class session to discuss and analyze their topic. Each of you will write up individual notes about your group’s discussion and submit them at the end of this session with your names on them.
  2. Between class periods, you will write up a few thoughts about the topic to bring with you to the second class session. These are thoughts that should help your group write up a collective report in the second session.
  3. In the second session, you will share your written thoughts with your group, brainstorm a paper outline, and then spend the bulk of the hour writing up a collective report of your group’s analysis on paper that you are provided. When class ends, you will submit your group report, which should be no
more than two pages in length.

The first group paper will be devoted to reflection and analysis of an advertisement drawn from a set that I supply. The second pair of days will be devoted to identifying and analyzing the philosophical character of a current issue.

- **Other Assignments (#2, #4, #6-#8):** These will be either exercises from the book that you are asked to complete or short, analytic papers that I ask you to write. More detail on these is forthcoming.

You are encouraged to discuss all of these assignments with each other, but you must write them up on your own. In fact, I would be happy to help set up study groups, if there is interest and the need for my assistance. If you work with others, please list their names on the front of your paper. I will be distributing the homework assignments over the course of the semester. The due dates for the assignments are listed below. (These are subject to change, should the need arise.)

**Examinations.** There will be a midterm examination and a final examination. The final will not be comprehensive. The midterm examination will be worth 150 points and the final 200 points. The midterm will be administered in class on October 23; the final exam will be Tuesday, 11 December, 7:45 to 9:45 am.

**Grading:**

The exams and cumulative homework scores will be curved, if the scores require it. In calculating the final semester grade, I will begin by considering the grade cutoffs at 90% (4.0), 85% (3.5), 80% (3.0), 75% (2.5), 70% (2.0), 65% (1.5), and 60% (1.0), respectively. If need be, I will curve the cutoffs downward, but I will not raise them above those levels.

The point totals are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>100</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #1 – Email</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments #2 – #8</td>
<td>600</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Examination</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>200</td>
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<td>1070</td>
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Policies:

Attendance

Attendance is required in this class. Excused absences are those excused by the university for official activities, those excused by me in advance, or those excused subsequently for documented reasons (e.g., health problem, family emergency). When you attend class, please be respectful of the others in the room—turn all sounds off on your cell phones, refrain from reading the newspaper, etc.

Academic Honesty

Article 2.III.B.2 of the Academic Freedom Report states, "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the Department of Philosophy adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide or the MSU Web site: www.msu.edu.) You are expected to complete all course assignments without assistance from any source that I have not authorized. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course, and you may not pass off the work of others as your own (i.e., plagiarize). Also, you are not authorized to use the http://www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in Philosophy 130. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. If you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work, please contact me. (See also https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/student-faq.html.)

Deadlines

All assignments must be handed in as you arrive in class on the day they are due. I do not accept late work unless class was missed for a documented emergency that arose without time for you to submit your work in advance. If you know that you will miss a class session prior to that session, you will need to submit your assignment in advance.

Incompletes

The MSU policy for incompletes is as follows:

The I-Incomplete may be given only when: the student (a) has completed at least 6/7 of the term of instruction, but is unable to complete the class
work and/or take the final examination because of illness or other compelling reason; and (b) has done satisfactory work in the course; and (c) in the instructor’s judgment can complete the required work without repeating the course.

I do not give out incompletes unless the “compelling reason” mentioned above is documented, and you must discuss this with me in advance of finals week. The only exception is

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (from the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD))**

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services, and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at [http://rcpd.msu.edu](http://rcpd.msu.edu). It is your responsibility to promptly register with RCPD because some arrangements must be done well in advance (e.g. alternative test taking place or time). Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation (“VISA”) form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (e.g., paper due date). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

**Tentative Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Pages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/30</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/4 – 9/6</td>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>pp. 1-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/11 – 9/20</td>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>pp. 17-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2 – 10/11</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>pp. 51-75</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/25 – 11/8</td>
<td>Chapters 13-17</td>
<td>pp. 315-399</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/13 – 11/15</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>pp. 141-178</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/20 – 11/29</td>
<td>Chapters 8-10</td>
<td>pp. 215-276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/4 – 12/6</td>
<td>Chapters 4 &amp; 5</td>
<td>pp. 77-137</td>
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**Important Dates:**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 7</td>
<td>Assignment #1 Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 20</td>
<td>Assignment #2 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 25 &amp; 27</td>
<td>Group Paper Exercise (Assignment #3) – Paper due on 9/27 in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 11</td>
<td>Assignment #4 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 9 &amp; 16</td>
<td>Group Paper Exercise (Assignment #5) – Paper due on 10/16 in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 23</td>
<td>Midterm Examination</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>November 8</td>
<td>Assignment #6 Due</td>
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<td>November 15</td>
<td>Assignment #7 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 22</td>
<td>NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 29</td>
<td>Assignment #8 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 11</td>
<td>Final Examination, 7:45 – 9:45 am</td>
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