According to Baruch College’s Mission Statement, “. . . Baruch College’s faculty cultivates its students’ analytical ability, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and ethical sensibility”. This course fulfills that promise by providing an intensive introduction to two topics that are areas of explicit focus in philosophy – but they will be valuable to the pursuit of excellence in all academic disciplines, since they help us think about what it means to do the best we can as human beings. Ethics is the study of right/wrong actions: what it means to do well when choosing actions that impact other people’s lives. Critical thinking is the study of good reasoning: what it means to do well in forming beliefs & judgments that are properly supported with adequate evidence.

course topics & theme questions

What is ethics? (moral philosophy)

meta-ethics:
- What’s the use in debating about “right” & “wrong”, if no one seems to agree about any of it?
- Is it reasonable and/or desirable to eliminate emotion from ethical judgments & decision-making?
- When (& to what extent) are we morally responsible and/or deserving of punishment for our actions? How does luck come into play?

normative ethics:
- What key concepts/values have philosophers suggested we should keep in mind while reasoning about how we ought to treat other people?

What should we believe? How should we think? (normative epistemology)

virtue epistemology:
- What are the character traits of a good thinker?
- How does a person develop these traits?

ethics of belief:
- Is it ever appropriate to believe something without evidence?
- What kinds of evidence can support a belief? Are some forms of evidence better than others?
- How can we know when we have enough evidence to be certain that our beliefs are supported?
- Is it possible to completely avoid having our minds swayed by forces outside of our control?
- Why do we find some claims easy to believe, and others much harder to believe?
- Does open-mindedness require that we treat all claims as worthy of our belief? If not, how do we draw the line in defining which ideas we can close our minds to?

social epistemology:
- How do other people influence our beliefs & our thinking?
- How do we determine who we can trust as credible sources of information?

empirical insights:
- What kinds of biases are built into our thinking, as a consequence of how our minds operate?
- Can we learn to counteract these biases?
- What kind of evidence, wording, and other presentation tactics are we often misled by?

What rules have philosophers developed in order to define “good reasoning”? (logic)

deductive logic:
- How do we differentiate between the form and the content of an argument?
- How do we evaluate the validity & soundness of deductive arguments?

informal logic:
- What patterns of faulty reasoning (fallacies) should we be aware of, so we can detect these in others’ thinking and avoiding them in our own thinking?
- What rhetorical tricks should we know about, so we can avoid being misled by others?

How can we apply what we’ve learned in the real world? (applied ethics)

1 https://www.baruch.cuny.edu/president/strategicplanning/missionstatement.html
course objectives

Students will:
- develop mastery of theories & concepts supplied by philosophers to help us:
  • understand the nature of morality and decide how to act ethically
  • understand the nature of reasoning and determine how to think/believe responsibly
- examine one’s own intellectual conduct using the tools of normative epistemology
- practice adopting perspectives other than one’s own and interpreting others’ arguments charitably
- improve their ability to extract arguments embedded in natural language (text and speech), and be able to evaluate these arguments using criteria of formal and informal logic
- improve the clarity/persuasiveness of written & spoken arguments, and develop confidence in expressing oneself through these media

requirements & grading

✓ take a syllabus quiz (on Google Forms)
  – This quiz will ensure that you understand how this course works & what Prof. Alpert’s policies are.

✓ attend each class session (for 1/27-3/5)
  ➢ Recommended readings for each session are posted to the course website as PDFs.
  ➢ From 3/19-5/14, you are not obligated to attend class during the live videoconference; however, doing so will make it easier to earn participation credit.

✓ participate in class activities
  ➢ Participating in class discussions (in-person or online (via audio or over chat)) is highly recommended.
    – However, as an alternative to sharing your ideas over chat, you can earn participation credit by submitting questions & comments on class material to the discussion board on Blackboard, in writing via email, or by speaking to your professor one-on-one about class material during office hours (in person or online via conference).

✓ write 3 reading responses to assigned texts (on Google Forms)
  – You’ll read a brief article (meant to complement our lecture topics), and then respond to specific questions intended to help you comprehend the author’s view and practice expressing your thoughts in writing.

✓ complete 3 online exams (on Google Forms)
  – These are designed to be like problem sets, meant to help you master the material by applying & synthesizing principles / concepts discussed in class.
    – You’ll use the lecture slides to complete multiple-choice, matching, and fill-in-the-blank questions.
    – Additionally, you’ll be asked to apply what you’ve learned in order to explain, analyze, and/or evaluate an instance of real-life reasoning about an ethical issue.
    – You may work with classmates to answer the exam questions; however, you must compose your written answers independently from your classmates in order to get full credit for your work.
  I grade based on how well you demonstrate your own ideas and your own understanding.
  ➢ You will not receive full credit for written answers that are identical to, paraphrases of, or otherwise derived from the answers submitted by another student.
Grades are calculated as follows (using Baruch’s grading scale: see bit.ly/baruchgrades):

- **exams**: 60% (3 x 20% each)
- **syllabus quiz & 3 reading responses**: 20% (4 x 5% each)
- **attendance** (from 1/27-3/9 only): 5%
- **participation & conduct**: 15%

**policies**

- **Check your email regularly for course updates.**
  I will email the class in the event of any changes to the course schedule.

