

**PHILOSOPHY 23001/33110**  
**REASONS AND REASONING**  
University of Chicago, winter 2006

Course Instructor: Jason Bridges  
Office hours: Fridays 10:30-12:00, Stuart 231C

Course Assistant: Tom Lockhart  
Office hours TBA

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**DESCRIPTION**

Arguably, the fundamental distinguishing feature of creatures with minds is their possession of a faculty of reason: a capacity to recognize, assess, and be moved by reasons. In this course, we address two sets of questions about the nature and status of this faculty. The first concerns the phenomenon of reasoning. What happens when a person reasons? Is reasoning a causal process? How does appeal to a person's reasoning explain her beliefs and actions? How do rules of inference mediate inferences? Can rules of inference be justified? The second set of questions concerns rationality. What is it for a belief or action to be rational? Does providing for the rationality of beliefs and actions require regarding these phenomena as constitutively normative? What is the relationship between objective claims about reasons and subjective evaluations of rationality? Does formal decision theory contribute to our understanding of the norms of rationality? Are there really any norms of rationality at all? What is the role of assumptions about rationality in interpersonal interpretation? Since many of these questions cut across the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical reason, our readings will include recent work in both epistemology and the philosophy of action.

*Prerequisite:* at least one previous course in philosophy or permission from the course instructor. Some background in symbolic logic will occasionally be assumed. The readings for this course are challenging.

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**READINGS**

Some of the course readings will be available for purchase from the Humanities mail room in the basement of Walker. The remaining readings will be available on electronic reserve.

Course materials, such as syllabi and paper topics, will be posted to the course's Chalk website.

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**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

First paper:	3 pages	due January 31 <sup>st</sup> in class	worth 25% of course grade
Second paper	5 pages	due February 21 <sup>st</sup> in class	worth 30%
Final paper:	7 pages	due March 14 <sup>th</sup> in Professor Bridges' mailbox (Stuart 202)	worth 45%

Paper topics will be distributed in class 12-14 days before the due dates. Late papers will be docked a grade per day (e.g., B+ to B) unless you have received approval ahead of time. No papers will be accepted after March 14<sup>th</sup>.

Graduate students taking the class may either write the three papers above on the assigned paper topics, or one 15-page paper on a topic approved by Professor Bridges.

There is no final exam.

Undergraduate attendance of discussion sections is mandatory.

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

### Part I: Overview

<u>Lecture</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1	Course overview	
2	Reasons, reasoning and rationality	H. P. Grice, <i>Aspects of Reason</i> , pp. 4-40

### Part II: Reasoning

3	The tortoise and Achilles	Lewis Carroll, "What the tortoise said to Achilles" Barry Stroud, "Inference, belief and understanding" Simon Blackburn, "Practical tortoise raising"
4	Reasoning and dispositions	John Broome, "Reason and motivation"
5	Volitionism	Jay Wallace, "Three conceptions of agency"
6	Rational explanation and laws	Carl Hempel, "Aspects of scientific explanation," section 10
7	Anti-psychologism about rational explanation	Jonathan Dancy, "Two ways of explaining actions"
8	Rational causation	Bill Brewer, "Compulsion by reason"
9	Can rules of inference be justified?	Paul Boghossian, "Are objective epistemic reasons possible?"

### Part III: Rationality

10	Norm-expressivism about ascriptions of rationality	Alan Gibbard, <i>Wise Choices, Apt Feelings</i> , chapters 3 and 4
11	Belief as constitutively normative	Nishi Shah, "How truth governs belief" Nishi Shah and David Velleman, "Doxastic deliberation"
12	Subjective and objective oughts	Alan Gibbard, "Truth and correct belief"
13	Rationality as adherence to subjective normative requirements	John Broome, "Normative requirements" John Broome, "Reasons"
14	Are the norms of rationality illusory?	Niko Kolodny, "Why be rational?"
15	Formal theory I: decision theory	R. Duncan Luce and Howard Raiffa, <i>Games and Decisions</i> , chapter two
16	Formal theory II: critique	Simon Blackburn, <i>Ruling Passions</i> , chapters 5 and 6 Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Prospect theory: an analysis of decisions under risk"
17	Rationality and structure I: dispositions redux	T. M. Scanlon, "Structural irrationality"
18	Rationality and structure II: interpretation	Donald Davidson, "Can there be a science of rationality?" Donald Davidson, "The content of the concept of truth" Timothy Schroeder, "Donald Davidson's theory of mind is non-normative" <i>Background:</i> Frank Ramsey, "Truth and probability"