

Critical Thinking

Elective Course, The Theology Program

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Course Description

This course will introduce basic concepts and skills in logic and critical thinking. It will be taught from a Christian perspective and focus on the application of logic and critical thinking skills to biblical studies, theology, apologetics, and ethics. Please note that this course is strictly introductory and focuses on developing a sound approach to the use of logic and an understanding of its most basic elements.

Course Schedule

This course will meet Tuesday nights, 10:00—11:30 p.m. Eastern time, for eight straight weeks, beginning on September 28, 2010, and finishing on November 16, 2010.

Date	Topic
9/28	Biblical Perspectives on Critical Thinking
10/5	Basics of Critical Thinking
10/12	Logic 101: Identifying and Evaluating Arguments
10/19	Deduction for Dummies
10/26	Inductive, Abductive, and Analogical Reasoning
11/2	Fallacies of Meaning and Relevance
11/9	Fallacies of Presumption and Evidence
11/16	Developing a Constructively Critical Christian Mind

Course Assignments

1. Complete the reading requirements indicated in the weekly schedule that follows.
2. Listen to each of the lectures.
3. Homework: Do the homework assignments indicated in the schedule that follows.

Honors Reading: Read any one of the books listed on the following page. Note that some of these books are explicitly Christian in their perspective while others are not. If you wish to use a book other than one listed here, you should email me and let me know what book you have in mind. It is expected that you will choose a book that you have not previously read.

Introductory Books on Logic and Critical Thinking

Explicitly Christian books are marked with an asterisk (*).

- Adler, Mortimer and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*. Rev. and updated ed. New York: Simon & Schuster—Touchstone, 1972. This classic book with the paradoxical title teaches how to skim, inspect, speed through, pigeonhole, and critique a book. A must-read.
- Baggini, Julian, and Peter S. Fosl. *The Philosopher's Toolkit: A Compendium of Philosophical Concepts and Methods*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. Brief, clear explanations of basic concepts and methods in logic and philosophy. Read at least chapters 1-3 to satisfy the honors reading requirement.
- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. How to select and focus your topic, do research, find sources, formulate well-reasoned arguments, and put your findings in writing. An excellent primer.
- *Carson, D. A. *Exegetical Fallacies*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996. Important text discussing fallacies having to do with word study, grammar, logic, presuppositions, and history in biblical interpretation. Of interest primarily to those who have at least some rudimentary knowledge of Greek.
- *Carter, Joe, and John Coleman. *How to Argue Like Jesus: Learning Persuasion from History's Greatest Communicator*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009.
- *Geisler, Norman L., and Ronald Brooks. *Come, Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990. One of the few textbooks on logic written specifically for Christian students.
- *Geisler, Norman L., and Patrick Zuckeran. *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.
- *Groothuis, Douglas. *On Jesus*. Wadsworth Philosopher Series. Wadsworth, 2002. Evangelical philosopher and apologist looks at Jesus as a philosopher.
- *Moreland, J. P. *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997. A plea to evangelicals to inculcate the life of the mind.
- *Moreland, J. P., and William Lane Craig. "Argumentation and Logic." Chapter 2 in *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 28-69. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003. Working through this one chapter satisfies the honors reading requirement.
- *Sire, James W. *Why Good Arguments Often Fail: Making a More Persuasive Case for Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006.

Week #1—Biblical Perspectives on Critical Thinking

Readings (choose at least two):

Bluedorn, Harvey. “Reasons from the Bible to Study Logic.” 2000.

<http://www.fallacydetective.com/articles/read/reasons-from-the-bible-to-study-logic/>.

Gleghorn, Michael. “Why We Shouldn’t Hate Philosophy.” Richardson, TX: Probe Ministries, 2005. <http://www.michaelgleghorn.com/artHatePhilosophy.php>.

McDurmon, Joel. “The Bible and Critical Thinking.” *Christian Reader*, 30 Nov. 2009.

http://christianreader.typepad.com/christian_reader/2009/11/the-bible-and-critical-thinking.html.

