

Portland State University

PHL 303U Critical Thinking

As we know, there are known knowns.
There are things we know we know.
We also know there are known unknowns.
That is to say we know there are some things we do not know.
But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know.
Donald Rumsfeld, Feb. 12, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing

I am one of those who are very willing to be refuted if I say anything which is not true, and very willing to refute anyone else who says what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute--for I hold that this is the greater gain of the two...
Socrates in the Gorgias

Course Syllabus

Course Title:	PHL 303U – Critical Thinking (CRN 42797)
Required Text:	Baloney Detection Kit, Michael Shermer and Pat Linse Available in the PSU bookstore, or through: http://www.skeptic.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=SS&Product_Code=b075PB&Category_Code= Cost \$5.00
Other:	A portable 2-gig thumb drive Cost \$15
Professor's Name:	Dr. Peter Boghossian (Please call me "Pete")
Location:	BA 190
Days/Times:	T, R
Email address:	
Office hours:	M, W 9:00-10:00 NH 451V (And by appointment)

Professor's Bio

Peter's primary research areas revolve around critical thinking and moral reasoning. His doctoral research studies, funded by the State of Oregon and supported by the Oregon Department of Corrections, consisted of using the Socratic method to help prison inmates to increase their critical thinking and moral reasoning abilities and to increase their desistance to criminal behavior. Peter's peer-reviewed publications can be found in *Diálogos*, *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *The Clearing House: Educational Research Controversy and Practices*, *The Radical Academy*, *Offender Programs Report*, *Teaching Philosophy*, *Corrections Today*, *Informal Logic*, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, and the *Journal of Correctional Education*.

Peter was a councilman for the State of Oregon (LSTA), an advisor to *Sockeye Magazine* and *The Weekly Alibi*, wrote national philosophy curricula for the University of Phoenix and was a research fellow for the National Center for Teaching and Learning. Currently, he is the Chairman of the Prison Advisory Committee for Columbia River Correctional Institution, teaches philosophy, critical thinking and ethics at Portland State University, serves on the board of directors of various non-profits and has a philosophical counseling practice.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class is designed to improve reasoning and critical thinking skills. The focus is on practical/applied methods of reasoning. Students will learn to use tools to think clearly and critically about a wide range of questions and issues.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Improve your critical thinking skills.
- Develop a healthy skepticism.
- Formulate beliefs on the basis of reason and evidence.

Point Values for Course Assignments

<i>ASSIGNMENT</i>	<i>DATE</i>	<i>POINTS</i>
Class Participation	All	25
Midterm Exam	April 28	37.5
Final Exam	June 8 10:15-12:05	37.5
Total		100

This section has a Teaching Assistant (TA): Rachel Parker will be grading your exams and recording attendance. If you have questions about your grades please talk to/email her. TA Office Hours: M, 10:15-11:20, NH 451V. If you have questions about the class content please speak to the professor.

Dates

Week 1 March 28
Week 2 April 4
Week 3 April 11
Week 4 April 18
Week 5 April 25
Week 6 May 2
Week 7 May 9
Week 8 May 16
Week 9 May 23
Week 10 May 30

Policies and Procedures

- Please try your best not to be late.
- Ask if you have a question. It is my pleasure to help you.
- If you have a disability inform me *before* the assignment is due. If tests need to be given in PSU's testing center then please let me know ASAP.
- I only accept five students over the class cap.
- Silence your cell phone.
- *Please do not text during class.* If there's an emergency, please step out of class and handle it there.
- *You are responsible for signing the attendance sheet. If you do not sign the attendance sheet you will not get credit for attendance.*
- I am teaching three classes this term. *Please take only one of my classes per term.*

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is highly valued at Portland State University. The consequences of academic dishonesty can include removal from the University.

Controversial Issues

I hope to challenge you, and to help you question "givens," but I do so in good faith and in the spirit of academic and intellectual integrity and honesty. We will be discussing and analyzing controversial issues (e.g., faith and God). We may also take aim at traditional, established orthodoxies, like diversity, multiculturalism, intelligent design and sustainability. If you are easily offended then this is not the class for you--please drop this class and sign up for another section.

Optional Presentations (extra credit)

- During the last week of class we will have optional presentations.
- In your presentation you will deconstruct a pseudoscientific belief.
- You must apply the tools that you have been learning in class to a concrete instance of pseudoscience.
 - Psychics, speaking with the dead (mediums), ESP, clairvoyance/clairaudience, spoon bending (esp. Uri Geller), psychic surgery, dowsing, extraterrestrial visitations/abductions, astrology, creationism/intelligent design, prophecy, faith healing, etc.
 - You may choose from the list above, or you may pick another pseudoscientific topic.
- *The thesis for your presentation must be pre-approved.*
 - The thesis is one sentence and should take the form, "The purpose of this presentation is _____".
- You must use *at least three sources from the "Suggested Readings" section of the text.*
 - James Randi's "Flim-Flam! Psychics, ESP, Unicorns, and other Delusions" and "The Faith Healers" are both highly recommended.
- Be prepared to field questions and to defend your claims.
- You will present for five minutes and then field questions for five minutes.
- You are welcomed to do a team presentation.
- Please have a "Citations" page ready for review.
- Signups are "first-come, first-served".
- Depending upon how much time we have, we may only accommodate 14 presentations.