- **Feel free to email me** if you have questions or concerns about the course. I will try to make expectations for assignments & exams abundantly clear, so please read assignments thoroughly before emailing.
  
  - Please include “PHI 1100” in the subject line of your message.
  
  I will do my best to respond promptly to emails.

- **Assignments are due by the start of class time on their due dates.**
  (That way, you won’t be distracted by the assignment during class that day.)

- **LATE POLICY:** Submitting assessments late will result in a deduction from the maximum score:
  5% off if submitted up to two calendar days after the due date, 10% off if three days or more.
  
  - I will accept late work any time on or before May 14th, 2020.

**attendance**

- **Regular attendance is expected.** I will not take attendance every class; however, I will occasionally collect materials from in-class activities that will serve as a record of your attendance.

- **You are responsible for all course material,** including that covered in lectures you miss.
  
  - Refer to the PowerPoint slides and consult your classmates about material covered in any lectures you’re unable to attend. I recommend that you identify at least one classmate who you trust to take good notes and exchange contact information with them. If you ask a fellow student for help catching up, you should be willing to return the favor for that student on another occasion.
  
  - If you need additional help catching up, stop by my Office Hours to talk through what you missed.

**accessibility**

- I strive to ensure that every student can succeed in this course. Though I’ve made an effort to design the course so as to provide equal access to the immense benefits of studying philosophy, it’s very possible that some students will need additional accommodations for the best possible experience in this course. I encourage any student encountering difficulties in getting the most out of the course to come talk to me: together, we can develop some strategies for success.

- The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD: VC 2-272, Vertical Campus) can provide “reasonable accommodations” for students who register for services. The OSSD provides an “Accommodation Letter” that informs your instructors what services you need, while maintaining confidentiality about the basis for accommodation. For information on the OSSD, see baruch.cuny.edu/studentaffairs/ossd/disabilityServices.htm.
conduct

- **You must respect the views of your classmates** during full-class and small-group discussions, no matter how drastically they may differ from your own. Disrespectful, disparaging, or hateful speech will not be tolerated. Please take care to ensure that your language conveys appreciation & support for your fellow students’ efforts.

- **Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.** All contact with your classmates and professor should be courteous and professional. Pro-tip: If you sense that you ought to preface what you intend to say or do with a “sorry”, that’s probably a good indicator that what you were about to say is inappropriate in this context.

- There is **zero tolerance for cheating and/or plagiarism** in my course (and at Baruch College in general). Confirmed instances of cheating/plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment in question – and possibly for the entire course. Suspected instances will result in a hold on your grade for the course until the issue is resolved with the Dean’s Office.

statement on representation in philosophy

- The vast majority of texts traditionally taught in introductory philosophy courses are authored by white males. This reflects long-standing imbalances of power & privilege, which have deprived members of other groups of the opportunity to study philosophy, or to have their philosophical work recognized & celebrated. This syllabus aims for inclusivity, with respect to authors and topics that have been neglected for much of intellectual history.

course schedule (below): subject to change!

Dates for in-person course meetings appear in blue; dates for online course meetings appear in purple.

