

24.260, Topics in Philosophy: Human Reasoning

Fall 2025

Lecture: T/Th 2:30–4

Classroom: 35-308

Course website: https://www.kevindorst.com/fa25_HR

Professor: Kevin Dorst

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Office: 32-D938

Office Hours: Th 4–5

Class Description: This is a course for majors and minors in Philosophy. The goal is to study a topic in greater depth and detail than a normal undergraduate course allows.

The topic will be the rationality of human reasoning. Some bits of cognitive science suggest we're shockingly foolish; others suggest we're amazingly smart. What should we make of this discrepancy? To think clearly about it, we'll need to think hard about how rational people would form beliefs and make decisions—and compare that to how real people do so. We'll read work from philosophy and psychology to try to figure it out.

Readings: All readings will be provided on the website: https://www.kevindorst.com/fa25_HR

Requirements:

- Attend and participate in every class.
- Read the assigned reading for each class.
- Write two short (1500-word) and one long (3000-word) paper.
- Present on your ideas for each of your papers, in class.

Grading:

Class participation and presentations: 25%

Short papers: 20% + 20% = 40%

Long paper: 35%

Course Policies:

Announcements. I'll use email (not canvas) for announcements.

Late work. Late work will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late (a B+ becomes a B, etc.).

Screens policy. No laptops during class; tablets only if face-up on the table for notetaking.

AI policies. You're free to use AI in the development of your ideas, but **you must write your paper yourself. Using AI to write (parts of) your paper will count as plagiarism.**

- *Why?* To force you practice formulating and expressing your own ideas.
- *How?* **You must write your entire paper in Google Docs.** (Brainstorm/outline wherever you like.) When you submit it, you must **(1) share a Google Doc link and (2) give me editing privileges.** I'll use the "Draftback" Chrome plugin to verify that the paper was written the way a human would write.

Writing Help. Clear and concise writing is an important component of this class. The MIT Writing and Communication Center (WCC) offers free tutoring. Appointment scheduler: <https://mit.mywconline.com>. WCC hours are Monday-Friday, 9am–6pm, and fill up fast.

Academic Integrity. Any writing submitted for a grade must be your own; quotations or ideas paraphrased from other sources should be clearly cited in a way that allows us to find the source. You are responsible for knowing what counts as plagiarism. Reach out if you have questions. Asking beforehand is never an issue. See

<https://integrity.mit.edu/sites/default/files/images/AcademicIntegrityHandbook2020-color.pdf>.

Disability Accommodations. If there's anything we need to touch base about, let me know! MIT disability and accommodations services: <https://studentlife.mit.edu/das>.

Schedule

1. (Sep 4) Two faces of human cognition, Dorst_RP extract. *Optional: [Simulating The Worm](#)*
2. (Sep 9) The conjunction fallacy, Tversky and Kahneman 1983
3. (Sep 11) The conjunction fallacy, Dorst and Mandelkern 2022 (skip sections 3.3, 4.1, and 4.2)
4. (Sep 16) The sunk cost fallacy, Hastie and Dawes 2010
5. (Sep 18) The sunk cost fallacy, Kelly 2004
6. (Sep 23) Overconfidence, Moore 2008
7. (Sep 25) Overconfidence, Moore 2015
8. (Sep 30) Overconfidence, Dorst_OC1 and Dorst_OC2
9. (Oct 2) Student presentations
10. (Oct 7) Student presentations
11. (Oct 9) The gambler's fallacy, Kahneman and Tversky 1972
Short paper 1 due at 11:59pm. Share Google Doc permissions.
12. (Oct 14) The gambler's fallacy, Dorst_GF, (sections 1–4)
13. (Oct 16) The gambler's fallacy, Dorst_GF (only section 5) and Xiang et al. 2025
14. (Oct 21) Hindsight bias, Hedden 2019
15. (Oct 23) Hindsight bias, Gerken 2024
16. (Oct 28) Hindsight bias, Dorst_HB (sections 7.1–7.5)
17. (Oct 30) Confirmation bias, Lord et al. 1979
18. (Nov 4) Student presentations
19. (Nov 6) Student presentations
(Nov 11) No class (student holiday)
Short paper 2 due at 11:59pm. Share Google Doc permissions.
20. (Nov 13) Confirmation bias, Kelly 2008
21. (Nov 18) Confirmation bias, McWilliams 2021
22. (Nov 20) Confirmation bias, Dorst_CB, (sections 8.1–8.4, up thru section 8.4.6)
(Nov 25) No class (Thanksgiving)
(Nov 27) No class (Thanksgiving)
23. (Dec 2) Confirmation bias, Dorst_CB (sections 8.5–8.7; skip section 8.5.2.1)
24. (Dec 4) Student presentations
25. (Dec 9) Student presentations
(Dec 10) No class. **Long Paper due at 11:59pm. Share Google Doc permissions.**