

The Critical Reflections are designed to help you keep up with the readings, sharpen your critical thinking skills, and improve your writing skills. They also serve as stepping-stones to the next level, namely, writing your own arguments. Critical Reflections are due before class whenever there is a required reading assignment. For each required reading, you should do the following:

1. **Identify one argument in the text and analyze it.**

To analyze an argument is to identify its parts, i.e., its premise(s) and conclusion, and then write it *canonical form* (i.e., in premise-conclusion format) as follows:

Premise 1  
Premise 2...  
Premise *n*  
Conclusion

For example:

*“Let no young man delay the study of philosophy, and let no old man become weary of it; **for it is never too early nor too late to care for the well-being of the soul** (Epicurus, *The Great Conversation Vol. I*, p. 237).*

*Italics* = conclusion

**Bold** = indicator words

Underline = premises

1. It's never too early or too late to do what is good for the soul.
2. The study of philosophy is good for the soul. [implicit premise]
3. Therefore, it's never too early or too late to study philosophy.

This argument is valid because if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true as well. If it's never too early or too late to do what is good for the soul, and studying philosophy is good for the soul, then it's never too early or too late to study philosophy. Any argument that has the following logical form is valid:

If *A*, then *B*.  
*A*.  
Therefore, *B*.

(where *A* and *B* stand for statements). So, another way to state this argument is the following:

1. If it's never too early or too late to do what is good for the soul, then it's never too early or too late to study philosophy.
2. It's never too early or too late to do what is good for the soul.
3. Therefore, it's never too early or too late to study philosophy.

Given that this argument is valid, the next question is whether it's sound. Are the premises in fact true? Presumably, most (all?) of us want to do things that are good for us. Of course, sometimes we are not sure what is good for us, or we are misinformed about what is good for us. But we still want things that are good for us, overall. If this is true, and if studying philosophy is one of those things that are good for us, then it is one of those things that are never too late or too early to do. Again, we may not know that studying philosophy is

actually good for us. If Epicurus is right, however, then it is and, hopefully, by taking this course, you will come to see that studying philosophy is indeed good for the soul. :)

## 2. Evaluate the argument.

State whether the argument is *valid* (i.e., the premises of the argument, if true, guarantee the truth of the conclusion) or *invalid*. If valid, state whether the argument is *sound* (i.e., the argument is valid and the premises are in fact true) or *unsound* (i.e., at least one of the premises is false). If the argument is meant to be inductive, not deductive, state whether it is *strong* (i.e., the premises of the argument, if true, make the truth of the conclusion more probable) or *weak* (i.e., the premises of the argument, even if true, do not make the truth of the conclusion more probable). If strong, state whether the argument is *cogent* (i.e., the argument is strong and the premises are in fact true) or *non-cogent* (i.e., at least one of the premises is false). These logical terms are discussed on pages xiii-xvii of *The Great Conversation Vol. I* and the materials posted in the Reasoning module on Canvas. Also, please see the decision procedure for evaluating arguments in the review sheet for the Reasoning Exam. It should be useful for completing the Critical Reflections.

## 3. Comment on a classmate's post.

After you post your Critical Reflection on Canvas, you should comment on one of your classmate's posts. In commenting on a classmate's post, you can do one of the following:

- Ask for clarification. "You claim that X, but I don't know what you mean by saying that X. Could you please clarify? By saying that X, do you mean that Y?"
- Ask for evidence. "You claim that X. I think I know what you mean by X. But why do you claim that X? I don't see any argument for X. Could you please provide evidence for X?"
- State an objection. "You claim that X and you provide evidence in support of X. However, I think that X (or your argument for X) is problematic. Here's my objection against X (or against your argument for X): Y. What would you say in response to Y?"
- Offer assistance. "You claim that X. I agree with you that X, but I think the following additional reason (which you do not mention) can be given in support of X: Y. Would you agree that Y counts as supporting evidence for X?"
- Offer an alternative interpretation. "You say that the reading claims that X. However, I don't think that this is exactly what it says. Instead, I think it says that X\* (and here's why I think this). What do you think about this alternative interpretation of the text?"
- Suggest parallels. "You say that X and you offer evidence in support of X. This reminds me of so-and-so's idea that Y (or his/her argument for Y). Do you think that comparing X to Y help shed light on the issue in question?"

When commenting on a classmate's post, please do one of the above rather than simply say, "I agree" or "Great work." For these brief comments are not helpful; they are conversation stoppers. But we would like to keep the conversation going in order to think carefully and deeply about philosophical questions.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at any time: [mmizrahi@fit.edu](mailto:mmizrahi@fit.edu).