

CRITICAL THINKING (PHIL 1500H)

Fall Term, 2009

Call Number: 56284

Time: TR (3rd) 1100-12:15

Peabody Hall: Room 219

Text: **LOGIC AND RATIONAL THOUGHT**

Frank R. Harrison, III

Professor: Frank R. Harrison, III

Office: 102, Peabody Hall

Office telephone: 542-2823

Home telephone: 543-6014

E-mail: harrison@uga.edu

Office hours: 2:00 - 4:00 Wednesday

or by appointment

**The unrefined and sluggish mind
of Homo javanensis
Could only treat of things concrete
And present to the senses.**

--- Willard Van Orman Quine ---
philosopher/logician

GOING TO MY WEB PAGE

It will be *important* for you to check in on my Web Page from time-to-time. After you are at my Web Page, I suggest that you book mark it. That will make life easier for you as you have to reenter this page. To go to my web page follow these steps.

- (1) Go to <Department of Philosophy Home Page>;*
- (2) on the left side of the screen click on <PEOPLE>;*
- (3) in the middle of the screen click <FACULTY>;*
- (4) scroll down to <Frank R. Harrison, III> and click on name;*
- (5) click on <Dr. Harrison's Web Page>;*
- (6) scroll to your appropriate class to read information and print off what you need.*

GENERAL COMMENTS

In the following I describe the nature of this course and what is required by it. I consider this syllabus a contractual agreement between you and me. From this syllabus you can ascertain at least the framework of what I expect of you and what you can expect from this course.

This syllabus is the general guideline for the progression of this course. There may be times when “adjustments” will need to be made. These will be announced in class. It is the responsibility of the student to know of any announcements made in class even if that student is absent on the day of the announcements.

PHIL 1500H is a class devoted to the study of arguments and what can go wrong in them. The following considerations are required for success in this class --

- 1) Devoting, on average, to this class at least two hours of good study time a day (even holidays), seven days a week over the entire Term (this will become more mandatory when we move into proofs);
- 2) attending and participating regularly in, all classes;
- 3) paying close attention to correct English usage;
- 4) treating mathematics like a game similar to backgammon, chess, or checkers; and
- 5) relaxing while learning this game.

If you do not follow these “requirements for success,” this class may become difficult to pass! It will certainly become less than enjoyable and profitable for you.

You must complete a Student Data Sheet which is found on my Web Page. On this sheet indicate the name you wish to be called in class. Also indicate if you do not want either your local address or your local telephone number to be included in a class directory to be passed out to all members of the class. **You will be required to give me a recent photo of yourself to attach to your data sheet.** (Photos can be obtained at Kinko's if you do not have a recent one.) The Data Sheet is not considered complete without this photo.

Not to submit this assignment as specified is reason for withdrawal from this class.

In the autobiographical sketch I invite you to introduce yourself, **as a person**, to me. You **may** wish to address such questions as "Why am I in an institution of higher learning, and especially the University of Georgia?", "What is required to be successful at the University?", "What do I think relevant to my life in general, and to my university education in particular?", "What are my major likes and dislikes in both 'things' and people?", "What specific goals do I wish to reach in my next seven years? Why do I wish to reach these goals and not some others?", "Do I consider myself a moral person and on what standards

of morality?", "Do I hold anything so important that I would be willing to die for it? Why is this so important to me, or why is there not something so important for me?" "Why am I in this class and what do I hope to achieve from it?" These questions are only illustrative of the types of topics you might consider. **Go your own path.**

Remember, I **must** have a good recent photo of you included with this autobiographical sketch. I consider this a necessary condition for you to remain in this class.

While I have noted that my regular office hours are on Wednesdays from 2:00-4:00, please drop by to see me whenever you wish. Indeed, days other than Wednesday are often better as I also advise undergraduates on Wednesday afternoon. Just send me an e-mail at <harrison@uga.edu> in order to check if I am in the office at a particular time. Or catch me before or after class. Other than when I am teaching, I am "up for" lunch, dinner, a movie – or most other "social events" – if anyone wants to do something with me. Just let me know before hand. And certainly if you have any problems other than associated with this class, and would like to discuss them with me, I am here for you.

Please ask questions in class! If I believe an answer to your question will take too long or is of secondary importance to what is being discussed at that moment, I shall talk with you after class. If I cannot answer your question clearly enough for you, I shall have someone else try. In a math class it is vital that you do not become, and stay, confused even by what may seem the smallest of points! If you have difficulty with something in the book -- either a passage in the text or an exercise -- ask about it in class. Even so, class questioning is not a substitute for rigorous, and constant, preparation. Furthermore, be certain that you have marked the passage or exercise clearly **so that you never have to thumb through the book to find what you want**. Such fumbling to find what you want only wastes everyone's time.