TOPICS AND DATES

WEEK 1

Introduction

Syllabus review

The American Philosophical Association's Delphi Report

Critical Thinking

ASSIGNMENT:

- Read Boghossian's *How to Make an Argument*.
- Read Facione's "Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts" <http://tinyurl.com/y8oxn3y>
- Separate the last page of the syllabus. Keep it by your bed. Before you go to bed, review it. Ask yourself if that does or does not describe how you engaged the world in your day. Be specific. Ask yourself how you can make improvements and how you can come closer to the critical thinking ideal.
- Buy and bring in a 2-gig thumb drive to the second and third classes.
- Please bring in a laptop to our second class (if you have one).
- Buy the book.
- Read the syllabus very carefully.

WEEK 2

How to Make an Argument

- Premises and conclusions
- Validity, soundness
- Induction, deduction

Reasons, Belief and Evidence (time permitting)

Dunning-Kruger Effect

Shermer's baloney detection talk

ASSIGNMENT:

Read and finish the text.

Read "How to make an argument" on the thumb drive

WEEK 3

Logical fallacies and their application

Applied critical thinking

Doxastic volunteerism and doxastic closure

ASSIGNMENT:

- Type up and bring in at least two fallacies to class. These should be fallacies that you encounter in your life. Please don't google "fallacies" and just write down what you find. Apply your critical thinking skills!! (Not graded, not collected but extensively reviewed).
- Review the fallacy section of the text.
- Review the MLoLogicalFallacies.doc on your thumb drive

WEEK 4

Fallacies continued

The biological basis of belief

Pinker, "The Moral Instinct,"

- TED talk (time permitting)

Shermer, "Why People Believe Weird Things" (TED talk)

(Time Permitting: Jim Fallon on murderers, Wade Davis on "The Worldwide Web of Belief and Ritual")

ASSIGNMENT:

- Read Pinker's *The Moral Instinct* (Also on your thumbdrive).
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/magazine/13Psychology-t.html>
- Type up and bring in at least two fallacies to class. (Not graded, not collected but extensively reviewed).
- Listen to the following podcasts: <http://tinyurl.com/ybush8t> and <http://tinyurl.com/ye4y6ao>

WEEK 5

A look at the latest critical thinking research

- Michael Merzenich

Midterm review

Midterm practice

MIDTERM

ASSIGNMENT:

- Type up and bring in at least two fallacies to the first class of the week. (Not graded, not collected but extensively reviewed).
- Type up and bring in any questions you have about the midterm. The more specific the question the better.

WEEK 6

"Diminish Your Ability to Think Critically!"

Don't believe your eyes

Captain Disillusion (multiple videos)

(Time Permitting: Beau Lotto's TED talk)

ASSIGNMENT:

- Begin the readings about God. Do not be deceived by their length. They are complicated, so please start early.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-arguments/> (focus on Anselm)
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/#God> (Aquinas on God)
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/immutability/> (Aristotle on God)
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager/> (Pascal's Wager)

WEEK 7

Derren Brown (multiple videos)

Subliminal Advertising and critical thinking

The Persuaders and/or Merchants of Cool

Martial Arts (guest lecture, date subject to change)

ASSIGNMENT:

- Continue the readings (about God). Hint: There will be *at least* one test question about the readings (Anselm, Aquinas, Aristotle, Pascal).
 - Bring in any questions, comments, criticisms you have.
- Watch all martial arts videos on your thumb drive.

WEEK 8

God, faith, religion and critical thinking

- Against: Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins
- For: Anselm, Aquinas, Aristotle, Pascal

Scientology and Steven Fishman <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6812164614976718979#>

Diane Benscoter TED Talk

- Cults

Faith Healing

ASSIGNMENT:

- Finish the readings about God.
- Watch the three Sam Harris videos lectures on your thumb drive.
- Watch the Daniel Dennett video lecture on your thumb drive.

WEEK 9

God continued

Daniel Dennett

- consciousness
- “belief in belief”

(Time Permitting: Michael Specter’s TED talk)

ASSIGNMENT:

- Review the last page of the syllabus yet again. Note any changes from when you first began this course. Be prepared to discuss with your team.
- Optional presentation preparation.
- Suggested, not required, Dan Daniel Dennett’s article “Preachers who are not believers”.

WEEK 10

Revisiting the American Philosophical Association’s critical thinking statement

Test Review

Your superstitions!

Optional Student Presentations

ASSIGNMENT:

- Study for the final.
- Bring in any questions you may have about the final.

American Philosophical Association's definition of critical thinking and the ideal critical thinker:

We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based. CT is essential as a tool of inquiry. As such, CT is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one's personal and civic life. While not synonymous with good thinking, CT is a pervasive and self-rectifying human phenomenon.

The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focuses in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. Thus, educating good critical thinkers means working toward this ideal. It combines developing CT skills with nurturing those dispositions which consistently yield useful insights and which are the basis of a rational and democratic society.

Six core elements:

1. Interpretation: comprehend and express meaning or significance
2. Analysis: identify the intended and actual inferential relationships
3. Evaluation: assess logical strength
4. Inference: draw reasonable conclusions
5. Explanation: state the results and justify one's reasoning
6. Self-regulation: monitor one's cognitive activities