

Logic and Critical Thinking
Phil 1500
Spring 2008
Syllabus

Daniel Bloom (Instructor)
Office: Peabody Hall #24
Hours: Mon. 10:15-11:15
Wed. 2:10-3:10
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Description and Objective: The question we will be focusing on this semester is what it means to think well. What is the proper method for determining the truth or falsity of a position or claim? How do I know which accounts to accept? These are all questions about what it means to use logic and engage in critical thought well.

There is a kind of paradox to taking (and teaching) a course on critical thinking. In order to meaningfully examine critical thought one must necessarily think critically. Or in other words the topic being examined must be assumed in order to engage in the examination. How can I critically examine an account without assuming a knowledge of critical examination, and if I have already assumed a knowledge of critical thought then why do I need to examine it?

One method that is used to try to avoid the above mentioned paradox is one which takes the texts as they are presented to us. We will try, to the extent to which we are able, to adopt each philosopher's method of inquiry. Or in other words we are seeking to know how to think like the different philosophers. Instead of judging the different accounts with reference to some external, assumed, standard we will instead be judging the different positions with respect to their internal consistency. Does this philosopher's account contradict itself? Do all the parts of his theory fit together properly? Judging the accounts in this way allows us to think critically about the text without assuming the knowledge we are looking for.

But does the above method really get us out of the original problem? Don't we have to assume some method of determining consistency? Doesn't the above method assume that the contradictions indicate a problem with accounts, and hence a flaw in one's thinking? The answer to this appears to be yes. Fortunately for us all of the philosophers we will be reading do share something in common, in spite of all their differences. All the philosophers appeal to logical arguments to justify their positions, and in doing so appeal to what they consider to be universal, logical standards of reasoning. As a result the primary focus of this course will be on recognizing and understanding arguments, and then seeing how these arguments can be used to create whole, coherent accounts.

Recognizing and understanding arguments is a skill, and like any other skill it takes time and practice to become proficient in it. You should not expect these texts, and the arguments and positions they contain, to be obvious to you. Further you should not expect them to become clear without considerable effort on your part. In other words, it is going to take a lot of work to do well in this course. With this effort, however, you should begin to see improvement in your ability to work with arguments, an ability whose helpfulness transfers far beyond the classroom.

Readings: Plato, *Protagoras*. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*. Henri Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Auguste Comte, *Introduction to Positive Philosophy*. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*.

Study: You are expected to come to lectures having already read the assigned readings for that day. Reading a philosophical text is not like reading other texts. There is no way to read a work of philosophy passively. You should be raising questions and problems as you read, and continually trying to answer these questions and objections with, and for, the text. This (i.e. reading critically) is one of the most important skills that one can develop in any introductory philosophy course. You cannot develop this skill if you are not doing the readings before class. You will need to read these assignments more than once. One good approach is to read the assigned readings *at least twice* before class (once quickly, and then again slowly), and again after the discussion in lecture. It is not enough to know *what* the author says you must know *why* he says it.

Grading:	Quizzes (3-4)	5% (total)
	First Paper (3-4 pages)	20%
	Mid-term	20%
	Second Paper (3-4 pages)	25%
	Final Exam (cumulative)	30%

The paper topics will be assigned and discussed further at a later date.

Attendance: Attendance is a requirement of this course. If you are absent for more than four classes your grade may be lowered.

Readings and Assignments: The readings should be completed before class on the day listed. You do not need to read any introductions or prefaces written by editors or translators, but you do need to read any written by the philosophers themselves. **This schedule is flexible and subject to change.**

January	7	Introduction		
	9	Arguments		
	11	Arguments		
	14	Plato	309a – 320b	Quiz #1
	16	Plato	320b – 334c	
	18	Plato	334c – 347c	
	23	Plato	347c – 362a	
	25	Plato	Complete the Protagoras	
	28	Descartes	pp, 1-10	
	30	Descartes	pp. 11-17	Quiz #2
February	1	Descartes	pp. 17-24	
	4	Descartes	pp. 24-35	
	6	Descartes	pp. 35-42	Paper #1 Due
	8	Descartes	pp. 42-52	
	11	Descartes	Complete Descartes	

	13	Berkeley	pp. 3 - 23	
	15	Berkeley	pp. 23 - 42	
	18	Berkeley	pp. 43 - 60	
	20	Berkeley	pp. 61 - 75	
	22	Berkeley	pp. 75 - 87	
	25	Berkeley	Complete Berkeley	
	27			Midterm Exam
March	29	Kant	pp. 1 - 8	
	3	Kant	pp. 9 - 22	
	5	Kant	pp. 22 - 35	
	7	Kant	pp. 35 - 45	
	9-16	Spring Break		
	17	Kant	pp. 45 - 55	
	19	Kant	pp. 55 - 64	Quiz #3
	21	Kant	pp. 64 - 84	
	24	Kant	pp. 84 - 98	
	26	Kant	Complete Kant	
	28	Bergson	pp. 21 - 37	
April	31	Bergson	pp. 37 - 49	
	2	Bergson	pp. 49 - 62	
	4	Comte	pp. 1 - 14	
	7	Comte	pp. 14 - 33	
	9	Comte	pp. 35 - 45	
	11	Comte	pp. 46 - 61	
	14	Comte	Complete Comte	2nd Paper Due
	16	Nietzsche	pp. 1 - 24	
	18	Nietzsche	pp. 24 - 48	
	21	Nietzsche	pp. 47 - 66	
23	Nietzsche	pp. 66 - 92		
25	Nietzsche	pp. 92 - 118		
28	Review and Conclusion			