I shall often ask questions of the class and I expect you to give quick and firm answers. I do not expect you simply to sit with a blank look on your face. I become VERY annoyed at such behavior. Remember, you are responsible for studying the assigned material before coming to class. You will not get very far merely relying on "lectures" and what notes you can take in class! **YOU** are responsible for your own education -- not the professor nor, for that matter, anyone else!

NEVER get behind in your work!! The material builds on itself making it **extremely difficult**, if not impossible, to catch up! I have found in teaching this class over many years that a great cause -- although not the only one -- of poor work, and eventual withdrawal or failure, is lack of personal discipline and responsibility, coupled with little regard for time management.

I am going to be working with you, and you with me, in learning to think critically. In doing this you are also going to helping me as I write a new text in critical thinking. While the current textbook will be used, there will also be new chapters for you to take from my website. To learn the material in these chapters I am going to require of you that you go to

various newspapers, books (except in logic and critical thinking), magazines, and the like to find examples of what we are discussing in class. None of these examples are to be over 250 words. Each example will be put into the proper form for critical analysis that we are discussing at the time. All of this will become clearer as we proceed in the class. Your grade will be determined by the quality of the examples you submit and by the way you present your analysis of each example. I shall also very much appreciate you pointing out to me any sort of mistakes (spelling, grammar, etc.) that you find. Also any suggestions you have to improve the new text, do, please, let me know. ☺

There will be four such submissions. Each will consist of ten examples.

As the class proceeds you will be required to bring examples to class to present there for discussion. You may then type these reviewed examples up for submission.

By collecting, working through, and polishing examples for submission to me, you will be both learning the material AND internalizing it.

Class participation is important. Not to come prepared with examples to discuss will guarantee you a low grade, if not failure in this class. Furthermore, class participation gives you a chance for others in the class to help you with your work.

Final grades are **NOT** posted, nor given out by the professor in any other form except through the Office of the Registrar.

Makeup tests are given only under the **most pressing reasons** such as serious illness or death in your immediate family. First cousins are not considered "immediate family." Weddings, sport events, field trips in other classes, over sleeping, conflicts with other classes, etc. do not count as reasonable excuses for missing a test.

An unexcused missed assignment is an automatic **ZERO**.

If, for some reason (e.g., ADHD, hypomania, etc.) you require special, please see me as soon as possible.

It is the prerogative of the professor to assign a **WF**, any time during the term, to a student for poor attendance (three or more absences). Note that I do not automatically drop anyone after four absences. On the other hand, if you stop coming to class but do not officially withdraw from the class, your final grade will be a **WF**. Or if you do not take the final test, no matter what your current average is, and do not have the approval of the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs to have missed that final, your final grade for the course will be a **WF**.

Is ("Incomplete") are seldom given in this class, and only under the guidelines set out by the University. An **I** must be requested in a formal, typed written letter to the professor. In

this letter the student requesting an **I** must establish that (s)he has a passing grade at the time of the request and that the reasons for requesting an **I** are absolutely nonacademic. Evidence supporting this claim must accompany the request letter. The final decision to give an **I** is left to the professor of the class. Any **I** must be completed within nine months after it is given. If not, that **I** automatically turns into an **F**. The details of how the **I** is to be completed will be written by the professor and then signed and dated by both the student requesting the **I** and the professor.

Speaking of grades, a recent letter from the Honors Program stated:

In an effort to battle one of the enduring “urban legends” at UGA, I encourage you to stress to Honors students that it is possible to earn less than an “A” or “B” in an Honors course. Many students currently believe that they cannot earn below a “B” unless their instructor submits a petition to the Director of the Honors Program, and I would appreciate any assistance to dispel this myth. Since Honors courses should require more depth in the students’ assignments, additional efforts are required to earn the higher grades that Honors students are accustomed to receiving in regular courses.

I can assure you that in my Honors courses over the years every grade has been earned, “**A**” to “**F**,” by some students or another. The student, in fact, earns his or her grade. I simply record that grade.

Remember, assignments should **always** be read through **before** the class in which the assigned readings are discussed. Then immediately after that class period you should carefully reread the material and work exercises. Whenever there is anything to memorize, such as definitions or rules, do **this as soon as possible**. If you do not follow this procedure of preparation and memorization, you will quickly become behind in your work, not understand what is being presented in class, and earn a low or failing grade. No student, including Honors students, has a “right” to a passing grade, much less a high grade.

At the end of this class you will complete a class evaluation. A copy of the evaluation form is found at the end of this syllabus. If, while the class progresses, you find **anything** which is not up to what you perceive as an “A” standard, please talk with me about it! This class contains difficult material to teach, and **you** could have some **excellent suggestions** on how to go about doing this -- suggestions which I have not considered. Further, some of my teaching techniques and/or personality idiosyncrasies may be counter-productive for you. We can also talk about these. Perhaps I can change, or perhaps you can come to see why I do what I do -- or a little of both. In any event, if you are dissatisfied with the way something in the class is moving, then, as a student, you have both the right and the obligation to see me about it **as soon as possible**. In particular, do not wait immediately before a test or the end of the class to see me. Then it is far too late!

