

philosophy of life. A faulty philosophy of life—that is, one that comprises a great many false fundamental beliefs—can lead to a misspent or misdirected life, a life less meaningful than it could be. Philosophy is the most powerful instrument we have for evaluating the worth of our fundamental beliefs and for changing them for the better. Through philosophy we exert control over the trajectory of our lives, making major course corrections by reason and reflection.

The Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 BCE), one of Western civilization’s great intellectual heroes, says, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” To examine your life is to scrutinize the core ideas that shape it, and the deepest form of scrutiny is exercised through philosophy. This search for answers goes to the heart of the traditional conception of philosophy as a search for wisdom (the term *philosophy* is derived from Greek words meaning “love of wisdom”). With the attainment of wisdom, we come to understand the true nature of reality and how to apply that understanding to living a good life.

Philosophy’s chief *theoretical* benefit is the same one that most other fields of inquiry pursue: understanding for its own sake. Even if philosophy had no practical applications at all, it would still hold great value for us. We want to know how the world works, what truths it hides, just for the sake of knowing. And philosophy obliges. Astronomers search the sky, physicists study subatomic particles, and archaeologists search for ancient ruins, all the while knowing that what they find may have no practical implications at all. We humans wonder, and that’s often all the reason we need to search for answers. As the great philosopher Aristotle says, “For it is owing to their wonder that people both now begin and at first began to philosophize.”

For many people, the quest for understanding through philosophy is a spiritual, transformative endeavor, an ennobling pursuit of truths at the core of life. Thus, several philosophers speak of philosophy as something that enriches or nurtures the soul or mind. Socrates, speaking to the jurors who condemned him for practicing philosophy on the streets of Athens, asked, “Are you not ashamed that, while you take care to acquire as much wealth as possible, with honor and glory as well, yet you take no care or thought for understanding or truth, or for the best possible state of your soul?” In a similar vein, the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE) said, “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.” And in our own era, the philosopher Walter Kaufmann (1921–1980) declared, “Philosophy means liberation from the two dimensions of routine, soaring above the well known, seeing it in new perspectives, arousing wonder and the wish to fly.”

Along with philosophical inquiry comes freedom. We begin our lives at a particular place and time, steeped in the ideas and values of a particular culture, fed ready-made beliefs that may or may not be true and that we may never think to question.

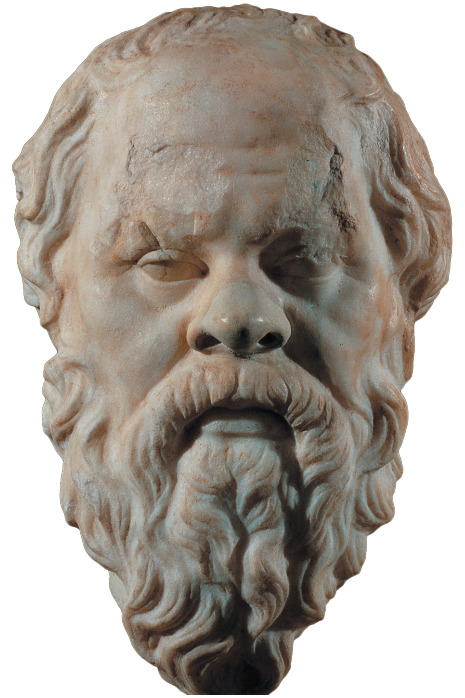


Figure 1.1 Socrates (469–399 BCE).

