Critical Thinking in Leadership
LDSP 250, Section 2

Spring 2010

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Terry L. Price
E-mail: tprice@richmond.edu
Phone: 287-6088
Office: Jepson Hall, Room 133
Office Hours: Open door 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. 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 will 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 the first 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.

Recognition of these problems should lead us to consider the conditions under which we can be said to have knowledge generally or knowledge about ourselves, the external world, or God. Philosophy addresses just these sorts of issues. In the second substantial portion of this course, we look at some of our most fundamental beliefs so that we might take up these basic epistemological issues. Questions we will address include the following: How do we know anything? Do we have souls? Does God exist? 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 readings, assignments, discussions, 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 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


REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING
Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Class Contribution—10%
2. Periodic Quizzes (5 of 6)—20%
3. Editorial Outline—10%
4. Outline of Argumentative Analysis—10%
5. Argumentative Analysis—15%
6. Final Examination—35%

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 class, 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. It does not apply to periodic quizzes, except in the case of sanctioned university activities. Please note that computer problems never constitute an acceptable excuse.

SCHEDULE (Subject to Change as the Course Progresses)

T Jan 12       Cavender and Kahane, Chapter 1
R Jan 14       Cavender and Kahane, Chapter 2
T Jan 19       Cavender and Kahane, Chapter 3
R Jan 21       Cavender and Kahane, Chapter 4
M Jan 25       Editorial Outline due by 5:00 p.m. (Jepson Hall, Room 125)
T Jan 26       Cavender and Kahane, Chapters 4-5
R Jan 28       Cavender and Kahane, Chapter 5
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<td>T Feb 2</td>
<td>Blackburn, Introduction</td>
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<td>R Feb 4</td>
<td>Blackburn, Chapter 1</td>
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<td>M Feb 8</td>
<td>Outline of Argumentative Analysis due by 5:00 p.m. (Jepson Hall, Room 125)</td>
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<td>T Feb 9</td>
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<td>R Feb 18</td>
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<td>M Feb 22</td>
<td>Argumentative Analysis due by 5:00 p.m. (Jepson Hall, Room 125)</td>
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<td>S Feb 27</td>
<td>Final Examination—in class from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.</td>
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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).