

# [Phil 201 - liberty university - "lesson" study guide #3](https://assignbuster.com/phil-201-liberty-university-lesson-study-guide-3/)

PHIL 201 Study Guide Lesson 3: Thinking Critically Points 1) Be able to state common objections and questions often raised against philosophical reasoning and how one might respond to them: a) Quibbling over Words: Philosophy is little more than quibbling over the meaning of words — key terms of an issue are often defined in the views of the philosopher / It all depends on how you define your terms = Response - Yes, often it does ~ Question is “ what reasons are there for preferring one definition to the other" — one’s definition is not always as good as another’s > further debate determines adequacy b) Need for Absolute Certainty: it may seem most of the solutions to philosophical problems can be supported with good arguments and, in addition, are open to significant objections — a matter of personal preference / Response - assumption that philosophical truth is an all-or-nothing proposition — just because critics always seem to have objections, it does not follow that there are no reasons for preferring one theory over its rivals — the rational acceptability of any philosophical thesis is primarily a matter of degree \* a theory that is relatively free from ambiguity, supported with sound arguments, and does not lead to highly dubious consequences, is preferable to one that does not have these attributes (much ground between absolute certainty and complete skepticism) c) Philosophical Relativism: “ although for Smith theory X is false, X is nevertheless true for me. Because the truth is relative to our own beliefs, each of us is correct" > earth cannot be both flat and not flat + same thing cannot be both flat and spherical / Response - failure to distinguish between mere belief and true belief / you must work your way through the evidence, not try to get around it just by declaring that the view in question is “ true for me" d) Just Personal Beliefs: the claim that the choice between two competing theories is determined by an individual’s conditioning and instincts — the use of arguments in philosophy is really just a process of rationalizing the beliefs, commitments, and unconscious forces already at work in our lives / underlies the use of ad hominem arguments (attacking a person’s character or personal circumstances rather than his or her arguments — tendency to predict and evaluate a person’s philosophy in relation to his or her personality / \* 2 Responses — a) the psychology behind a person’s commitment to a certain theory is irrelevant to the arguments supporting it — psychology does NOT make that commitment less important or less in need of critical examination and b) the hypothesis of “ psychological conditioning factors" is overly speculative (if not false), since it is impossible to specify all the factors leading to the adoption of any given view — even if it is true, it applies to everyone, not only to philosophers — psychological and social conditioning should therefore affect the claims of art critics, mathematicians, theologians, lawyers, politicians, and physicists — not just philosophers > positions supported with reasons and emotions e) Why be Rational? might request justification for the use of reason itself — unanswerable b/c applicable to all reasons given in response \* you cannot rationally prove that one should not be rational without contradicting yourself / Response — simply to note that being rational “ pays" in a broad sense of the term and that, by cutting short a philosophical debate with one-liners such as “ we’ll never get anywhere" or “ you’re just rationalizing what your parents taught you, " one can cheat oneself — in your interest to push the defense and criticism of a philosophical theory to its limits \* issues and arguments we encounter in philosophy are further removed from goals with which we can easily identify — intellectual curiosity, peace of mind, moral decisions, political commitment, and scientific investigation are all influenced by the positions we entertain on a variety of philosophical issues — critical investigation and rational inquiry 2) Assumptions: where do we start and how do we handle them? For substantive truth about reality, what we can know, or how we ought to behave, we must always begin with certain assumptions, definitions, and frames of reference whose total objectivity cannot be guaranteed, even though they may seem self-evident. / Philosophy requires that we always be prepared to examine those assumptions once we are made aware of them and they appear even slightly problematic. But we are not always aware of them. They can be so ingrained in our mind-set that it never occurs to us to probe their implications. Or they can just appear so self-evident that when someone dares to question them, it just doesn’t seem worth our while to pursue the matter any further. Our assumptions seem to work very well when they lead to new knowledge and successfully address our needs. 3) The distinction between “ thinking" and “ critical thinking" thinking has to do with manipulating beliefs and with developing beliefs from experiences (brainstorming, being creative, coming up with an idea, choosing among preferences) / critical thinking is “ principled thinking" / critical thinking is thinking that follows a reasoned track — means to ends thinking, problem-solving thinking / in thinking critically one has a goal / thinking is purposeful / \*\*\* critical thinking is purposeful, goal-directed thinking that follows a principled, reasoned track > practicalities and usefulness + use of reason — critical thinking involves moving beyond simply explaining why a person has a particular preference; critical thinking involves recommending — building a case that will function not only as a reason for why one person chooses a particular course of action but also why another person should choose a similar course 4) The two themes of critical thinking — the first theme is the one focused on the practicalities and usefulness of thinking critically — critical thinking in the weak sense is important to achieve everyday goals \*\*critical thinking in the weak sense means that that one can deflect challenges advanced against one’s own position > \*\* critical thinking in the strong sense means that one can challenge one’s own assumptions and arguments - the goal for critical thinking in the strong sense is to move such a thinker from having a belief set that includes some false beliefs to having a belief set that includes less false beliefs = life-goal (goal about exercising human capacities for living a life more in tune with