2 Is it possible to lead a meaningful life without self-examination?

Philosophy is the highest music.
—Plato

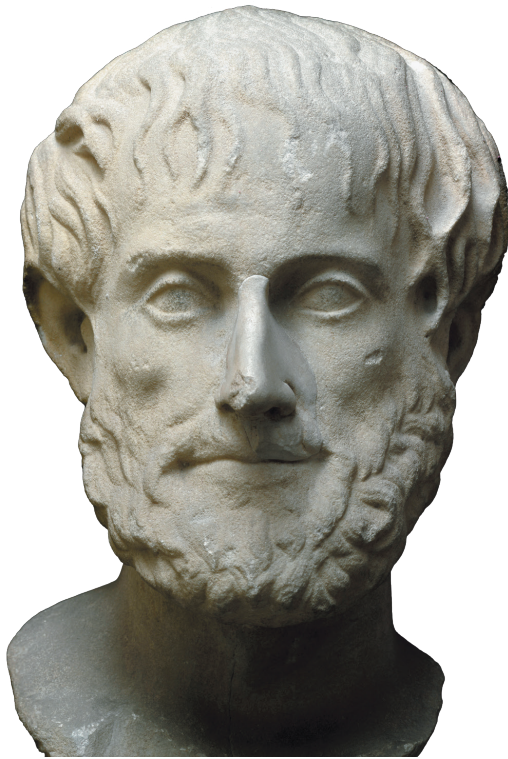


Figure 1.2 Aristotle (384–322 BCE).

To teach how to live without certainty and yet without being paralysed by hesitation is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can do for those who study it.
—Bertrand Russell

3 Has your thinking recently led you to reflect on philosophical questions? If so, how did the thought process begin, and what fundamental belief did you end up contemplating?

Metaphysics is the study of reality in the broadest sense, an inquiry into the elemental nature of the universe and the things in it.

If you passively accept such beliefs, then those beliefs are *not really yours*. If they are not really yours, and you let them guide your choices and actions, then they—not you—are in charge of your life. You thus forfeit your personal freedom. But philosophy helps us rise above this predicament, to transcend the narrow and obstructed standpoint from which we may view everything. It helps us sift our hand-me-down beliefs in the light of reason, look beyond the prejudices that blind us, and see what's real and true. By using the philosophical method, we may learn that some of our beliefs are on solid ground and some are not. In either case, through philosophy our beliefs become truly and authentically our own.

Philosophical Terrain

Philosophy's sphere of interest is vast, encompassing fundamental beliefs drawn from many places. Philosophical questions can arise anywhere. Part of the reason for this is that ordinary beliefs that seem to have no connection with philosophy can become philosophical in short order. A physiologist may want to know how our brains work, but she ventures into the philosophical arena when she wonders whether the brain is the same thing as the mind—a question that science alone cannot answer. A lawyer studies how the death penalty is ad-

ministered in Texas, but he does philosophy when he considers whether capital punishment is ever morally permissible. A medical scientist wants to know how a human fetus develops, but she finds it difficult to avoid the philosophical query of what the moral status of the fetus is. An astrophysicist studies the Big Bang, the cataclysmic explosion thought to have brought the universe into being—but then asks whether the Big Bang shows that God caused the universe to exist. On CNN you see the horrors of war and famine, but then you find yourself grappling with whether they can be squared with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God. Or you wonder what your moral obligations are to the poor and hungry of the world. Or you ponder whether government should help people in need or leave them to fend for themselves.

We can divide philosophy's subject matter into four main divisions, each of which is a branch of inquiry in its own right with many subcategories. Here's a brief rundown of these divisions and a sampling of the kinds of questions that each asks.

Metaphysics is the study of reality in the broadest sense, an inquiry into the elemental nature of the universe and the things in it. Though it must take into account the findings of science, metaphysics generally focuses on basic questions that science cannot address. Questions of interest: Does the world consist only of matter, or is it made up of other basic things, such as ideas or minds? Is there a spiritual, ideal realm that exists beyond the material world? Is the mind the same thing as the body?



WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

Your Philosophical Beliefs

Where do you stand on the fundamental issues in philosophy? Here is your chance to take inventory of your views. After you finish this course, take the survey again to see if your perspective has changed or become more nuanced. Answer with these numbers: 5 = true; 4 = probably true; 3 = neither probable nor improbable; 2 = probably false; 1 = false.

1. At least some moral norms or principles are objectively true or valid for everyone. _____
2. Moral standards are relative to what individuals or cultures believe. _____
3. Mind and body consist of two fundamentally different kinds of stuff—nonphysical stuff and physical stuff. _____
4. The mind, or soul, can exist without the body. _____
5. Our mental states are nothing but brain states (mind states are identical to brain states). _____
6. No one has free will. _____
7. Persons have free will (some of our actions are free). _____
8. Although our actions are determined, they can still be free (free will and determinism are not in conflict). _____
9. The God of traditional Western religions (an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good deity) exists. _____
10. The apparent design of the universe shows that it had an intelligent designer. _____
11. Right actions are those commanded by God; wrong actions are those forbidden by God. _____
12. God does not make actions right or wrong by commanding them to be so. _____
13. We can know some things about the external world. _____
14. We cannot know anything about the external world. _____
15. The theory of evolution is a better explanation of the apparent design of biological life than the theory of “intelligent design.” _____
16. Truth about something depends on what a person or culture believes. _____
17. Libertarianism is the correct political theory. _____
18. Welfare liberalism is the correct moral theory. _____
19. Meaning in life comes from outside ourselves, from God or some other transcendent reality. _____
20. Meaning in life comes from within ourselves. _____

