PHILOSOPHY 170 - CRITICAL REASONING - CLASS SYLLABUS

FALL 2008

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Meeting Times</th>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tu, Th: 11:00AM to 12:15PM</td>
<td>LA5-246</td>
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Email (preferred): wweinste@csulb.edu -- Phone (unreliable): (562) 985-4342
Home Page: http://www.csulb.edu/~wweinste
Office Hours: M, W: 11:00 - 11:50; Tu, Th: 12:30 - 1:20; and by appt.

Texts:
Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

General:
This is a course in philosophy (which means *love of wisdom*). The subject matter is critical reasoning. We will study the principles and criteria used to distinguish correct reasoning from incorrect reasoning. We will study the nature of reasoning, its methods, its common failings, its applications, and its limitations.

Objectives:
Students will be able to discuss, interpret and apply the concepts and methods of critical reasoning, analysis, and argumentation. They will learn to think critically about a variety of subjects, both formal and informal, and to distinguish between valid and invalid reasoning. They will be able to examine their own beliefs, and those of others, with both clarity and an openness to alternative views.

Course Outline:
Unit 1. Basic Reasoning Concepts; More About Arguments; Impediments to Cogent Reasoning
Unit 2. Fallacious Reasoning
Unit 3. The Importance of Language; Thinking Critically about Advertising and the News

Grading:
For students meeting the attendance requirements, below, there will be a one-hour exam (33%) at the end of Unit 1, another (33%) at the end of Unit 2, and a cumulative two-hour final exam (34%). Except for documented, serious and compelling reasons, no make-up exams will be given. An optional term project will count for 30% of the final grade only if it raises a student's final grade. A grading curve will be applied at the end of the semester, with extra-credit awarded for active and effective classroom participation.

Attendance Policy:
*Attendance at all meetings is mandatory.* Absences due to illness, death in the family, or participation in university-sponsored events may be excused if a student provides timely documentation. Accumulation of three weeks of unexcused absences will result in a grade of “F”. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each meeting. Late arrivals are responsible for checking in before leaving class that same day. Failure to check in by the end of class will be considered an unexcused absence.

Plagiarism/Cheating:
Students should read the university policy on *Cheating and Plagiarism* in the *CSULB Catalog*. Penalties for these offenses include “a failing final grade” and “possible probation, suspension, or expulsion.”

Accommodation:
It is the student’s responsibility to notify the instructor in advance of the need for accommodation of a university-verified disability.

Withdrawal:
Standard university policies apply. See *CSULB Catalog*. 

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Texts:
Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

UNIT 1.
Wk#1 Print and Study *Syllabus* and the two
articles from the Course Packet by *Palmquist* and *Gilbert*
Wk#2 Covey: *Part One*, all
Kahane, Ch. 1, *Good and Bad Reasoning*, Sections 1 - 4
Wk#3 Kahane, Ch. 1, *Good and Bad Reasoning*, Sections 5 - end
Covey: *Part Two*, Habit 1
Wk#4 Kahane, Ch. 2, *More on Deduction and Induction*
Covey: *Part Two*, Habit 2
Wk#5 Kahane, Ch. 6, *Psychological Impediments to Cogent Reasoning*
Covey: *Part Two*, Habit 3

FIRST EXAM: Last meeting of Wk#6

Unit 2.
Wk#7 Kahane, Ch. 3, *Fallacious Reasoning* -1
Covey: *Part Three*, Habit 4
Wk#8 Kahane, Ch. 4, *Fallacious Reasoning* -2
Covey: *Part Three*, Habit 5
Wk#9 Kahane, Ch. 5, *Fallacious Reasoning* -3
Covey: *Part Three*, Habit 6

SECOND EXAM: Last meeting of Wk#10

Unit 3.
Wk#11 Kahane, Ch. 7, *Language*
Wk#12 Kahane, Ch. 10, *Advertising: Selling the Product*
Wk#13 Kahane, Ch. 11, *Managing the News*
Wk#14 Covey: *Part Four*, all

FINAL EXAM: See Final Exam Schedule
### WEEKLY CALENDAR, F'08

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THE RIGHT TO THINK, CHOOSE, AND CREATE BELIEFS: Personal Beliefs

We begin to form our beliefs with the dawn of our awareness in the womb and we continue to do so over time as we experience life. We witness cause and effect: if this happens then that may follow. If that happens then I will feel this way. From these experiences we create beliefs. Imagine that the beliefs that we form are arranged in concentric circles, like the rings of a tree that are laid down year after year. Our early beliefs exist at our core, while our later beliefs surround and encompass our earlier beliefs, as our experiences in life become broader.

