

Critical Thinking in Leadership
LDSP 301, Sections 1 & 2

Spring 2005

Course Syllabus

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Office: Jepson Hall, Room 129

Office Hours: TR 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

One characteristic feature of humans is our **liability to hold mistaken beliefs**. Unfortunately for us, it often turns out that we just have things wrong—sometimes badly wrong. Simply put, we can think that we know things when in fact we do not. This problem is particularly acute for leaders. Leaders often face problems for which answers are not obvious. Accordingly, we might say that they can find themselves at the “epistemic margins” of social, political, and professional life. For example, they frequently work for change and, so, must rely upon knowledge bases that are even more limited than are the knowledge bases upon which we rely in our everyday dealings in the world. This is important, especially given that leaders must sometimes take greater chances and face greater risks than do most individuals—both self-regarding and other-regarding chances and risks. In many ways, then, this is a course in **self-leadership**. How can we be expected to lead others in the right direction, we might ask, if we are misleading ourselves?

Foundational epistemological burdens are worrisome enough, but the problems to which they give rise are further compounded by a myriad of familiar **defects of reasoning**. In this course, we first look at a **humanities-based approach** to how our reasoning goes awry. Most of the major defects of reasoning identified by philosophers can be put under the headings of “questionable premises” or “faulty inferences.” We sometimes reason from unfounded beliefs, and our beliefs often fail to support the conclusions that we want to draw from them. The goal in this part of the course is to learn to notice these defects in the reasoning of others and, ultimately, to avoid them in our own reasoning. Second, we will consider a **social scientific approach** to human inference. In their analysis of inferential failure, psychologists point to the overutilization of familiar cognitive strategies such as the “representativeness heuristic” and the “availability heuristic.” We will give special attention to the liabilities of these strategies and others as well as to the difficulties associated with specific inferential tasks such as characterizing data, making causal analyses, and revising theories.

Recognition of these problems should lead us to consider the conditions under which we can be said to have knowledge. **Epistemology**, the study of the grounds of knowledge, addresses just these sorts of issues. In the third substantial portion of this course, we look at the nature of **scientific inquiry**, which many people take to be the paradigmatic case of knowledge production, so that we might take up basic epistemological issues. Questions we will address include the following: Is

scientific knowledge really objective? What should we make of the claim that it is nothing more than an “instrument of oppression” to be used by the rich and powerful? To what extent are our scientific beliefs constructed or shaped by human interests? Addressing these and related questions will force us to confront the tensions between epistemic values and **practical values**, especially those practical values that characterize social, political, and religious commitments. Confronting these tensions, as we shall see, will help us to identify the role that epistemology plays in the study and exercise of leadership.

To summarize, as both a leader and a student of leadership, you will be presented with information from a variety of sources and in areas in which you have no expertise. Leaders need skills for making judgments about arguments and about the information on which these arguments rest. Students of leadership need to know how to assess the strengths and limitations of the different **disciplinary approaches** and **methodologies** that come to bear on a multidisciplinary education. There is reason to think, however, that good leadership requires more than just care in the acquisition and maintenance of our beliefs. If good leadership turns on reason-giving—on always being ready to justify oneself by means of an appeal to **rational persuasion**—then you will also need to be able to give **persuasive arguments** for your beliefs. You must be able to make a convincing argument that you are right and that others should accept (and, thus, act on) the beliefs that you have. This course aims to provide the necessary means for developing this fundamental leadership competency. In the end, its success will depend in large part on your willingness to engage yourself fully in assignments, discussion notes and commentaries, and class exercises. Please note also that **class will begin and end on time**.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- The student should learn to identify formal and informal fallacies in the reasoning of others and how to avoid these fallacies in his own thought and in its written and verbal communication.
- The student should develop a keen understanding of the role that knowledge structures and judgmental heuristics play in the layperson’s understanding or *mis*understanding of the world.
- The student should be familiar with the normative principles and inferential tools that guide formal scientific and social scientific inquiry.
- The student should have a sophisticated view of the nature and limits of knowledge.
- The student should come to some considered conclusions about the relationship between knowledge and value as well as about the implications that this relationship has for our understanding of leadership.
- The student should be able to apply her critical thinking skills in the study and exercise of leadership.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Howard Kahane and Nancy Cavender, *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric: The Use of Reason in Everyday Life* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2002), 9th edition.

Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980).

Philip Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Naquib Mafouz, *Akhenaten: Dweller in Truth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998).

