

PHIL 1290 – Critical Thinking

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Time: MWF 12:30-1:20

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

We are all thinkers. Sometimes we think well, sometimes we think poorly. Unfortunately, we are not always that great at identifying whether a particular line of thought is a good one. In this course, we will take this as our key problem: how do we identify whether a line of thought is a good line of thought or a bad one? In order to solve this problem, we will discuss the process of *argument evaluation*. We will come up with techniques for taking a paragraph of text, or a bit of speech, and reconstructing it into a valid argument. We will then look at strategies for assessing whether our reconstructed arguments are strong or weak. To conclude, we will look at some common types of arguments: statistical arguments, arguments from testimony, and moral arguments, in order to get a better feel for how to evaluate arguments of each type.

Course Materials

Feldman, Richard. 1999. *Reason and Argument*, 2nd Ed. Prentice Hall.

Course Evaluation

<i>Item</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Due</i>
Logic Assignment	20%	March 1
Argument Reconstruction	30%	March 22
Short Paper	50%	April 16

The Logic Assignment will be a short test of your understanding of the basic concepts and tools of the class. It will focus on the notions of deductive validity and strength.

The argument reconstruction is a short essay (500-1000 words), where you take a passage (which will be provided to you), reconstruct it into standard form, and briefly discuss which premise of the argument you think might be challenged. The goal of this assignment is to prepare you for the short paper. These papers will be evaluated on the clarity and accuracy of the reconstruction.

The short paper is a slightly longer paper (1000-2000 words), where you take a passage (which will be provided to you), reconstruct it into standard form, identify a premise to challenge, construct an argument in standard form whose conclusion is the denial of the identified premise, defend each premise in your argument, and consider an objection to your own argument.

Late Assignments and Rescheduled Tests

You will be deducted a half a letter grade per day that your reconstruction or final paper are late. If you have a reason why your assignment must be late, please talk to me about it at least 24 hours prior to the due date of the assignment (the earlier the better). If your assignment is late because of illness, I expect a doctor's note. If your assignment is late for reasons related to accessibility issues, then you may get in touch either with me or with Accessibility Services, whichever you are more comfortable with.

Tests will not be rescheduled, unless there is a valid reason to do so. If there is such a reason, please get in touch with me (or Accessibility Services, if necessary) as soon as possible, so that we can assist you as quickly as possible.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious offence. At minimum, it may result in a 0% grade in the assignment in question. Students should familiarize themselves with the regulations regarding cheating plagiarism in the U of M Calendar.

Accessibility Services

Over and above the issues related to assignments or tests, you may require the assistance of Accessibility Services for other course-related reasons. Please get in touch with them as soon as possible so that we can ensure that you make the best out of your learning experience.

Wheaton's Law

Don't be a jerk. A large part of a philosophy class involves arguing with people who disagree with you. The fact that this is an important part of our activity does not warrant anyone in engaging in any of the following behaviours: speaking out of turn, cutting people off in conversation, dominating discussion, talking down to or making fun of someone, or any other jerky behaviour. Other ways of being disrespectful and distracting to the class include: showing up late, having your cellphone go off loudly in class, and other disruptive behaviour.

Email and Office Hours

My office hours are by appointment, but I am often at my office for a few hours before class, so feel welcome to just drop in. I check my email once or twice a day, so if I haven't responded within 24 hours, please feel free to email me again: this will not bother me, you have a right to having your emails responded to. Email is not the place for deep philosophical discussion, however, so I will not answer substantive philosophical questions via email.