truth) / the second theme concerns the use of reason - what critical thinking calls for in building arguments are reasons (publicly accessible and open to inspection) — moving beyond simply explaining why a person has a particular preference > critical thinking involves recommending — it involves building a case that will function not only as a reason for why one person chooses a particular course of action but also why another person should choose a similar course 5) The skills needed to do critical thinking — philosophers understand the skills of critical thinking primarily to consist in informal logic - includes more than simply a consideration of the structures of arguments > informal logic incorporates consideration of the content as well as the form (whether the individual premises in an argument are worthy to be believed — if true and what kind of truth they express / \* critical thinking is about both gathering and evaluating information, information which can be used as evidence for premises in arguments > building quality arguments 6) The importance of the spirit of critical thinking — to be a critical thinker means more than simply having a skill-set. It means using that skill-set each time a problem presents itself, and it means accepting the result of that work. Ultimately, to have a spirit to think critically is more than an asset to the worthiness of engaging in critical thinking; it is more than a willingness to engage in critical thinking; it is even more than an enjoyment of engaging in critical thinking. \*\*\* To have a spirit to think critically is to have the habit of engaging in critical thinking. Critical thinkers habitually, routinely, and frequently apply their critical thinking skills (in the weak sense) to the problems they encounter regularly in their everyday life and (in the strong sense) to their own beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes. They also accept, act on, and live by the beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes they have developed as a result of thinking critically. > Needs to be fostered and nurtured as early as possible. 7) Critical: negative or positive? We often use the word “ critical" to denote something negative. Certainly there is something of the negative in critical thinking, which ideally comes with a fair-minded skepticism. Critical thinkers look to expose falsity. / \*\*\* But essentially critical thinking is a positive enterprise. Critical thinkers are problem solvers. We are interested in framing approaches to meet our goals that are effective, efficient, and lasting. In turning the critical thinking spotlights on ourselves, we pursue our own growth as thinkers and, more simply still, as human beings. At the same time critical thinkers are always open to new arguments, new evidence, and new points of view. Critical thinking is essentially a constructive enterprise. Terms 1) Philosophical Relativism — failure to distinguish between mere belief and true belief — because the truth is relative to our own beliefs, each of us is correct — positions that lead to such contradictions are usually based on faulty assumptions \* you must work your way through the evidence, not try to get around it just by declaring that the view in question is “ true for me" 2) Mere Belief — does NOT support either the truth or falsity of a proposition — the qualification “ for me" does not magically transform mere belief into true belief — if it did, we would not need evidence, and the distinction between reason and arbitrary whim would collapse 3) True Belief — the evidence for the belief that the earth is spherical far outweighs the evidence available for the belief that it is not > supports truth or falsity of a proposition > you must work your way through the evidence, not try to get around it just by declaring that the view in question is “ true for me" 4) Thinking — thinking has to do with manipulating beliefs and with developing beliefs from experiences (brainstorming, being creative, coming up with an idea, choosing among preferences) 5) Critical Thinking — critical thinking is “ principled thinking" / critical thinking is thinking that follows a reasoned track — means to ends thinking, problem-solving thinking / in thinking critically one has a goal / thinking is purposeful / \*\*\* critical thinking is purposeful, goal-directed thinking that follows a principled, reasoned track > practicalities and usefulness + use of reason — critical thinking involves moving beyond simply explaining why a person has a particular preference; critical thinking involves recommending — building a case that will function not only as a reason for why one person chooses a particular course of action but also why another person should choose a similar course 6) Weak/Strong Critical Thinking — critical thinking in the weak sense means that that one can deflect challenges advanced against one’s own position - critical thinking in the weak sense is important to achieve everyday goals / critical thinking in the strong sense means that one can challenge one’s own assumptions and arguments - the goal for critical thinking in the strong sense is to move such a thinker from having a belief set that includes some false beliefs to having a belief set that includes less false beliefs = life-goal (goal about exercising human capacities for living a life more in tune with truth) 7) Formal Logic — the reason we call it formal is because logic deals with the form of arguments — it does not deal with the contents of arguments, only with their structure 8) Informal Logic — informal logic relies, of course, on the methods of formal logic — include more than simply a consideration of the structures of arguments — all arguments have forms, but all real-world, everyday arguments also have contents \*\* informal logic incorporates consideration of the content as well as the form — whether the premises are true and what kind of truth they express / \*\*\* informal logic deals with both the form of arguments and their contents, and to the extent that we are concerned with the truth of premises, we will be focused on what evidence can be brought to bear for believing them 9) Consistency — consistency means that two things go together without a contradiction 10) Coherence — for two things to cohere means that they not only go together without a contradiction — that they are consistent — but also support one another, that they fit together (crossword puzzle) — the words support one another, and they do so by offering both clues and constraints to future candidates, for potential correct answers \*\* with quality arguments, premises limit our conclusions but they also point to them