How are mind and body related? Do people have immortal souls? Do humans have free will, or are our actions determined by forces beyond our control? Can actions be both free and determined? Does God exist? How can both a good God and evil exist simultaneously? What is the nature of causality? Can an effect ever precede its cause? What is the nature of time? Is time travel possible?

And what, Socrates, is the food of the soul? Surely, I said, knowledge is the food of the soul.

—Plato

MAIN DIVISIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

Division	Questions
Metaphysics	Does the world consist only of matter, or is it made up of other basic things, such as ideas or mind? Is there a spiritual, ideal realm that exists beyond the material world? Is the mind the same thing as the body? How are mind and body related? Do people have immortal souls? Do humans have free will, or are our actions determined by forces beyond our control? Can actions be both free and determined? Does God exist? How can both a good God and evil exist simultaneously? What is the nature of causality? Can an effect ever precede its cause? What is the nature of time? Is time travel possible?
Epistemology	What is knowledge? What is truth? Is knowledge possible—can we ever know anything? Does knowledge require certainty? What are the sources of knowledge? Is experience a source of knowledge? Is mysticism or faith a source? Can we gain knowledge of the empirical world through reason alone? If we have knowledge, how much do we have? When are we justified in saying that we know something? Do we have good reasons to believe that the world exists independently of our minds? Or do our minds constitute reality?
Axiology	What makes an action right (or wrong)? What things are intrinsically good? What is the good life? What gives life meaning? What makes someone good (or bad)? What moral principles should guide our actions and choices? Which is the best moral theory? Is killing ever morally permissible? If so, why? Are moral standards objective or subjective? Is an action right merely because a culture endorses it? Does morality depend on God? What makes a society just?
Logic	What are the rules for drawing correct inferences? What are the nature and structure of deductive arguments? How can propositional or predicate logic be used to evaluate arguments? Upon what logical principles does reasoning depend? Does logic describe how the world is—or just how our minds work? Can conclusions reached through inductive logic be rationally justified?

Epistemology is the study of knowledge.

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Axiology is the study of value, including both aesthetic value and moral value. **Ethics** is the study of moral value using the methods of philosophy.

Axiology is the study of value, including both aesthetic value and moral value. The study of moral value is known as **ethics**. Ethics involves inquiries into the nature of moral judgments, virtues, values, obligations, and theories. Questions of interest: What makes an action right (or wrong)? What things are intrinsically good? What is the good life? What gives life meaning? What makes someone good (or bad)? What moral principles should guide our actions and choices? Which is the best moral

1.2 SOCRATES AND THE EXAMINED LIFE

The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.

—Bertrand Russell

4 Socrates says that a good man can never be harmed. What do you think he means by this?

The **Socratic method** is a question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth.

The chief benefit, which results from philosophy, arises in an indirect manner, and proceeds more from its secret, insensible influence, than from its immediate application.

—David Hume

There is no better way to understand and appreciate the philosophical quest for knowledge than to study the life and work of Socrates, one of philosophy's greatest practitioners and the most revered figure in its history. Socrates wrote no philosophy, but we know about his thinking and character through his famous pupil Plato, who portrayed him in several dialogues, or conversations (notably in *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, and *Apology*). For two and a half millennia Socrates has been inspiring generations by his devotion to philosophical inquiry, his relentless search for wisdom, and his determination to live according to his own high standards. As mentioned earlier, he famously said that "the unexamined life is not worth living," and he became the best example of someone living his life by that maxim. Thus, at a time when most philosophy was directed at cosmological speculations, he turned to critically examining people's basic concepts, common beliefs, and moral thinking.