⇒ Note: April 1st is the last day to withdraw from the course with the grade of “W” (no GPA penalty)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 January 28th</td>
<td>2 Jan. 30th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to the Class; Intro to Critical Thinking: Argument Basics, Types of Reasoning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 February 4th</td>
<td>4 Feb. 6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to Ethics: Meta-Ethics &amp; Moral Psychology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Recommended Reading/Viewing:  
THUNK, Episode #63: “Moral Realism & Antirealism” (video)  
Crash Course Philosophy, Episode #33: “Divine Command Theory” (video)  
| Deeper Reading:  
Hume, David. *A Treatise on Human Nature* (excerpts)  
| 5 Feb. 11th      | 6 Feb. 13th      |
| Intro to Ethics: Moral Responsibility, Moral Luck & Situationism, Blame & Forgiveness, Retribution & Punishment |
| Recommended Reading/Viewing:  
Churchland, Patricia. “The Big Questions: Do We Have Free Will?”  
Strawson, Galen. “Your Move: The Maze of Free Will”  
Crash Course Philosophy, Episode #39: “Moral Luck” (video)  
| Reading Response #1:  
Lackey, Jennifer. “The Irrationality of Natural Life Sentences” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Viewing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 18th</td>
<td><strong>Intro to Ethics: Normative Ethical Values</strong></td>
<td>Crash Course Philosophy. Episodes #35-38 (videos) Rothman, Joshua. “The Equality Conundrum”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 20th</td>
<td></td>
<td>Access Exam #1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
               Rothman, Joshua. "Ethics of the Mind (excerpts)  
               Resnick, Brian. "Intellectual Humility: The Importance of Knowing that You Might Be Wrong"  
               Cassam, Quassim. “Epistemic Vices and Conspiracy Theories”  
               *Deeper Reading:*  
               Zagzebski, Linda. *Virtues of the Mind* (excerpts)  
               Battaly, Heather. “Can Closed-Mindedness be an Intellectual Virtue?”  
               Mandelbaum, Eric and Quilty-Dunn, Jake. “Believing Without Reason, Or: Why Liberals Shouldn’t Watch Fox News”  
               Gilbert, Daniel, Tafarodi, Romin W., and Malone, Patrick S. “You Can’t Not Believe Everything You Read” |
| Feb. 27th|                                                                        | EXAM #1 DUE                                                                      |
| Mar 3rd  | **Normative Epistemology: Intellectual Virtues & Vices (cont.); Doxastic Voluntarism** | *Recommended Reading/Viewing:* Crash Course Philosophy. Episode #14: “Anti-Vaxxers, Conspiracy Theories, & Epistemic Responsibility” (video)  
               8-Bit Philosophy. “Can We Be Certain of Anything? (Descartes)” (video)  
               The Oatmeal. “You’re Not Going to Believe What I’m About to Tell You…”  
               Carneades.org. “The Paradox of Dogmatism” (video)  
               *Deeper Reading:*  
               Rini, Regina. “Deepfakes are Coming. We Can No Longer Believe What We See”  
               Clifford, W.K. “The Ethics of Belief”  
               James, William. “The Will to Believe” (excerpts) |
| Mar 5th  |                                                                        |                                                                                |
| Mar 10th | **Normative Epistemology: The “Ethics of Belief” (cont.)**            |                                                                                |
| Mar 12th | NO CLASS – “Instructional Recess”                                     |                                                                                |
| Mar 19th |                                                                        | **RR #2 DUE**                                                                   |
               Lackey, Jennifer. “True Story: Echo Chambers are Not the Problem”  
               Reading Response #2:  
               Nguyen, C. Thi. “Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles” |
| Mar 26th |                                                                        |                                                                                |
| Mar 17th | NO CLASS – “Instructional Recess”                                     |                                                                                |
### April 2nd

**Access Exam #2 (on 3/31)**

### April 7th

**EXAM #2 DUE**

- **NO CLASS (Classes on a Wednesday schedule)**

### April 9th

- **NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

### April 14th

- **NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

### April 21st

**Evaluating Arguments: Argument Mapping; Form vs. Content; Premise Relevance**

- **Palmer.** “Premise Indicators, Serial and Convergent Premises, Argument Diagrams”
- “Validity, Soundness, Sufficiency and Inductive vs. Deductive Arguments”; “Conditional Reasoning 1”
- ”Welcome to the RRAR Method of Reasoning for the Digital Age”
- “Contextual Relevance…”; “Failures of Relevance 1…”; “Failures of Relevance 2…”

### April 28th

**Evaluating Arguments: Premise Relativity; Use of Language & Numbers**

- **Recommended Reading/Viewing:**
  - **Wireless Philosophy.** “CRITICAL THINKING – Fundamentals: Bayes’ Theorem” (video)
  - **Leetaru, Kalev.** “Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics: How Bad Statistics are Feeding Fake News”
  - **Palmer.** “How to Mislead with Statistics: Part 1”, “… Misleading with Numbers 2 …”
  - “Generalizations … Part 1”; “Generalizations, …2”

- **Deeper Reading:**
  - **Huff, Darrell.** *How to Lie with Statistics.*
  - **Big Think.** “Julia Galef: Think Rationally via Bayes’ Rule” (video)

### May 5th

**Evaluating Arguments: Premise Relativity**

- **Recommended Reading:**
  - **Palmer.** “Vagueness, Ambiguity, Fallacies of Equivocation, Composition and Division”
  - “Misleading Language: Comparisons, Weasel Words, Enthymemes, and Other Rhetorical Tricks”

- **Deeper Reading:**
  - **Cavender, Nancy and Kahane, Howard.** "Language" (excerpts).
  - *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric: The Use of Reason in Everyday Life* (11th Ed.)

### May 12th

**Evaluating Arguments: Premise Acceptability**

- **Cavender and Kahane.** (excerpts from Chs. 3-5)

### May 19th

- **NO CLASS (Reading Week)**

### May 21st

**EXAM #3 DUE**

- **NO CLASS (Reading Week)**
  - Last Chance to Visit Office Hours