

PHIL 5983: Seminar: Rationality

University of Arkansas, Fall 2004

Professor: Eric Funkhouser
Office location: Old Main 308
Office hours: MF 2:30 - 4:00, and by appointment
Office phone number: (479) 575-7441
Email: efunkho@uark.edu

Class meeting time: W 3:30-5:50
Classroom: Old Main 322

Class website: <http://comp.uark.edu/~efunkho/rationality.html>
All class handouts, and some additional links (hopefully), will be put on this page.

Texts:

Required:

1. Gigerenzer, Gerd, Peter Todd, and the ABC Research Group. 1999. *Simple Heuristics that Make Us Smart* (New York: Oxford University Press).
2. Coltheart, Max and Martin Davies, eds. 2000. *Pathologies of Belief* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.).
3. Mele, Alfred. 2001. *Self-Deception Unmasked* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

I have ordered the required texts, and they should be available at the University bookstore. Other readings will be photocopied and available in a folder in the Philosophy Library/Conference Room (Old Main 315).

Course Description:

The topic of this seminar is the limits of human (theoretical) rationality. What degree of rationality is required of any believer? To what extent does the norm of rationality guide belief attributions? Does psychological evidence disprove the philosopher's notion of a rational "folk psychology"? Is it even possible to hold severe delusional *beliefs* that are completely, or at least very radically, disconnected from one's evidential base and are otherwise implausible? Is it possible to hold contradictory beliefs? What are the relevant cognitive states of the self-deceived?

We will begin the course by reading philosophers who argue that rationality, in a strong sense to be specified, is essential to being a believer. If true, this puts serious conceptual (*a priori*) restrictions on the limits of human rationality. But philosophy has a long history of having conceptual claims refuted by empirical evidence. Next, we examine the psychological evidence that is often taken to refute this alleged (strong) conceptual connection between belief and rationality. This evidence points out systemic biases and heuristics that human thinkers employ. We will then turn to the literature on severe delusional disorders, and the rationality of schizophrenics with severe delusions in particular. Finally, we tackle the topic of self-deception.

Course Requirements and Grading

Regular attendance and participation in weekly class meetings is expected, and will be a factor in your course grade. You will also be responsible for:

- *4 short (3-5 pages each) “reaction papers” concerning weekly readings
- *1 in-class presentation covering an assigned reading
- *A major, final paper (approximately 15 pages)

Schedule of Readings and Topics (Note: This might be changed slightly.)

Week 1. Introduction/Varieties of Rationality

W Aug. 25 Reading: None

Week 2. Must We Be Rational? I: Rationality and Meaning Restrictions on Belief

W Sept. 1 Readings: Dennett (“Intentional Systems” and “Brain Writing and Mind Reading”) and Davidson (“Thought and Talk”)

Week 3. Must We Be Rational? II: Apparent, Systematic Shortcomings in Human Reasoning

W Sept. 8 Readings: Tversky and Kahneman (“Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases”, “Availability: A Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability”, and “Extensional Versus Intuitive Reasoning: The Conjunction Fallacy in Probability Judgment”)

Week 4. Must We Be Rational? III: But Wait! Can Philosophy Nullify the Psychological Case for Systematic Irrationality?

W Sept. 15 Reading: L. Jonathan Cohen (“Can Human Irrationality Be Experimentally Demonstrated?” (and selected Commentary and Author’s Response))

Week 5. Must We Be Rational? IV: More Moderate Responses to Tversky and Kahneman, from Psychology

W Sept. 22 Readings: *Simple Heuristics* (Chapter 1); Kahneman and Tversky (“On the Reality of Cognitive Illusions”) and Gigerenzer’s reply (“On Narrow Norms and Vague Heuristics: A Reply to Kahneman and Tversky (1996)”)

Week 6. Simple Heuristics I: Recognition and One-Reason Decision Making

W Sept. 29 Readings: *Simple Heuristics* (Chapters 2-4)

Week 7. Simple Heuristics II: Memory, Estimation, and Categorization

W Oct. 6 Readings: *Simple Heuristics* (Chapters 9-11)

Week 8. Simple Heuristics III: Finding Mates, Raising Children, and Summary

W Oct. 13 Readings: *Simple Heuristics* (Chapters 13, 14, and 16)

Week 9. Delusions I: Introduction and Stone/Young’s Two-Factored Account

W Oct. 20 Readings: Stone and Young (“Delusions and Brain Injury: The Philosophy and Psychology of Belief”); *Pathologies of Belief* (Chapter 1)

Week 10. Delusions II: More on Understanding Delusions

W Oct. 27 Readings: *Pathologies of Belief* (Chapters 2, 3, and 4)

Week 11. Delusions III: Rationality and the Deluded

W Nov. 3 Readings: *Pathologies of Belief* (Chapters 6 and 8) and Bermudez

(“Normativity and Rationality in Delusional Psychiatric Disorders”)

Week 12. Self-Deception I: The Puzzles of Self-Deception

W Nov. 10 Readings: *Self-Deception Unmasked* (Chapters 1 and 2); Davidson
(‘Deception and Division’)

Week 13. Self-Deception II: Mele’s Account of Self-Deception

W Nov. 17 Readings: *Self-Deception Unmasked* (Chapters 3-6)

Week 14. Turkey

W Nov. 24 **NO CLASS FALL BREAK**

Week 15. Self-Deception III: Believe What You Want

W Dec. 1 Readings: Funkhouser (‘Do the Self-Deceived Get What They Want?’);
Williams (‘Deciding to Believe’)