

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR
Department of Philosophy

Philosophy 561
Fallacy, Sophistry, and Error

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Fall 2010
M 1:00-3:50 CHN 2193

Office Hours: Wednesday morning.

Course description:

Human reason is prone to mistakes, putting out errors like the best computer operating system. In the Western philosophical tradition, those mistakes have often been studied and categorized with a view to understanding and, hence, avoiding them. In its more disdainful moments, philosophy has associated many abuses of reason, especially when they seem preventable and even deliberate, under the label of ‘sophistry’. In fact, early philosophy distinguished itself by fixing sophistry as its negative “other.” More recently, this view has been judged a prejudice, with calls for a more measured understanding (and definition) of ‘sophistry’ and what is involved in it. The most negative understanding of the sophism may be seen in the tradition of logical fallacy. Yet ‘fallacy’ is a further term where the apparent simplicity of the textbook accounts belies a deeper complexity that defies a clear definition. Finally, modern treatments of errors in reason provided by cognitive scientists and psychologists suggest that mistakes are not necessarily a bad thing, that being prone to mistakes is a positive aspect of human reason not a fault.

In this course, we will explore this triad of concepts (sophistry, fallacy, and error) from Plato’s *Euthydemus* through to some of the recent work of Rescher and Gigerenzer with a view to gaining a better appreciation of each and their relationship to each other. In preparation for the first meeting in September, students should read Gerd Gigerenzer’s “I Think, Therefore I Err” [*Social Research*, 2005 (1):1-24] and Plato’s *Euthydemus*. Links to both texts will be available on the course CLEW site.

Course Structure:

The course will be conducted as a seminar/discussion. Each week a member of the class will introduce the reading material, identifying relevant themes, points of interest and problems.

Required Texts:

Weekly reading material will be placed on reserve in the library or department office, or on the course CLEW site.

Requirements:

1. Each member of the class will be asked to introduce the class material at least once over the term. This will involve talking about the main ideas in what they have read and raising questions about it that the rest of us might then take up and discuss. These introductions will comprise 20% of the grade.
2. Class-preparedness and participation: Students should be prepared to engage in discussions, and success on this level will be reflected in 10% of the grade.
3. Two short papers (@5 pages each) discussing the principal ideas in two of our readings: (i) Read Cassin's "Who's Afraid of the Sophists?" Discuss and critique how she understands the relationship between sophistry and philosophy (due Sept. 27); (ii) Read Walton: "Defeasible Reasoning and Informal Fallacies." Discuss and critique Walton's change to the definition of "fallacy" and his reasons for this (due Oct. 25). Each short paper is worth 10%.
4. A major paper will be due by December 16 (3:30 pm). This can be written in drafts throughout the latter part of the course. Length and nature of the paper will depend on the topic chosen, which will arise from discussions with the instructor. The paper is worth 50% of the course grade.

Class Schedule: (We may make changes/adjustments to some of the later readings, depending on how our interests develop.)

September:

13: Introduction to the course; organizational meeting. Rescher, Ch.7.

20: Plato on Sophistry and Fallacy

Reading: Plato's *Euthydemus*.

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthydemus.html>

Cassin, Barbara (2000) "Who's Afraid of the Sophists? Against Ethical Correctness," *Hypatia* 15 (4):102-120.

27: Sophistry

Reading: Freeman, Kathleen (1948) *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, pp.125-39.

Sprague, Rosamund Kent (1972) Editor: *The Older Sophists*:18-24 (Protagoras); 42-67 (Gorgias).

Kerferd, G.B. (1981) *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge) Ch.4 (The Meaning of the Term Sophist:24-42).

October:

4: Aristotle's rhetorical program.

Reading: Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations*.

http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/sophist_refut.html

Hamblin, C.L. (1970) *Fallacies*. London: Methuen: Chapter 2 (Aristotle's List):50-88.

11: Thanksgiving: No Class

18: Fallacies in the Aristotelian Tradition

Reading: Hamblin, C.L. (1970) *Fallacies*: Ch.1 (The Standard Treatment); Ch.3 (The Aristotelian Tradition).