During infancy and early childhood our experiences are centered mainly around ourselves and our caregivers. This is when we form our core beliefs about ourselves, our needs, our relationships to those closest to us, and the world in which we live. As we move into later childhood and adolescence our interactions as well as the variety of our experiences grows considerably. The modifications of our beliefs about ourselves and our world become the outer rings of the trunk of our tree. Our interests and the diversity and depth of our experiences in life determine its branches and the leaves, flowers, and fruit that are produced.

By the time we reach adulthood the vast majority of our beliefs, particularly those about ourselves, have been formed and reinforced hundreds or even thousands of times. The more an experience is repeated or the more traumatic an experience is the more fixed our beliefs become. When we are grown we have solidified a base of beliefs from which to operate. We have created the trunk of our tree, which is firmly rooted in the ground. Unwittingly however, as a byproduct of this process, we have also learned to perceive the world in a manner consistent with our beliefs, just as a tree can only view the world from its fixed location.

Our beliefs define a reality that we have come to know and expect. This is the reality that we have become comfortable with and therefore, we have developed a vested interest in perceiving experiences in a manner consistent with our beliefs. This is not only how we have defined our reality, but it is also the process that we have used to define ourselves. Our beliefs about ourselves and our world have become more than simple understandings about cause and effect. They have become the manner in which we identify ourselves. Our beliefs have also become incorporated into the filters through which we perceive the world and our relationship to it, creating our unique perspective. This process develops slowly over decades. When we take a class in high school or a course in college, we learn a body of information over a term or semester. As we study for the final exam we review all the facts, opinions, and processes that we have learned throughout the course and we consolidate that information. This is not how we approach life’s lessons. We rarely take the time to review and reflect upon the chain of experiences that we have used to define an aspect of ourselves or our deeper beliefs about our relationship with other people or the world at large. We do not feel the need to do so because we tend to perceive the world the same way from day to day because our filters allow us to. We have designed them to perform that function.

We perceive ourselves, others, and the world as we think they are. We do not perceive our filters. Therefore, we believe that our perceptions are truthful, but they are not. They are colored by the filters we have created to tailor our new experiences to our expectations. This is how we reinforce our beliefs and how we maintain our reality as we think it should be. We do not feel the need to be accountable for our version of reality because we believe that what we perceive is reality. Yet each of us has created our personal reality through our individual beliefs and filters. Until we become accountable for our individual reality we will never recognize the need to perceive our personal filters. Therefore, many of our beliefs about ourselves and our relationships to others, the world, and All That Is will remain just as we defined them when we were children.

From Claim Your Basic Rights, by Jennifer L. Palmquist and Daniel E. Cohen, M.D., pages 167-8. Used with the permission of the publisher.
LONG before seat belts or common sense were particularly widespread, my family made annual trips to New York in our 1963 Valiant station wagon. Mom and Dad took the front seat, my infant sister sat in my mother’s lap and my brother and I had what we called “the wayback” all to ourselves.

In the wayback, we’d lounge around doing puzzles, reading comics and counting license plates. Eventually we’d fight. When our fight had finally escalated to the point of tears, our mother would turn around to chastise us, and my brother and I would start to plead our cases. “But he hit me first,” one of us would say, to which the other would inevitably add, “But he hit me harder.”

It turns out that my brother and I were not alone in believing that these two claims can get a puncher off the hook. In virtually every human society, “He hit me first” provides an acceptable rationale for doing that which is otherwise forbidden. Both civil and religious law provide long lists of behaviors that are illegal or immoral — unless they are responses in kind, in which case they are perfectly fine.

After all, it is wrong to punch anyone except a puncher, and our language even has special words — like “retaliation” and “retribution” and “revenge” — whose common prefix is meant to remind us that a punch thrown second is legally and morally different than a punch thrown first.