For Socrates, an unexamined life is a tragedy because it results in grievous harm to the soul, a person's true self or essence. The soul is harmed by lack of knowledge—ignorance of one's own self and of the most important values in life (the good). But knowledge of these things is a mark of the soul's excellence. A clear sign that a person has an unhealthy soul is her exclusive pursuit of social status, wealth, power, and pleasure instead of the good of the soul. The good of the soul is attained only through an uncompromising search for what's true and real, through the wisdom to see what is most vital in life. Such insight comes from rational self-examination and critical questioning of facile assumptions and unsupported beliefs. To get to the truth, Socrates thought, we must go around the false certitudes of custom, tradition, and superstition and let reason be our guide. Thus he played the role of philosophical gadfly, an annoying pest to the people of Athens, prodding them to wake up and seek the wisdom within their grasp.

We know very little about Socrates' life. He spent all his days in Athens except for a term of military service in which he soldiered in the Peloponnesian War. He was married and had three sons. He spent much of his time roaming the streets of Athens, speaking with anyone who would listen. His habit was to ask people seemingly simple questions about their views on virtue, religion, justice, or the good, challenging them to think critically about their basic assumptions. This sort of question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth has become known as the **Socratic method**. Usually when Socrates used it in conversations, or dialogues, with his fellow Athenians, their views would be exposed as false or confused. The main point of the exercise for Socrates, however, was not to win arguments but to get closer to the truth. He thought people who pursued this noble aim as he did should not be embarrassed by being shown to be wrong; they should be delighted to be weaned from a false opinion. Nevertheless, the Socratic conversations often ended in the humiliation of eminent Athenians. They were enraged by Socrates, while many youths gravitated to him.

Eventually Socrates was arrested and charged with disrespecting the gods and corrupting the youth of the city. He was tried before five hundred jurors, a majority

PHILOSOPHERS AT WORK

Plato

No philosopher—with the possible exception of Aristotle—has had a deeper and more lasting effect on Western thought than Plato (c. 427–347 BCE). He was born in Athens into an influential aristocratic family and grew up during the perilous years of the Peloponnesian War, a struggle between Athens and the Peloponnesian states. He was a student and admirer of Socrates, who turned Plato's mind toward philosophy and the pursuit of wisdom. He was horrified by Socrates' execution in 399 for impiety and corruption of Athenian youth, so he left Athens and traveled widely, possibly to Sicily and Egypt. When he returned to Athens, he founded the Academy, a teaching college regarded as the first university, and devoted the rest of his life to teaching and writing philosophy. (The Academy endured for hundreds of years until it was abolished by the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian I.) The Academy's most renowned student was Aristotle, who entered the school at age seventeen and remained for twenty years.

Plato's thinking is embodied in his dialogues, twenty-five of which exist in their complete form. They were written during a span of fifty years and have been divided into three periods: early, middle, and late. The early dialogues include *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno*, and *Gorgias*. These early works portray Socrates as a brilliant and principled deflater of his contemporaries' bogus claims to knowledge. The middle dialogues include *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Theaetetus*; the late ones consist of *Critias*, *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Laws*, and others.

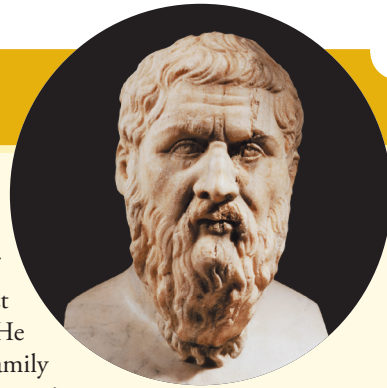


Figure 1.4 Plato (c. 427–347 BCE).

of whom voted to convict him. His sentence was death or exile; he chose death by poison rather than leave his beloved Athens. In his dialogues *Crito* and *Phaedo*, Plato recounts the events of the trial, including Socrates' address to the jurors. Socrates is portrayed as a man of brilliant intellect and unshakeable integrity who would not compromise his principles, even to escape death.

In one form or another, the Socratic method has been part of Western education for centuries. It is one of the ways that philosophy is done, a powerful procedure for applying critical thinking to many statements that seem out of reason's reach. As Socrates used it, the method typically would go like this: (1) someone poses a question about the meaning of a concept (for example, "What is justice?"); (2) Socrates' companion gives an answer; (3) Socrates raises questions about the answer, proving that the answer is inadequate; (4) to avoid the problems inherent in this answer, the companion offers a second answer; (5) steps (3) and (4) are repeated a number of



Figure 1.5 *The Death of Socrates* by Jacques-Louis David.

times, ultimately revealing that the companion does not know what he thought he knew. To Socrates, this negative outcome is actually a kind of progress. False answers are eliminated, opinions are improved, and perhaps the truth is a little closer than before.

