

PHI169

CRITICAL REASONING

M&W 9:30-10:45 in C-349

or

M&W 11:00-12:15 in C-349

instructor Marcello Di Bello*e-mail* marcello.dibello@lehman.cuny.edu*office hrs* M&W 2:00-3:00 in C-365***course topics***

topics of contemporary interest will serve as the “battle ground” for exercising your reasoning skills while reading, writing and debating with your fellow classmates

part 1 - Michael Brown -

how did the media cover the shooting of Michael Brown? what did the witnesses say? why was officer Darren Wilson not indicted?

part 2 - capitalism -

does capitalism promote

prosperity? does it widen economic inequalities?

part 3 - religion -

does religion facilitate or obstruct the construction of a just and free society?

part 4 - TBA -

the last part will consist of students' presentations

materials

you will read scholarly and newspaper articles, court transcripts, as well as watch video clips from the internet

slides, handouts and homework assignments will allow you to concentrate on key aspects of the course materials

website

all course materials are available through the course website, so you should check the website on a regular basis, at least once a week

www.marcellodibello.com/PHI169



who is the victim and who is the criminal?

requirements & grades

you are required to

- ♦ complete five assignments, each counting for **15%** of your final letter grade
- ♦ conduct independent research on a topic of your choice, present your findings to the class and write a final paper, counting for **25%** of your final grade

five assignments

there are five assignments for which you will receive a letter grade:

- #1. warm-up reasoning exercises
due Mon Feb 2
- #2. witness testimony summary
due Wed Feb 11
- #3. witness testimony assessment
due Wed Mar 4
- #4. arguments back-and-forth
due Mon Mar 23
- #5. final paper preparation
due Mon Apr 27

final paper

the final paper, 20-25 pages in length, will be written with 4-5 fellow students on a topic of your choice, due Mon May 18

the final paper is an opportunity for you to apply the skills of careful analysis and reasoning which you'll be learning in this course

PART I - MICHAEL BROWN

week 1: Wed Jan 28

We will begin with a few remarks about the nature of reasoning and the distinction between premises and conclusions.

reading

Euclid, *Elements*, Book I, Propositions 1–5

week 2: Mon Feb 2 & Wed Feb 4

We will examine how some of the media reported the shooting of Michael Brown.

watching

Fox News, *The Truth about Ferguson*

week 3: Mon Feb 9 & Wed Feb 11

We will read the grand jury transcripts and the testimonies, among others, by officer Wilson and Johnson.

readings

Grand Jury, vol 4 and 5

week 4: Mon Feb 16 & Wed Feb 18

There is no class on Feb 16; on Feb 18 we will continue with last week's topic.

week 5: Mon Feb 23 & Wed Feb 25

We will examine the physical evidence, such as medical examinations and DNA evidence, about the shooting.

readings

Grand Jury, vol 19 and 20

week 6: Mon Mar 2 & Wed Mar 4

We will examine the assistant prosecutors' role in the grand jury proceedings and their instructions to the grand jurors.

readings

Grand Jury, vol 24

assignment #1
due Feb 2

assignment #2
due Feb 11

assignment #3
due Mar 4

objectives

you will learn how to be critical of the claims made in newspaper articles, the TV, political speeches

you will develop intellectual honesty, i.e. the courage to admit that, sometimes, your claims aren't well supported by arguments

you will develop analytical writing skills, as well as skills for oral presentations and public debates

course etiquette

just in case you forgot

- ✦ do the reading and come to class ready to engage with me and your fellow students
- ✦ disagree with me and your fellow students, but always be gracious and polite
- ✦ don't be shy and don't think what's in your mind is stupid or not worth sharing
- ✦ when you're in class, don't get distracted by the virtual world – i.e. your phone, facebook, instagram, etc.

no plagiarism!

you may not copy the work of others without proper acknowledgement, and if you do so, *you will fail the class*

PART 2 - CAPITALISM

week 7: Mon Mar 9 & Wed Mar 11

A recent book by French economist Thomas Piketty sparked controversy on the question, how did the distribution of wealth change during the last one hundred years in the US and Europe?

watching

Piketty, *New Thoughts on Capital* (TED Talk)

FT, *Data Problems with Capital in the 21st Century*

week 8: Mon Mar 16 & Wed Mar 18

The question for debate this week is, what's wrong with the 1%?

reading

Mankiw, *Defending the One Percent*

Replies by Krugman and Pollock

week 9: Mon Mar 23 & Wed Mar 25

Statistics and numbers play an important role in debates about capitalism and inequality. But can they deceive us? If so, how?

reading

WSJ, *Ultimate Antipoverty Program*

Counterpunch, *Distorting Poverty to Promote Capitalism*

week 10: Mon Mar 30 & Wed Apr 1

The question for debate this week is, are the rich taxed enough?

watching

IQ2 Debates, *Are the Rich Taxed Enough?*

week 11: Mon Apr 6 & Wed Apr 8

No classes — it's Spring break!

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| assignment #4 due Mar 30 |
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disability accommodation

students who have a disability which may necessitate an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services in a class should contact the *Office of Student Disability Services* located in Shuster, room 238, phone number 718-960-8441

tutoring services

the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) is the tutoring centers on campus

the ACE provides appointment based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing and academic skills workshops

to obtain information about the ACE, please visit their website at www.lehman.edu/issp or call the ACE at 718-960-8175

week 12: *Mon Apr 13 & Wed Apr 15*

We will discuss the distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions and how the distinction is used in arguments.

PART 3 - RELIGION

week 13: *Mon Apr 20 & Wed Apr 22*

Different religions make different claims about the nature of God, marriage, fasting, righteous actions, etc. How can we decide among these different claims?

readings

Yacob, Treatise [selections]

week 14: *Mon Apr 27 & Wed Apr 29*

The question for debate this week is, does religion bring any good to society or not?

readings

Sam Harris, Letter to a Christian Nation [selections]

IQ2, Is Islam a Religion of Peace?

**assignment #5
due April 27**

PART 4 -

week 15: *Mon May 4 & Wed May 6*

Student presentations about the final paper

week 16: *Mon May 11 & Wed May 13*

Student presentations about the final paper

**FINAL PAPER
due May 18**