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Class Contribution—15%
2. Discussion Notes and Commentaries (15 notes, posted by 5 p.m. the day before class and 5 commentaries, posted by 12:00 the night before class, of at least 300 words each)—15% (attendance required for credit)
3. Editorial Outline—10%
4. Midterm Examination—15%
5. Outline of Argumentative Analysis—10%
6. Argumentative Analysis—15%
7. Final Examination—20%

Note: The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System as sanctioned by the School of Arts and Sciences. **Every piece of written work** must have the honor pledge and the student's signature on it. The pledge is: "I pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work." Work submitted without the honor pledge will be considered incomplete and, thus, may be subject to the late penalty (see below).

A WORD ON DEADLINES AND SCHEDULED EXAMS

The instructor takes deadlines and scheduled exams very seriously. In fairness to your classmates, any difficulties that arise should be brought to my attention as soon as possible before the deadline or scheduled exam. **No late work will be accepted, unless accompanied by a completed and approved request form.** The form can be found attached to this syllabus. **Please note that computer problems never constitute an acceptable excuse.**

SCHEDULE (Subject to Change as the Course Progresses)

- T 1/11 Introduction to Critical Thinking
- R 1/13 Good and Bad Reasoning (1)
Kahane and Cavender, Chapter 1
- T 1/18 Inductive and Deductive Reasoning (2)
Kahane and Cavender, Chapter 2
- R 1/20 Fallacious Reasoning—1 (3)
Kahane and Cavender, Chapter 3
- T 1/25 Fallacious Reasoning—2 (4)
Kahane and Cavender, Chapter 4
- R 1/27 Fallacious Reasoning—2-3 (5)
Kahane and Cavender, Chapters 4-5
- T 2/1 Fallacious Reasoning—3 (6)
Kahane and Cavender, Chapter 5
- R 2/3 Language and Meaning (7)
Kahane and Cavender, Chapter 7
- T 2/8 An Introduction to the Intuitive Scientist (8)
Nisbett and Ross, Preface and Chapter 1
- R 2/10 Judgmental Heuristics and Knowledge Structures (9)
Nisbett and Ross, Chapter 2
- F 2/11 **Editorial Outline due by 5:00 p.m. (Jepson Hall, Room 125)**
- T 2/15 Judgmental Heuristics and Knowledge Structures
Assigning Weights to Data: The “Vividness Criterion” (10)
Nisbett and Ross, Chapters 2-3
- R 2/17 Assigning Weights to Data: The “Vividness Criterion” (11)
Nisbett and Ross, Chapter 3
- T 2/22 Characterizing the Datum, Sample, and Population (12)
Nisbett and Ross, Chapter 4
- R 2/24 **No class**
- T 3/1 Theory Maintenance and Theory Change (13)
Nisbett and Ross, Chapter 8

- R 3/3 **Midterm Examination—in Class**
- M 3/7
thru
F 3/11 **Spring Break**
- T 3/15 The Lay Scientist Self-examined (14)
 Nisbett and Ross, Chapter 9
- R 3/17 Psychodynamics versus Psychologic (15)
 Nisbett and Ross, Chapter 10
- M 3/21 **Outline of Argumentative Analysis due by 5:00 p.m. (Jepson Hall, Room 125)**
- T 3/22 Improving Human Inference: Possibilities and Limitations (16)
 Nisbett and Ross, Chapter 12
- R 3/24 Unacceptable Images and The World as We Find It (17)
 Kitcher, Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-19
- T 3/29 The World as We Make it (18)
 Kitcher, Chapter 4
- R 3/31 Mapping Reality (19)
 Kitcher, Chapter 5
- T 4/5 Constraints on Free Inquiry (20)
 Kitcher, Chapter 8
- R 4/7 Subversive Truth and Ideals of Progress (21)
 Kitcher, Chapter 12
- T 4/12 The Luddites' Laments (22)
 Kitcher, Chapters 13
- R 4/14 Research in an Imperfect World (23)
 Kitcher, Chapter 14
- F 4/15 **Argumentative Analysis due by 5:00 p.m. (Jepson Hall, Room 125)**
- T 4/19 Truth and Perspective (24)
 Akhenaten
- R 4/21 Summary and Discussion
- T 4/26 **Final Examination—in Class from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (Section 1)**
- T 4/26 **Final Examination—in Class from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Section 2)**

REQUEST FOR EXTENSION/MAKE-UP

1. **Today's Date:**
2. **Original Assignment Date:**
3. **Reason for Extension/Make-up:**
4. **Proposed Due Date/Make-up Date:**
5. **Instructor Signature:**
6. **Your Signature:**

Submit this form with the completed assignment (e.g., paper, make-up exam, etc.). This form will not be accepted if incomplete (e.g., if #5 is blank).

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