A BIT ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF THE CLASS

I have already mentioned that this class is concerned with arguments and what can go wrong with them. In the class we shall understand an argument as a way of presenting evidence in the support of the truth of some claim, hypothesis, thesis that is being presented. Thus, we are not at all concerned with arguments in the sense of fights or disagreements, although arguments are sometimes useful to settle disagreements.

Arguments are usually presented in the form of declarative sentences some of which denote the evidence being presented in support of the truth of some claim or another. These sentences presenting the evidence are called the “**premises**” of an argument. Then there is a statement of the position purportedly being supported by the evidence. This is called the “**conclusion**” of an argument. Sometimes these sentences are written, or uttered, separately. A person might say, for instance, “Tomorrow is going to be clear and warm. I always skip classes when the weather is clear and warm. So, tomorrow I am going to skip classes.” Two claims are given in support of the third claim, “Tomorrow I am going to skip classes. Or, an argument may be expressed in a single compound sentence such as, “Since I frequently see John coming out of the museum, he must like paintings.” Here seeing John frequently coming out of the museum is offered as evidence that he must like paintings. In both of these examples some evidence is offered in the support of the truth of some other claim.

Broadly speaking there are three fundamental ways in which an argument can be faulty and, hence, unacceptable. **First**, the terms used to express the premises and the conclusion may be so confused and confusing because of vagueness, ambiguity, over complication, and the like that we simply cannot grasp what is being claimed. **Second**, even if the statement of the premises is clear, these premises might not be acceptable for various reasons. For instance, we would not accept a premise if we knew that it was a false claim. But, **third**, even if all of the premises are clear and acceptable, nonetheless they still might not support the conclusion in the way the argument suggests that they do. The relation holding between the premises and the conclusion might be faulty.

In this class we shall be examining each of the ways in which an argument can go wrong. We are going to begin, however, with considerations of the ways in which the evidence may be related to the conclusion and what might go wrong here. By beginning here some of the following work that we do will be easier to grasp. We shall next move to a study of why premises might not be acceptable as stating evidence in support of some conclusion. While the best situation of all is to know that all of the premises with which we begin are true, it is the case that we are often, for various reasons, not in a position to say whether a premise is actually true or not. I might not be an expert in international finance while listening to, or reading, an argument in that topic area. Even so, there are certain situations and considerations which, if holding, would lead me strongly to suppose that the evidence given in the premises was not rationally

acceptable or reasonable to suppose that it is true. Such considerations will lead us into the study of what is known as informal fallacies. We shall interweave with these various discussions examinations of the notion of definitions and their roles in critical thinking.

ASSIGNMENTS

There may well be some flexibility in the following. Changes, if any, will be announced in class. In any event, the following dates will give you a good indication of what to read and study to keep ahead in this class.

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|-----------------|--|
| 18 August | Getting Started; Complete "Student Data Sheet" and submit at the end of the class. Read Harrison text, Chapter 1; also read on line Chapter 1 |
| 20 August | Chapter 1, begin Chapter 2 on line. |
| 25 August | Turn in autobiographical sketch with recent photo; Chapter 2 on line |
| 27 August | Chapter 2 on line |
| 1 September | Chapter 2 on line and Chapter 2 in text |
| 3 September | Chapter 2 in text |
| 8, 10 September | Chapter 4 in text |
| 8 October | Midterm |
| 15 October | Chapter 4 in text |

15 September *FIRST SET OF EXERCISES DUE*

17, 22 September Chapter 8

22 October

This is the last day to withdraw from the course with a "W". After today I must assign a "WF" if you decide to withdraw.

24, 29 September Chapters 8 and Chapter 10 on line
13, 15, 20 October Chapter 10 on line

22 October *SECOND SET OF EXERCISES DUE*

22, 27, 29 October Chapter 11 on line
29 October
3 November Chapter 14 in text; Sections 9-12

3 November *THIRD SET OF EXERCISES DUE*

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|-------------------|---|
| 5,10 November | Chapter 14 in text; Sections 1-5, 13-17, omitting 15 |
| 23, 27 November | Thanksgiving Holidays |
| 1 December | Chapter 15 in text; Sections 1-4 |
| 3 December | Chapter 15 in text; Sections 4-6 Class evaluations |
| 3 December | FOURTH SET OF EXERCISES DUE |

Remember that if you have ANY difficulties at all with this course, or me as the instructor, see me at once. I do not breathe fire and spit brim stone outside of the class room. IN the classroom may be another matter. Indeed, I have been told that I am a loveable teddy bear – outside the classroom.

ENJOY!!!