That’s why participants in every one of the globe’s intractable conflicts — from Ireland to the Middle East — offer the even-numberedness of their punches as grounds for exculpation.

The problem with the principle of even-numberedness is that people count differently. Every action has a cause and a consequence: something that led to it and something that followed from it. But research shows that while people think of their own actions as the consequences of what came before, they think of other people’s actions as the causes of what came later.

In a study conducted by William Swann and colleagues at the University of Texas, pairs of volunteers played the roles of world leaders who were trying to decide whether to initiate a nuclear strike. The first volunteer was asked to make an opening statement, the second volunteer was asked to respond, the first volunteer was asked to respond to the second, and so on. At the end of the conversation, the volunteers were shown several of the statements that had been made and were asked to recall what had been said just before and just after each of them.

The results revealed an intriguing asymmetry: When volunteers were shown one of their own statements, they naturally remembered what had led them to say it. But when they were shown one of their conversation partner’s statements, they naturally remembered how they had responded to it. In other words, volunteers remembered the causes of their own statements and the consequences of their partner’s statements.

What seems like a grossly self-serving pattern of remembering is actually the product of two innocent facts. First, because our senses point outward, we can observe other people’s actions but not our own. Second, because mental life is a private affair, we can observe our own thoughts but not the thoughts of others. Together, these facts suggest that our reasons for punching will always be more salient to us than the punches themselves — but that the opposite will be true of other people’s reasons and other people’s punches.
Examples aren’t hard to come by. Shiites seek revenge on Sunnis for the revenge they sought on Shiites; Irish Catholics retaliate against the Protestants who retaliated against them; and since 1948, it’s hard to think of any partisan in the Middle East who has done anything but play defense. In each of these instances, people on one side claim that they are merely responding to provocation and dismiss the other side’s identical claim as disingenuous spin. But research suggests that these claims reflect genuinely different perceptions of the same bloody conversation.

If the first principle of legitimate punching is that punches must be even-numbered, the second principle is that an even-numbered punch may be no more forceful than the odd-numbered punch that preceded it. Legitimate retribution is meant to restore balance, and thus an eye for an eye is fair, but an eye for an eyelash is not. When the European Union condemned Israel for bombing Lebanon in retaliation for the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers, it did not question Israel’s right to respond, but rather, its “disproportionate use of force.” It is O.K. to hit back, just not too hard.

Research shows that people have as much trouble applying the second principle as the first. In a study conducted by Sukhwinder Shergill and colleagues at University College London, pairs of volunteers were hooked up to a mechanical device that allowed each of them to exert pressure on the other volunteer’s fingers.

The researcher began the game by exerting a fixed amount of pressure on the first volunteer’s finger. The first volunteer was then asked to exert precisely the same amount of pressure on the second volunteer’s finger. The second volunteer was then asked to exert the same amount of pressure on the first volunteer’s finger. And so on. The two volunteers took turns applying equal amounts of pressure to each other’s fingers while the researchers measured the actual amount of pressure they applied.

The results were striking. Although volunteers tried to respond to each other’s touches with equal force, they typically responded with about 40 percent more force than they had just experienced. Each time a volunteer was touched, he touched back harder, which led the other volunteer to touch back even harder. What began as a game of soft touches quickly became a game of moderate pokes and then hard prods, even though both volunteers were doing their level best to respond in kind.

Each volunteer was convinced that he was responding with equal force and that for some reason the other volunteer was escalating. Neither realized that the escalation was the natural byproduct of a neurological quirk that causes the pain we receive to seem more painful than the pain we produce, so we usually give more pain than we have received.

Research teaches us that our reasons and our pains are more palpable, more obvious and real, than are the reasons and pains of others. This leads to the escalation of mutual harm, to the illusion that others are solely responsible for it and to the belief that our actions are justifiable responses to theirs.

None of this is to deny the roles that hatred, intolerance, avarice and deceit play in human conflict. It is simply to say that basic principles of human psychology are important ingredients in this miserable stew. Until we learn to stop trusting everything our brains tell us about others — and to start trusting ourselves — there will continue to be tears and recriminations in the wayback.

Daniel Gilbert, a professor of psychology at Harvard, is the author of “Stumbling on Happiness.”