Let's watch Socrates in action. Here is his conversation with Thrasymachus, a teacher eager to demonstrate that Socrates is not as wise as people say he is. The question is "What is justice?" and Thrasymachus insists that justice is whatever is in the interest of the strongest—that is, might makes right.

Plato, *The Republic*

Listen, then, he [Thrasymachus] said; I proclaim that justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger. And now why do you not praise me? But of course you won't.

Let me first understand you, I [Socrates] replied. Justice, as you say, is the interest of the stronger. What, Thrasymachus, is the meaning of this? You can not mean to say that because Polydamas, the pancratiast [an athlete], is stronger than we are, and finds the *eating* of beef conducive to his bodily strength, that to eat beef is therefore equally for our good who are weaker than he is, and right and just for us?

That's abominable of you, Socrates; you take the words in the sense which is most damaging to the argument.

Not at all, my good sir, I said; I am trying to understand them; and I wish that you would be a little clearer.

Well, he said, have you never heard that forms of government differ; there are tyrannies, and there are democracies, and there are aristocracies?

Yes, I know.

And the government is the ruling power in each state?

Certainly.

And the different forms of government make laws democratical, aristocratical, tyrannical, with a view to their several interests; and these laws, which are made by them for their own interests, are the justice which they deliver to their subjects, and him who transgresses them they punish as a breaker of the law and unjust. And that is what I mean when I say that in all states there is the same principle of justice, which is the interest of the government; and as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion is, that everywhere there is one principle of justice, which is the interest of the stronger.

Now I understand you, I said; and whether you are right or not I will try to discover. But let me remark, that in defining justice you have yourself used the word “interest” which you forbade me to use. It is true, however, that in your definition the words “of the stronger” are added.

A small addition, you must allow, he said.

Great or small, never mind about that: we must first inquire whether what you are saying is the truth. Now we are both agreed that justice is interest of some sort, but you go on to say “of the stronger”; about this addition I am not so sure, and must therefore consider further.

Proceed.

I will; and first tell me, Do you admit that it is just for subjects to obey their rulers?

I do.

But are the rulers of states absolutely infallible, or are they sometimes liable to err?

To be sure, he replied, they are liable to err.

Then in making their laws they may sometimes make them rightly, and sometimes not?

True.

When they make them rightly, they make them agreeably to their interest; when they are mistaken, contrary to their interest; you admit that?

Yes.

And the laws which they make must be obeyed by their subjects—and that is what you call justice?

Doubtless.

Then justice, according to your argument, is not only obedience to the interest of the stronger but the reverse?

What is that you are saying? he asked.

I am only repeating what you are saying, I believe. But let us consider: Have we not admitted that the rulers may be mistaken about their own interest in what they command, and also that to obey them is justice? Has not that been admitted?

Yes.

Then you must also have acknowledged justice not to be for the interest of the stronger, when the rulers unintentionally command things to be done which are to their own injury. For if, as you say, justice is the obedience which the subject renders to their commands, in that case, O wisest of men, is there any escape from the conclusion that the weaker are commanded to do, not what is for the interest, but what is for the injury of the stronger?¹

Astonishment is the root
of philosophy.
—Paul Tillich

5 Socrates never seems adversarial or combative in his dialogues. What effect do you think this approach has on those who enter into dialogue with him?

PHILOSOPHERS AT WORK

The Pre-Socratics

Philosophy began in ancient Greece in the sixth century BCE among thinkers who broke with age-old tradition to ponder important matters in an entirely novel way. For centuries, humans had been devising answers to fundamental questions: What is the nature of the world? What is it made of—one kind of stuff or many kinds? Does the world have an origin or has it always existed? Why is the world the way it is? What makes things happen—gods, magic, or something else? What is the reality behind the appearances of reality? Their answers were generally drawn from mythology and tradition, from old stories about the gods or from hand-me-down lore and law. But the first philosophers—called *pre-Socratics* because most of them came before Socrates (fifth century BCE)—refused to take this path. It is mostly their *way* of seeking answers about the world, rather than the answers themselves, that distinguished them and made them the first philosophers. Once this philosophical fire was lit, it spread to later thinkers in the ancient world, a period of about a thousand years, from approximately 600 BCE to around 500 CE. It was in this era that Western philosophy first established itself, defined almost all its main areas of study, and gave us philosophical heroes (most notably, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) who continue to influence our thinking on important ideas and issues.