Some topics to discuss:

What is logic? What is reason?

A biblical case for logic

- Logic and truth-telling
- Logic and the Golden Rule
- What Proverbs teaches about reason
- Jesus’ use of logic
- Alleged irrationality of the Bible
- Examining proof texts for pious anti-intellectualism

What logic can do

Limitations of logic

- Not all speech is an argument
- GIGO (the need for factual premises or data)
- The problem of paradox

Homework:

- Read Paul’s speeches in Acts 13 and 17. How are they different? How are they alike? Describe Paul’s method of reasoning and his basic argument in the two speeches. Why are the two speeches so different?

Week #2—Basics of Critical Thinking

Readings (choose at least three):

Lau, Joe. “Module: Critical Thinking.” In *Critical Thinking Web: OpenCourseWare on Critical Thinking, Logic, and Creativity*. <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/critical>.

Passantino, Bob. “Fantasies, Legends, and Heroes: What You Know May Not Be So and How to Tell the Difference.” 1990. <http://www.answers.org/apologetics/fantasy.html>.

Rusbult, Craig. “Critical Thinking Skills in Education and Life.” American Scientific Affiliation, 2001, 2008. <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/think/critical.htm>. Overview of the subject, with numerous links (reflecting varying perspectives).

Wile, Jay L. “Teaching Critical Thinking.” Apologia Educational Ministries. <http://www.apologiaonline.com/conf/critthink.pdf>.

Wilson, Rebekah. “What Is Critical Thinking—and How Do We Teach It?” <http://www.crosswalk.com/homeschool/11625754/>.

Some topics to discuss:

- Is critical thinking relativistic?
- Critical thinking as an art or skill
- Basic principles of critical thinking

Homework:

None

Week #3—Logic 101: Identifying and Evaluating Arguments

Readings (please read all):

“Deductive, Inductive, and Abductive Reasoning.”

<http://www.butte.edu/departments/cas/tipsheets/thinking/reasoning.html>.

Groothuis, Doug. “Basic Logical Principles Required for Apologetic Endeavors.” 2005.

<http://www.ivpress.com/groothuis/pdf.php/doug/000085.pdf>.

Lau, Joe. Sections L01 through L03 in “Module: Basic Logic,” and sections A01 and A04 in “Module: Argument Analysis.” In *Critical Thinking Web: OpenCourseWare on Critical Thinking, Logic, and Creativity*.

<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/logic/>;

<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/arg.>

Some topics to discuss:

What is an argument?

Overview of three types of reasoning

- Deduction
- Induction
- Abduction

Fundamental laws of thought

Self-defeating claims

Distinguishing conclusions from supporting statements

Ways to test—either to challenge (refute) or to confirm (prove)—an argument

- Examine its factual basis (premises, data, facts); consider defeaters or counterevidence
- Critique its form or structure (fallacies)

Homework:

- Exercises in sections L01, L02, and L03 of Lau, “Module: Basic Logic”
- Exercises in sections A01 and A04 of Lau, “Module: Argument Analysis”

Week #4—Deduction for Dummies

Readings:

Lau, Joe. Sections A02 and A03 in “Module: Argument Analysis.” In *Critical Thinking Web: OpenCourseWare on Critical Thinking, Logic, and Creativity*.
<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/arg>.

Some topics to discuss:

- Premises, form, and conclusion
- Syllogisms
- Validity, soundness, cogency, and truth
- Examples (drawn from theology, ethics, etc.) of deductive fallacies: affirming the consequent, denying the antecedent, and undistributed middle

Homework:

- Exercises in sections A02 and A03 of Lau, “Module: Argument Analysis.”

Week #5—Inductive, Abductive, and Analogical Reasoning

Readings (please read both):

Craig, William Lane. “Visions of Jesus: A Critical Assessment of Gerd Lüdemann’s Hallucination Hypothesis.” 2005. An example of inference to the best explanation.
<http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/visions.html>.

