

## PHI 169 – CRITICAL REASONING – SPRING 2015

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### ASSIGNMENT #4 – DUE MON MARCH 30

**Background** In the first part (on Michael Brown), we looked at arguments.<sup>1</sup> In the second part (on capitalism), we are looking at how arguments are formulated, criticized and defended from criticism. The focus now is on the dialectical confrontation between two sides in a debate, each side advancing an opposite viewpoint.

Answer all the questions, a) through e), in **Prompt 1** or in **Prompt 2** below. *Write your answers in itemized form, be as specific and clear as possible, and cite the course materials whenever appropriate. Expected length is 2-3 pages.*

#### **Prompt 1: Piketty**

- a. What is the relation between  $r > g$  and inequality according to Piketty? Does Piketty believe that  $r > g$  explains inequality in the world? If so, what is his argument? Please review his TED talk and his slides available on the course website.
- b. How does Piketty explain the rising income inequality in the United States in the last 40 years? Does  $r > g$  factor into that?
- c. What criticism(s) does the economist Ray level against Piketty? In particular, discuss (i) why the US is an exception and (ii) why  $r > g$  does not explain inequality.

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<sup>1</sup>Recall the following points:

- An argument consists of a conclusion and a number of premises, and the latter are meant to support the conclusion. *Example:* It is raining (premise). I do not have an umbrella (premise). I am outside (premise). So, I will get wet (conclusion).
- A good deductive argument is such that the truth of the conclusion follows necessarily from the truth of the premises. *Example:* The moon is either blue or green (premise). The moon is not green (premise). So, the moon is blue (conclusion).
- A good inductive argument is such that the truth of the conclusion follows (more or less) probably from the truth of the premises. *Example:* The witness asserts she saw Michael Brown with his hands up while Wilson was shooting at him (premise). So, Michael Brown had his hands up while Wilson was shooting at him (conclusion).
- An argument expresses a *relation* between the truth of the premises and the truth of the conclusion. A good deductive argument guarantees that *if* the premises are true, the conclusion is necessarily true. A good inductive argument guarantees that *if* the premises are true, the conclusion is (more or less) probably true.

- d. Do you think these are good criticisms? If yes, explain why. If not, how would you respond? Please also discuss Piketty's response to the criticism that  $r > g$  does not explain inequality. Focus on pp. 1–7 only.
- e. What criticism(s) does the Financial Times level against Piketty's data? How does Piketty respond?

**Prompt 2: The 1%**

- a. Read Mankiw's paper "Defending the one percent" (in particular, up to page 25 and from page 29 till the end). Summarize the main message(s) of the paper.
- b. What are three arguments from the Left in favor of income redistribution (p. 29)? How does Mankiw respond to each of them?
- c. Consider Krugman's criticism of Mankiw's paper? Summarize the criticism. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Explain why.
- d. Consider Pollack's criticism of Mankiw's paper? Summarize the criticism. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Explain why.
- e. Summarize the WSJ article on income inequality. What are the main arguments used in the article to defend inequalities? How would you respond to these arguments?

**Grading Criteria**

*A range:* Each answer is well-written, extremely clear and extremely precise. There are no confusing or unclear sentences. The assignment shows a full mastery of the subtleties of the readings, as well as rigorous, original and independent thinking. The course materials, whenever necessary, are properly referenced and accurately described.

*B range:* Each answer is mostly well-written, clear and precise, although there are some confusing or unclear sentences. The assignment shows a sufficient mastery of the subtleties of the readings. The course materials, whenever necessary, are properly referenced and accurately described.

*C range:* Each answer addresses the questions in a satisfactory manner without major mistakes or misunderstandings of the readings. There are some confusing or unclear sentences. The assignment does not show mastery of the subtleties of the readings. The course materials are at times improperly referenced and inaccurately described.

*D range:* Each answer addresses the questions in a satisfactory manner without major mistakes or misunderstandings of the readings. And yet, there are several confusing or unclear sentences. The assignment does not show mastery of the subtleties of the readings. The course materials are often improperly referenced and inaccurately described.

*F range:* Each answer contains major mistakes or misunderstandings of the readings.