Some of the more notable pre-Socratics:

Thales (c. 625–547 BCE). According to tradition, Thales was the first philosopher. In ancient Greece he and his new way of thinking garnered a great deal of



Figure 1.6 Thales of Miletus (c. 625–547 BCE).

respect for an odd reason: he was said to have predicted the solar eclipse of 585 BCE and to have derived his prediction without appeals to divine or otherworldly forces. On this account he has also been called the first scientist, for in those times there was no clear distinction between philosophy and science. Thales' greatest contribution to both philosophy and science was his method. He set out to look for natural—not mythic—explanations for natural phenomena, and he insisted that such accounts be as simple as possible, preferably accounting for everything by positing a single substance or element. This, as it turns out, is also the preferred approach of modern science.

Empedocles (c. 495–c. 435 BCE). In the nineteenth century Charles Darwin propounded the theory of biological evolution, explaining that evolution operates through what he called “natural selection.” The basic outlines of natural selection, however, didn’t originate with Darwin. They were first articulated in rough form twenty-five centuries ago by a pre-Socratic philosopher named Empedocles. Using observation and imagination, Empedocles maintained that animals were not created whole by a deity and placed on the earth—they evolved.

Parmenides (c. 515–450 BCE). Parmenides was the most groundbreaking and influential philosopher of the pre-Socratics. We know little about his life—not much more than that he lived in Elea (a Greek colony on the southern coast of Italy) and taught the famous master of paradoxes, Zeno. We also know that through the centuries he won the attention and admiration of several eminent thinkers, from Plato to Plutarch to Hegel. Like the other pre-Socratics, he contributed more to the shape of philosophical inquiry than to its content. Parmenides’ claim to fame rests mostly on his systematic employment of deductive argument. He seems to have been the first thinker outside the field of mathematics to reason deductively and consistently from basic premises to interesting conclusions. In the process, he cemented basic distinctions that have been essential to philosophical inquiry to this day. For one thing, he contrasted reason and the senses. He contended that knowledge of the world could be acquired only through reason, only through a deductive chain of reasoning such as he himself used. The senses, however, were unreliable.

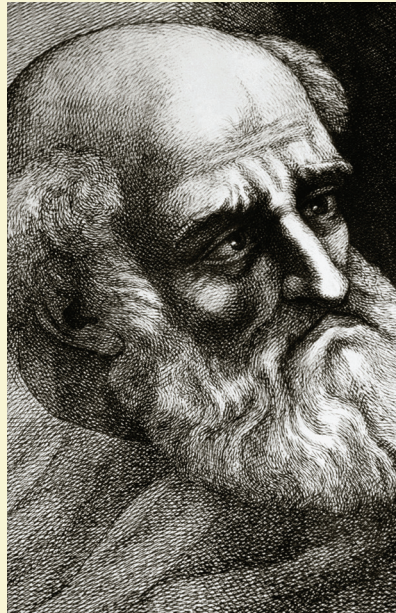


Figure 1.7 Empedocles (c. 495–c. 435 BCE).

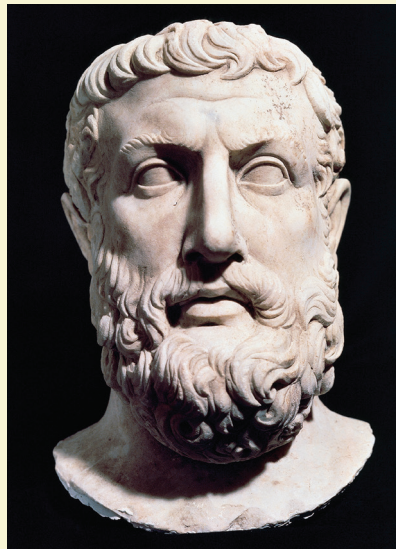


Fig. 1.8 Parmenides (c. 515–450 BCE).

