

SYLLABUS — Varieties of irrationality

Instructor: Dr. Cristina Borgoni

Language of instruction: English

Time: 11:45-13:15

Office hours: by appointment, Office 513

Place: UR09.51

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Course Summary

The course's guiding question is about the connection between rationality and beliefs. Rationality is normally not considered to be a constitutive feature of beliefs. It is a shared assumption that irrational *beliefs* exist. However, the current discussion on a variety of psychological phenomena appeals to the requirement of rationality to distinguish between beliefs and other types of mental states. This course aims to examine further this apparent implicit connection between beliefs and the requirement of rationality.

The title of the course 'varieties of irrationality' alludes to the study of different criteria for irrationality *and* to the study of a variety of irrational phenomena. The course is divided into three parts: 1. Norms of rationality and classic forms of irrationality, 2. Delusions and different criteria for irrationality, and 3. Rationality and reasoning.

Level of Difficult

This course is meant to be an advanced course in philosophy. All readings are written by and for professional philosophers. Readings require background knowledge. This course should not be taken if this is your first year or if this is your first course in philosophy. The minimum requirements are: Introduction to Philosophy of Mind or Introduction to Epistemology + Introduction to Philosophy.

Assessment

Your grades will be calculated as follows:

1. Attendance and participation: 30%

We have 12 meetings in total. If you miss more than 3 classes, you won't get any points for attendance. Your grade will be calculated on the quality of your participation in class.

2. Mid-term essay (around 1500 words): 30%
The guidelines will be given later in the course.
3. Final essay (around 2000 words): 40%
The guidelines will be given later in the course.

Schedule – Assigned readings

15/10/2014 Davidson, D. (1982) ‘Paradoxes of Irrationality’

22.10.2014 Davidson, D (1986) ‘Incoherence and Irrationality’ and (1985) ‘Deception and Division’

05.11.2014 Pears, D. and Pugmire, D. (1982) *Motivated Irrationality*

12.11.2014 Mele, A. (2001) *Self-Deception Unmasked* (excerpts)

19.11.2014 Bortolotti, L. (2010) Chapter 1, pp. 21-59

26.11.2014 Bortolotti, L. (2010) Chapter 2 ‘Procedural Irrationality’, pp. 61-92

03.12.2014 Bortolotti, L. (2010) Chapter 3, ‘Epistemic rationality’, pp. 113-154

10.12.2014 (double class) Bortolotti, L. (2010) Chapter 3, ‘Epistemic rationality’, pp. 113-154

Gendler, T. 2008: ‘Alief and Belief’. *Journal of Philosophy*, 105, pp. 634–663

10.12.2014 (double class) Bortolotti, L. (2010) Chapter 4, ‘Agential rationality’, pp. 159-203

07.01.2015: no class

—**Deadline mid-term essay**—

14.01.2015 (double class) Bortolotti, L. (2010) Chapter 4, ‘Agential rationality’, pp. 159-203

14.01.2015 (double class) **Guidelines on writing**

21.01.2015 Broome, J. (2013) *Rationality through Reasoning* (excerpts)

28.01.2015 Broome, J. (2013) *Rationality through Reasoning* (excerpts)

18.02.2015: no class

—**Deadline final essay**—

Course structure – bibliography

Part 1: Norms of rationality and classic forms of irrationality

In Part 1, we will read some classic texts on irrationality such as Davidson's texts and will learn about classic forms of irrationality such as *akrasia* and *self-deception*. We will see examples of beliefs that fail certain norms of rationality and thereby are paradigmatic examples of irrational beliefs.

Davidson, D. 1982: 'Paradoxes of Irrationality'. In his 2004: *Problems of Rationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 169–88.

Davidson, D. 1985: 'Incoherence and Irrationality'. In his 2004: *Problems of Rationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 189–198.

Davidson, D. 1986: 'Deception and Division'. In his 2004: *Problems of Rationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 189–198.

Pears, D. and Pugmire, D. 1982: 'Motivated Irrationality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56: pp. 157-196.

Mele, A. 2001: *Self-Deception Unmasked*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Part 2: Delusions and different criteria for irrationality

In this part, we will focus on Bortolotti's book on delusions. Delusions are considered a form of irrationality. However, it is an open issue whether delusions should be classified as beliefs. In this second part of the course, we will apply some of the criteria for irrationality discussed in the previous phase to think about the particular character of delusions when compared to irrational beliefs. We will follow Bortolotti's classification of three criteria for irrationality. In this part, we will also read some literature in the intersection of philosophy and psychology. Literature (optional readings will be indicated later in the course):

Bortolotti, Lisa (2010) 'Delusions and other irrational beliefs'. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gendler, T. 2008: 'Alief and Belief'. *Journal of Philosophy*, 105, pp. 634–663.

Part 3: Rationality and reasoning

In the last part of the course, we will read some excerpts of Broome's book 'Rationality through reasoning'. Broome's book has been one of the most discussed books on rationality and normativity since last year. We will focus on norms of rationality in first- and higher-order reasonings. Literature (optional readings will be indicated later in the course):

Broome, J. (2013) *Rationality through Reasoning*, Wiley-Blackwell.

Course Material

You can find part of the course material online at the course website (at <http://moodle.uni-graz.at>) and at the course's folder inside the library (look for 'Borgoni' folder).

Last, but not least: Plagiarism

Don't plagiarize. It's that simple. Plagiarism is an infringement of intellectual copyright and a serious offence, and is not taken lightly by the university. It is easy to avoid it: whenever you help yourself to the ideas of others, make their authorship explicit by referencing them. In addition, use quotation marks ('...') when you cite them word for word. When in doubt, always reference the source you're using: better a reference too many than too few.