

PHI 169 — *CRITICAL REASONING* – revised

FALL 2014 – LEHMAN COLLEGE, CUNY

instructor: **Marcello Di Bello**

e-mail: marcello.dibello@lehman.cuny.edu

course webpage: www.marcellodibello.com/PHI169

time & venue: Mon and Wed, 09:30-10:45, CA-348

office hours: Mon and Wed, 02:00-03:00, CA-365



OVERVIEW

We are surrounded by information and arguments, from the government, the media, the Internet, our employer, our teachers and friends. But not all these pieces of information and arguments are good and trustworthy. This course will help you discern good from bad arguments. It will also make you aware of how difficult it is to do so.

COURSE TOPICS

You will confront some of the pressing issues of our time—capitalism and economic inequalities, the death penalty and the criminal justice system, public debt and the welfare state, vegetarianism and animal rights, immigration, the War on Terror, etc. We will cover only a select few topics, roughly two or three. The death penalty is the first topic of the course; the choice of the others will be yours. At the beginning of the quarter, you will be asked to vote on the topics you would like to discuss in the course.

OBJECTIVES

You will become a critical “consumer” of information and arguments. You will also develop an awareness that reasonable people disagree on many issues, and that the correct answer—if there is any such thing—is often very nuanced and hard to find. Finally, you will develop intellectual honesty, namely the courage to admit that, sometimes, what you say isn’t really well-supported by good evidence and argument.

METHOD

You will be exposed to different written and oral arguments, from magazines, academic articles, videos and internet resources. You will often confront conflicting arguments, for example, arguments in favor and arguments against the death penalty. You will be asked to diagnose the source of the conflict between arguments. To this end, you will examine whether the arguments in question establish what they purport to establish. You will question their underlying assumptions—empirical, idealogical, moral and political assumptions.

COURSE MATERIALS

The course materials are available through the course website. The final list of topics is not yet available and will be decided after the first class meeting once everyone has voted. You can, however, have a look at the materials that are already posted on the course website.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

- (a) Three writing assignments:
- (#1) reconstruction of an argument [10% of the grade – **DUE SEPT. 15**]
 - (#2) comparison of conflicting arguments [15% of the grade – **DUE SEPT. 29**]
 - (#3) questioning of the assumptions [15% of the grade – **DUE TBA**]
- (b) Debate participation [30% of the grade – **Debate schedule TBA**]
- (c) Final group project [30% of the grade – **DUE TBA**]

SCHEDULE | READINGS

WEEK 1: Introduction

Mon (09/01): NO CLASS <i>Labor Day</i>	
Wed (09/03): Overview and voting	No assigned reading

WEEK 2: Against the Death Penalty

Mon (09/08): Deterrence argument (a)	Beccaria, <i>Crimes and Punishment</i>
Wed (09/10): Argument analysis	no assigned reading

WEEK 3: For the Death Penalty

Mon (09/15): Deterrence argument (b) Assignment #1 DUE	JS Mill, "On Capital Punishment"
Wed (09/17): Argument analysis	no assigned reading

WEEK 4: Argument Comparison

Mon (09/22): Beccaria v. Mill	no assigned reading Murder?"
Wed (09/24): No CLASS	

WEEK 5: Consolidation

Mon (09/29): Infanticide argument	no assigned reading
Wed (10/01): Necessary v. sufficient	no assigned reading

WEEK 6: Data About Deterrence

Mon (10/06): The power of deduction	no assigned reading
Wed (10/08): Statistical data	"Does Capital Punishment Deter Murder?"

WEEK 7: More Data About Deterrence

Mon (10/13): NO CLASS <i>Columbus Day</i>	
Wed (10/15):	"New Evidence that Capital Punishment Does Deter Murder"

WEEK 8: Beyond Deterrence

Mon (10/20): Retributivist argument	Kant, "Penal Law and the Principle of Universal Justice"
Wed (10/22):	den Haag "Ultimate Punishment"

WEEK 9: Questioning the Assumptions

Mon (10/27): Marxist analysis	Murphy, "Marxism and Retribution"
Wed (10/29): Sociological studies	"Crooked Ladder"

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic dishonesty, such as cheating, plagiarism, falsifying identity and academic records, will not be tolerated. Students who are found to have committed any act of academic dishonesty will fail the class.

ACCOMMODATING DISABILITIES

Lehman College is committed to providing access to all programs and curricula to all students. Students with disabilities who may need classroom accommodations are encouraged to register with the Office of Student Disability Services. For more information, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services, Shuster Hall, Room 238, phone number, 718-960-8441.

ACADEMIC CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE (ACE) AND SCIENCE LEARNING CENTER (SLC)

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and the Science Learning Center (SLC) are two of 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. The SLC provides drop-in tutoring for natural and computer science courses. To obtain more information about the ACE and the SLC, please visit their website at <http://www.lehman.edu/issp>, or please call the ACE at 718-960-8175, and the SLC at 718-960-7707.