Lau, Joe. Sections A05, A06, and A08 in “Module: Argument Analysis.” In *Critical Thinking Web: OpenCourseWare on Critical Thinking, Logic, and Creativity*.
<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/arg>.

Some topics to discuss:

Induction

- Data, argument, conclusion
- Strength and weakness
- Probability, statistics
- Examples of inductive reasoning in biblical interpretation, apologetics, etc.

Abduction

- Hypothesis, explanations
- Inference to the best explanation
- Examples of abductive reasoning in theology, apologetics, etc.

Homework:

- Exercises in sections A06 and A08 of Lau, “Module: Argument Analysis.” (Note that Lau finds fault with an analogy in Ephesians. How would you defend Paul’s analogy?)

Week #6—Fallacies of Meaning and Relevance

Readings (please read all):

Bowman, Robert M., Jr. *Logical Fallacies*: Parts A and B (to be provided).

_____. “Twenty Ways to Answer Someone If You Have No Case.”

Lau, Joe. “Module: Meaning Analysis.” In *Critical Thinking Web: OpenCourseWare on Critical Thinking, Logic, and Creativity*. <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/meaning/>.

Some topics to discuss:

Definition

- Different kinds of definitions
- Use of technical terms in theology

Fallacies of meaning (with interesting examples from theology, ethics, apologetics, etc.):

- Equivocation
- Euphemism fallacy
- Ambiguity
- Vagueness
- Reification
- Category mistakes
- Confusing sense and reference
- Persuasive definition

Fallacies of relevance (with more examples):

- Ad hominem
- Appeals to popular opinion and common practice
- Appeal to abuse
- Appeal to authority
- Appeals to antiquity and modernity
- Appeal to pity
- Appeals to force and fear
- Appeal to ignorance
- Genetic fallacy
- Straw-man fallacy

Homework:

- Exercises in sections M01, M02 (Evaluating definitions), M04, and M05 of Lau, “Module: Meaning Analysis.”

Week #7—Fallacies of Presumption and Evidence

Readings:

Bowman, Robert M., Jr. *Logical Fallacies*: Parts C and D.

Some topics to discuss:

Fallacies of presumption:

- Begging the question
- Appeal to ignorance
- Argument from fallacy
- Argument from silence
- False dilemma (black-white fallacy)
- Cliché fallacy
- Complex question fallacy
- Subjectivist fallacy

Fallacies of evidence:

- Fallacy of the beard
- Fallacies of composition and division
- Hasty generalization
- Is-ought fallacy
- Nothing-buttery (reductionism)
- *Post hoc ergo propter hoc*
- Slippery-slope fallacy
- Selective or biased evidence
- Spotlight fallacy (see also selective evidence)
- Unrepresentative sampling (see also selective evidence)

Homework:

- Fallacies Worksheet (to be provided)

Week #8—Developing a Constructively Critical Christian Mind

Readings (choose at least two):

Groothuis, Douglas. “Christian Apologetics Manifesto 2003: Sixteen Theses.”

<http://www.ivpress.com/groothuis/doug/archives/000010.php>.

_____. “Six Enemies of Apologetic Engagement.” 2002.

<http://www.leaderu.com/common/sixenemies.html>.

Moreland, J. P. “Developing an Apologetic Character.” 2001.

<http://www.jpmoreland.com/articles/developing-an-apologetics-character/>.

Samples, Kenneth Richard. “Integrating Argument and Virtue.” Oct. 1, 2004.

<http://www.reasons.org/philosophyreligion/logic/integrating-argument-and-virtue>.

Some topics to discuss:

- Developing a Bible reading and study plan
- The importance of becoming self-educating
- Broadening one’s knowledge without being sophomoric
- Identifying the indispensable classics and areas of knowledge
- The mutual benefits of a mentoring relationship
- The difference between inquisitiveness and unbelief

Homework:

None