Project: Reasonable People

For this project, you'll write a 500-to-1000-word essay exploring what it means to be "reasonable" using a fictional character from a book, movie, or TV show.

Directions. Choose a fictional character from a TV show, movie, or book that you think is good at "reasoning" or "logic." (Basically, the character is good at making decisions and figuring stuff out!). Now do the following:

1. Briefly describe the show's plot and the problems the characters are trying to solve.
2. Describe the character you've chosen in more depth and explain why you think they are especially good at reasoning. What types of logic (from class notes) are most relevant to the character's goals?
3. Give at least TWO examples of arguments from the show. (Note: These don't necessarily need to be arguments that character talks about. An "argument" also might be a description of the way they reason in a particular case). For each argument, do the following:
   a. Put it in standard form (see class notes – you'll need to put each statement on a separate line, with the conclusion at the bottom).
   b. Explain whether the argument is deductive or inductive, and say how you determined this.
   c. Explain whether the argument is valid (if deductive) or strong (if inductive), and say how you determined this.
4. On a more personal level, what aspects of the character's reasoning ability do you most admire? How might you get better at doing this sort of thing?

Example characters might include medical doctors, detectives, scientists, superheroes, teachers, students, Disney princesses, intelligent robots, or whatever. Use your imagination!

Project Requirements

1. The project should be between **500** and **1000 words.** I won't penalize you for going over, though please make an effort to be concise as possible, given the material. Make things "as simple as possible, but no simpler."
   a. A-level essays are often (though not always!) closer to 1,000 words than 500.
2. Material I've provided you with in our "textbook" (which contains both my lecture notes and other readings) can be cited informally by identifying the chapter, page, and author (if needed). If you choose to use outside resources, please use a standard citation style (such as APA, MLA, or Chicago), and provide a full citation. As a rule, **no more than 15%** of your paper should be quotes.
3. Please don't use the words or ideas of others without proper attribution. Please see the syllabus for details on plagiarism and academic integrity poli**cy.** I regularly use www.turnitin.com to check for plagiarism or related issues.
4. Essays that reproduce the handouts will not receive good grades. Nor will essays that simply "give your thoughts" on an issue (without demonstrating knowledge of the class material, and the ability to apply it to novel cases). Since the project is meant to help you understand the class material, you should try to use your own words and examples to explain what you've learned.
5. Please submit your essays as MS Word files. I will grade them on a **first-submitted, first-graded** basis.

Grading Rubric

The project is worth FIVE points. Your grade will depend on how well you do each of the following:

1. How well are you able to **explain** and **apply** the relevant course material? By the end of the essay, the reader should come away with a clear idea of what you've learned in the class, and how it applies to whatever problem/issue you are writing about.
2. To what extent does your essay offer a coherent and creative response to the problem/question? In an argumentative essay, for example, you should make an (evidence-based) **argument** for a **thesis and b**e sure to consider any potential objections fully**.**

Factors such as your paper's **structure** (e.g., intro/body paragraphs/conclusion) and **language** (e.g., grammar, style) are important to the extent they influence the above. The grading criteria are as follows:

Grade	Description
0	No answer was submitted or evidence of plagiarism.
3 or below (D or F)	Fails to meet minimal requirements regarding content (e.g., addresses a related question) or word count. Essays that simply report what you "believe" or "feel" without providing an *argument* may receive grades in this range.
C (3.5 points)	It meets minimal requirements regarding both content (it offers an answer to the assigned question and attempts to defend this answer) and word count. However, there may be some significant errors or omissions when explaining relevant class material or providing a detailed, complete response to the question.
B (4 points)	Fully meets content and word count requirements and provides satisfactory explanations of most major arguments and concepts from class. There are no significant errors in argumentation or explanatory gaps. However, explanations/examples/arguments may, at points suffer from a lack of clarity or completeness compared to A essays.
A (5 points)	Meets and exceeds minimum requirements. The essay's treatment of course material shows a complete mastery of the relevant content and provides a creative, well-thought-out response.

I will grade essays in the order they are submitted (first-come, first-serve).

Tips on Writing Philosophy

Philosophy essays can be a bit different from other sorts of writing. However, past students have told me they're not that bad once you start writing them! Here are some general tips:

1. You should have an **introduction** that concisely introduces the topic and a **thesis sentence** that clearly states your position. Philosophy papers often begin with theses of the form "I will argue X because of Y."
2. When discussing challenging ethical or philosophical issues, **avoid phrases like "I feel," "I think," or "I believe."** Part of taking these issues seriously involves granting that one's actions and beliefs have consequences for other people and that (for this reason) they need to be defended with the sorts of *arguments* and *reasons* that these other people could accept. For this reason, appeals to your *own* emotions, religious beliefs, etc., are generally (though not always) inappropriate.

3. Pretend you are writing to **an intelligent and interested (but relatively ignorant) 12-year-old** who doesn't know anything about the subject (rather than your philosophy professor). This means you'll need to write clearly, explain new concepts, and offer interesting, memorable examples. A significant portion of your grade will be based on your ability to explain the arguments/concepts we've been studying using your own words and examples.
4. Your essay should have multiple paragraphs, each with a clear **topic sentence** that relates back to your thesis. When writing philosophy, it's easy to get "off topic." So, always ask yourself: is this paragraph helping me provide evidence for my thesis? If the answer is "no," it should be cut or revised.
5. You should always consider possible **objections** to your thesis. Ask yourself: "How would a smart, well-educated opponent respond to my argument?" In some cases, this might be a real author who you can cite; in other cases, you'll have to play your own "devil's advocate."
6. The conclusion should help the reader appreciate how your argument fits into the "big picture." For example, what exactly do you take yourself to have shown? How does this relate to similar cases? What might the "next step" of this argument be if you had more time and space?