Walton: “Defeasible Reasoning and Informal Fallacies.”

25:

Reading: Hamblin’s Account

Hamblin: Ch.3 & Ch.4

November:

1:

Reading: The Nature of Fallacies

From Hansen & Pinto (1995) *Fallacies*: Locke; Whately & Mill.pp.55-56; 67-94.

Fogelin, Robert J & Timothy J. Duggan (1987) “Fallacies” *Argumentation* 1:255-62

Woods, John (1988) “Buttercups, GNP’s and Quarks: Are Fallacies Theoretical Entities?” *Informal Logic* 10:67-76.

8: Debates on Fallacies

Reading: From Hansen & Pinto: van Eemeren & Grootendorst, The Pragma-Dialectical Approach” (pp.130-44); Massey, Gerald “The Fallacy behind Fallacies” (pp.159-71).

Govier, Trudy (1983) “Who Says There are No Fallacies?” *Informal Logic* 5:2-10

12 (Class moved to Friday morning; no class Monday 15th): Error and Decidsion-Making

Reading:

Lebacqz, Joseph (1925) “What is Error?” *Heythrop Journal* 6:171-88.

Gigerenzer, Gerd & Peter Todd (2000) “Précis of Simple Heuristics that Make Us Smart,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 23:727-780.

22: The Positive Side of Making Mistakes

Reading: Gigerenzer, “I Think, Therefore I Err” (re-read).

Walton, Douglas “Why Fallacies Appear Better than They Are.”

29:

Reading: Rescher on Error: *Error: (On Our Predicament When Things Go Wrong)*

Chs. 5,6,8

Mercier, Hugo & Dan Sperber, “Why Do Humans Reason? Arguments for and Argumentative Theory” (forthcoming) *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

[Course Evaluations]

December:

6: Collecting Our Terms

Reading:

Select Bibliography

- Cassin, Barbara (2000) "Who's Afraid of the Sophists? Against Ethical Correctness," *Hypatia* 15 (4):102-120.
- Cassin, Barbara (2009) "Sophistics, Rhetoric, and Performance: How to Really Do Things With Words," Andrew Goffey (Trans.) *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 42 (4):349-372.
- Fogelin, Robert J & Timothy J. Duggan (1987) "Fallacies" *Argumentation* 1:255-62
- Freeman, Kathleen (1948) *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gigerenzer, Gerd (2010) *Rationality for Mortals: How People Cope with Uncertainty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gigerenzer, Gerd (2007) *Gut Feelings: The Intelligence of the Unconscious*. Viking.
- Hamblin, (1970) *Fallacies*. Newport News, VA: Vale Press.
- Gigerenzer, Gerd & Peter Todd (2000) "Précis of Simple Heuristics that Make Us Smart," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 23:727-780.
- Govier, Trudy (1983) "Who Says There are No Fallacies?" *Informal Logic* 5:2-10
- Kerferd, G.B. (1981) *The Sophistic Movement*. Cambridge.
- Lebacqz, Joseph (1925) "What is Error?" *Heythrop Journal* 6:171-88.
- Mercier, Hugo & Dan Sperber, (forthcoming) "Why Do Humans Reason? Arguments for and Argumentative Theory" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.
- Pinto, R & H. Hansen (1995) *Fallacies*. Penn State.
- Rescher, Nicholas (2007) *Error (On Our Predicament when Things go Wrong)*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Sprague, Rosamund Kent (1972) Editor: *The Older Sophists*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Stewart, M.A. and Rosamund Kent Sprague (1977) "Plato's Sophistry," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, Vol. 51:21-61.
- Walton, D. (1995) *A Pragmatic Theory of Fallacy*. Alabama.
- Walton, D. (2010) "Why Fallacies Appear Better than They Are," *Informal Logic* 30:159-84.
- Walton, D. (Forthcoming) "Defeasible Reasoning and Informal Fallacies," *Syntheses*.
- Whitmarsh, Tim (2005) *The Second Sophistic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woods, John (1988) "Buttercups, GNP's and Quarks: Are Fallacies Theoretical Entities?" *Informal Logic* 10:67-76.