

PHIL 333: Rationality

Fall 2013

Instructors

Stephen Darwall (stephen.darwall@yale.edu)

Alex Worsnip (alexander.worsnip@yale.edu)

Class meetings: Tues, Thurs 1pm-2:15pm, Phelps Hall 207

Office hours: Mon 4-6pm, Connecticut Hall 405B (Worsnip); Wed 2-4pm, Connecticut Hall 306 (Darwall); meetings also available with either of us by appointment

Course description

As human beings we are constantly evaluating – both explicitly and implicitly – reasoning, beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, intentions and actions for their rationality and irrationality. Social sciences such as psychology and economics tell us a great deal about the conditions under which humans will behave rationally or irrationally, but underlying these assessments are philosophical, normative assumptions about when a piece of behavior or state of mind counts as rational or irrational. In this course we examine these normative assumptions and related philosophical issues that they raise. Among others, topics include belief formation, consistency, disagreement, conceptions of preference and rational choice, sunk costs, free riding, and feminist accounts of rationality.

Enrollment

Enrollment is capped at 25 students. As a prerequisite, you must have completed one philosophy course (or the philosophy component of Directed Studies).

Requirements/assessment

The course consists of the following requirements:

- **Participation.** Including attendance of all classes and participation in discussions. *20% of grade*
- **Response papers and discussion points.** Students will take turns writing
 - a) Short reading responses (limit 1000 words) on that day's reading
 - b) Proposed discussion points for class on that day's reading (this should be a brief question or observation, no more than a short paragraph)Students will each write 3 reading responses and 3 discussion point suggestions over the course of the semester. (You will not write a reading response and a discussion point on the same day, but rather on different days.) In both cases you should email your work to both of us by 5pm the day before class at the latest. Individual assignments will not receive a formal letter grade but completion of them is a requirement of the class. *20% of grade (all together)*
- **Two (somewhat) longer papers on a topic of your choice.** 2500-3500 words. Paper topics should be put into writing and cleared with us at least a week in advance. We will be available to consult on possible topics. *30% of grade each*
 - Paper 1 due Friday, October 11th at 5pm. This should be on a topic from part one of the class (see reading schedule below).

- Paper 2 due Wednesday, December 11th at 5pm. This should be on a topic from part two or part three of the class (see reading schedule below).

All assignments are to be submitted by email, both to stephen.darwall@yale.edu and to alexander.worsnip@yale.edu. Please be aware of the Yale regulations on academic plagiarism, which will be enforced if necessary.

Schedule of classes and readings

Readings are generally short: we have attempted to limit ourselves to a maximum of 30 pages per class (i.e. 60 pages per week). With that in mind, you are expected to come to class having done all the required reading. A few weeks also feature recommended readings, which will be helpful to you but are not required. Readings will be available through the Course Resources folder on classesv2, unless otherwise specified.

Introduction

Thurs Aug 29 Introduction
 Reading: Thomas Scanlon, “Structural Irrationality,” pp. 84-99

Part one: theoretical rationality

Tues Sept 3 Belief formation I
 Reading: William James, “The Will to Believe”; Bernard Williams, “Deciding to Believe”

Thurs Sept 5 Belief formation II
 Reading: Pamela Hieronymi, “Controlling Attitudes”

Tues Sept 10 Belief rationality I
 Reading: Richard Foley, *Working Without a Net*, pp. 3-30

Thurs Sept 12 Belief rationality II
 Reading: Thomas Kelly, “The Rationality of Belief and Some Other Propositional Attitudes”
 Recommended reading: Thomas Kelly, “Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique”

Tues Sept 17 Inference & reasoning I
 Reading: Lewis Carroll, “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles”; Simon Blackburn, “Practical Tortoise Raising”

Thurs Sept 19 Inference & reasoning II
 Reading: Gilbert Harman, *Change in View*, pp. 1-20

Tues Sept 24 Belief consistency & the preface paradox I
 Reading: Sharon Ryan, “The Preface Paradox”

- Thurs Sept 26 Belief consistency & the preface paradox II
Reading: David Christensen, *Putting Logic in its Place*, ch. 3
- Tues Oct 1 Disagreement I
Reading: Thomas Kelly, “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement”
- Thurs Oct 3 Disagreement II
Reading: David Christensen, “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News”
- Tues Oct 8 Debunking arguments
Reading: Roger White, “You Just Believe That Because...”
- Thurs Oct 10 Learning of your own unreliability/bias/stupidity
Reading: Adam Elga, “On Overrating Oneself...and Knowing It”; Adam Elga & Andy Egan, “I Can’t Believe I’m Stupid” (skip appendices if you like)
- Part two: practical rationality*
- Tues Oct 15 Preference & choice I
Reading: Richard Jeffrey, *The Logic of Decision*, ch. 1; Sven Ove Hansson and Till Gruene-Yanoff, “Preferences” (§1.1-1.3, 3.1, 5)
- Thurs Oct 17 Preference & choice II
Reading: Alex Worsnip & Tina Rulli, “Rational Violations of the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives”; Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, ch. 6
- Tues Oct 22 Preference & choice III
Reading: Amartya Sen, “Behavior and the Concept of Preference”; Elizabeth Anderson, “Unstrapping the Straitjacket of ‘Preference’”
- Thurs Oct 24 *October recess: no class*
- Tues Oct 29 Newcomb’s problem
Reading: Robert Nozick, “Newcomb’s Problem and Two Principles of Choice”
- Thurs Oct 31 Free riding/Prisoners’ dilemmas
Reading: Russell Hardin, “The Free Rider Problem”; David Lewis, “Prisoners’ Dilemma is a Newcomb Problem”
- Tues Nov 5 Sunk costs
Reading: Thomas Kelly, “Sunk Costs, Rationality, and Acting for the Sake of the Past”

- Thurs Nov 7 Instrumental rationality I
Reading: John Broome, “Normative Requirements”; Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, ch. 4
- Tues Nov 12 Instrumental rationality II (+Enkrasia)
Reading: John Broome, *Rationality Through Reasoning*, ch. 9 (focus esp. on §9.4-9.5)
- Thurs Nov 14 Instrumental rationality III
Reading: Kieran Setiya, “Cognitivism about Instrumental Reason”
Recommended reading: Michael Bratman, “Intention, Practical Rationality & Self-Governance”
- Tues Nov 19 Instrumental rationality IV
Joseph Raz, “The Myth of Instrumental Rationality”

Part three: critiques/problems for the theory of rationality

- Thurs Nov 21 Feminist critiques I
Reading: Sandra Harding, “Is Gender A Variable in Conceptions of Rationality? A Survey of Issues”
Recommended reading: Phyllis Rooney, “Rationality and the Politics of Gender Difference”
- Tues Nov 26 *November recess: no class*
- Thurs Nov 28 *November recess: no class*
- Tues Dec 3 Feminist critiques II
Reading: Helen Longino, “Circles of Reason”
- Thurs Dec 5 The paradox of rationality
Reading: Donald Davidson, “Paradoxes of Irrationality”
Recommended reading: Steven Lukes, “Some Problems about Rationality”