

NAME: _____

Philosophy 1104: Critical Thinking

Answers to the Other Practice Quiz #1

[Total: 58 marks]

1. Which of the following pairs of propositions are consistent? (Write just 'Yes' or 'No' in the column provided.) If you think that the propositions, while consistent, have strong negative relevance to each other, then also write 'SNR'.

	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	Consistent? (Yes/No)
(i)	Fred just hit a hole-in-one	Fred never played golf before today	Yes (SNR)
(ii)	I have between 4 and 6 eggs	I have at least 3 eggs	Yes
(iii)	I have at least 4 eggs	I have no more than 2 eggs	No
(iv)	It's not the case that every politician is corrupt.	Every politician is honest	Yes
(v)	Janet likes listening to Jazz	Vancouver is west of Calgary	Yes
(vi)	Simpson is a heavy smoker	Simpson is a world-class skier	Yes (SNR)
(vii)	Alex is a woman	Alex is Ben's father	No
(viii)	Qin's theory is rejected by all relevant scientific authorities	Qin's theory is true	Yes (SNR)
(ix)	Sally is a feminist	Sally has eight children	Yes (SNR?)
(x)	Ali stabbed a man in Vernon, B.C. in 1998.	Ali first entered Canada in 2002.	No

[1 mark each for Yes/No correct]

2. In the conversations below, the speaker claims to find a contradiction. In each case say whether the inconsistency is serious or trivial, i.e. whether it threatens the general truth of the account. Briefly explain your judgement. (If you think that additional information is required to make this judgement, then briefly explain why.)

The official explanation of the WTC collapses on 9/11 claims that the main cause was the fires that occurred around the airplane impact area. These fires heated the steel frame of the building, softening and weakening it, until it collapsed. But this story contradicts the fact that WTC 2, which was struck second, collapsed first. WTC 2 burned for only 56 minutes, compared to 102 minutes for WTC 1.

Answer:

The main point here is that, while the towers themselves were very similar, they were struck at different heights, and at different angles. So, while the time difference until collapse is a puzzle, it is likely that some reasonable explanation of it can be found.

Another point is that buildings are complicated structures whose behaviour might be difficult to predict.

[5 marks]

The official explanation of the WTC collapses on 9/11 claims that the main cause was the fires that occurred around the airplane impact area. These fires heated the steel frame of the building, softening and weakening it, until it collapsed. But this story contradicts the fact that molten iron or steel was seen (and recorded on video) pouring out of one corner of WTC 2 before it collapsed. Glowing molten metal was also observed in the rubble piles after the collapses, and spheres of previously-molten iron were found in the dust. Iron and steel melt at around 1400 Celsius, whereas office fires, even ones started with jet fuel, cannot get hotter than about 1000 Celsius.

Answer:

In this case we have a rather simple situation, of a cause that is limited by basic physics, and apparently unable to produce the observed effect. Moreover, the temperature difference, between what is required and what such a fire can produce, is rather large (400 Celsius). So the inconsistency seems to be rather serious.

[5 marks]

3. Underline all vague words and phrases in the following paragraph . In each case say whether or not the vagueness is acceptable, and why. [10 marks]

Mr. Howson, a former student of mine, has asked me to write a letter in support of his application to the exchange program. Mr. Howson took (i) at least one course with me during his studies at Langara, and in each case was (ii) one of the only students who really mastered the material. His attendance record was excellent, and (iii) he certainly contributed to the class discussions. (iv) His course grade reflected his level of achievement.

Answer:

- (i) “at least one” – unacceptable. The prof. knows how many courses it was.
- (ii) “one of the only students” – how *many*? Doesn’t say. Unacceptable.
- (iii) “contributed” – how *much*? *Quality* of contributions? Doesn’t say. Unacceptable.
- (iv) “reflected level of achievement” – one would hope so. But was that level *high* or *low*? Doesn’t say. Unacceptable.

4. Comment on the suitability of the study’s definition of “spanking”. How suitable is it, for its purpose?

Groups that support a parent’s right to spank their children are scrambling to respond to a recent study that shows the damage that spanking causes to the child. The study found that adults who were previously spanked, as children, have significantly higher rates of depression and suicide, and also commit more violent crimes. “Spanking” is defined as the act of a parent striking the child, either using a hand or some implement.

Answer:

One worry here is that the definition is rather broad, including anything from a gentle swat on the backside to a hard punch in the face. The inclusion of “implement” similarly allows anything from a tennis shoe to a baseball bat. Hitting a child over the head with a baseball bat isn’t usually called ‘spanking’, so the definition departs from common usage. Also, according to some people at least, there is a morally significant difference between mild and severe cases of hitting children. So the definition possibly does not carve nature at the joints.

[5 marks]

5. Underline any ambiguous terms in the following paragraph, and explain their possible meanings. [6 marks]

Studies show that carbon taxes are (i) totally unnecessary for reducing carbon emissions – there are plenty of other ways to do it. And no one has (ii) proved that carbon dioxide emissions are the cause of global warming anyway! So far, all the evidence is (iii) inconclusive.

Answer:

- (i) “totally unnecessary” – not a good idea, not the best way, or just not the only possible way?
- (ii) “proved” -- conclusively demonstrated, or just found solid evidence for?
- (iii) “inconclusive” -- not conclusive, or not persuasive at all?

6.

- (i) You should hire me because I am single-minded (*obsessive*), determined (*stubborn*) and have years of experience (*old*). Working as a sales associate (*store clerk*) I was recognised among my colleagues for clear (*blunt*), honest (*insensitive*) communication, confidence (*arrogance*), and being proactive (*aggressive*). I am always meticulous (*fussy*), paying attention to details (*nitpicking*), and willing to help others find and correct their mistakes (*like to find fault with others and boss them around*). [6 marks]
- (ii) *Just Listed!!!* Cramped (*cosy*), two-bedroom condo right in the busy centre (*vibrant heart*) of Kits. Beach rather a long walk away (*just a walk away*). Small (*compact*) kitchen with old (*vintage*) appliances. Fir floors are dented and scratched (*have rustic charm*). Dim (*shady*) northern exposure. Draughty (*well ventilated*). Tiny (*intimate*) balcony with no roof (*open to the stars*). [5 marks]

7. Each of the following definitions is flawed in some way (each in just one way, I think, or at least one main one). Diagnose each definition as “circular”, “too narrow”, “too broad”, or “loaded”. [1 mark each]

- (i) I define a *cow* as an animal that produces milk.

too broad (all mammals produce milk)

- (ii) *Beer* is a golden-coloured, frothy alcoholic beverage brewed from barley, hops and yeast.

too narrow (beer can be dark, made from wheat, etc.)

- (iii) A *lawyer* is someone who feeds off the misery of others, and frequently adds to that misery.

loaded

- (iv) In chemistry, an *oxidising agent* is something that oxidises other substances.

circular

- (v) A *philosopher* is someone who can say an awful lot about something without saying anything at all.

loaded

- (vi) A *living being* is defined as something that is alive.

circular

- (vii) *Science*, derived from the Latin *scientia*, literally means ‘knowledge’.

too broad

- (viii) *Science* is the attempt to reduce everything good and noble in the world to the trivial operations of matter.

loaded