Reductio ad absurdum is an argument form in which a set of statements to be proved false is assumed, and absurd or false statements are deduced from the set as a whole, showing that the original statement must be false.

Socrates uses his famous question-and-answer approach to prove that Thrasymachus's definition of justice is wrong. In particular, he applies a common form of argument called *reductio ad absurdum*. (Other argument forms are discussed in the following section.) The basic idea behind it is if you assume that a set of statements is true, and yet you can deduce a false or absurd statement from it, then the original set of statements as a whole must be false. So, in the preceding dialogue, Socrates says in effect, Let's assume that Thrasymachus is right that justice is whatever is in the interest of the powerful, and that people are just if they obey the laws made by the powerful. It is clear, however, that the powerful sometimes make mistakes and demand obedience to laws that are *not* in their best interest. So if Thrasymachus's definition of justice is correct, then it is right for people to do what is in the interest of the powerful, and it is also right to do what is *not* in the interest of the powerful. His idea of justice then leads to a logical contradiction and is therefore false.

ESSAY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SECTION 1.2

1. Could the execution of someone for saying unpopular things happen in this country? Why or why not? Are there countries in the world where such things happen regularly? Is the execution of someone for his or her offensive speech ever justified? Explain.
2. What do you think Socrates would think about modern consumer societies?
3. Socrates is often regarded as the noblest of the great philosophers. Is this opinion justified? Why or why not?
4. Write an imaginary Socratic dialogue between yourself and a friend. Imagine that your friend declares, “Everyone lies. No one ever tells the truth,” and you want to show that those statements are false.
5. Write a Socratic dialogue between two fictional characters. Imagine that the opening statement is, “Courtesy to others is always a cynical attempt to serve your own interests. Respect for people has nothing to do with courtesy.”

1.3 THINKING PHILOSOPHICALLY

As we have seen, to think philosophically is to bring your powers of critical reasoning to bear on fundamental questions. When you do this, you are usually clarifying the meaning of concepts, constructing and evaluating philosophical theories, or devising and evaluating logical arguments. This latter task constitutes the principal labor of philosophy. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and other great thinkers do not deliver their philosophical insights to us without argument, as if we are automatically to accept their views with no questions asked. Philosophers provide *reasons* for thinking their ideas are plausible—that is, they give us arguments. And if we believe what

they say, it should be because there are good reasons for doing so. Likewise, if we expect intelligent people to accept *our* philosophical views, we must argue our case. Since the philosophy we read will most likely contain arguments, our understanding of the text will hang on our ability to identify and understand those arguments.

Reasons and Arguments

As you might have guessed, the term *argument* does not refer to heated disagreements or emotional squabbles. An **argument** is a group of statements in which one of them is meant to be supported by the others. A **statement** (or **claim**) is an assertion that something is or is not the case and is therefore the kind of utterance that is either true or false. In an argument, the statement being supported is the **conclusion**, and the statements supporting the conclusion are the **premises**. The premises are meant to provide reasons for believing that the conclusion is true. A good argument gives us good reasons for accepting a conclusion; a bad argument fails to provide good reasons. In philosophy—and in any other kind of rational inquiry—accepting a conclusion (statement) without good reasons is an elementary mistake in reasoning. Believing a statement without good reasons is a recipe for error; believing a statement for good reasons increases your chances of uncovering the truth.

When we do philosophy, then, we are likely at some point to be grappling with arguments—we are trying to either (1) devise an argument to support a statement or (2) evaluate an argument to see if there really are good reasons for accepting its conclusion.

Note that *argument* in the sense used here is not synonymous with *persuasion*. An argument provides us with reasons for accepting a claim; it is an attempted “proof” for an assertion. But persuasion does not necessarily involve giving any reasons at all for accepting a claim. To persuade is to influence people’s opinions, which can be accomplished by offering a good argument but also by misleading with logical fallacies, exploiting emotions and prejudices, dazzling with rhetorical gimmicks, hiding or distorting the facts, threatening or coercing people—the list is long. Good arguments prove something whether or not they persuade. Persuasive ploys can change minds but do not necessarily prove anything.

Now consider these two simple arguments:

Argument 1

It's wrong to take the life of an innocent person.
Abortion takes the life of an innocent person.
Therefore abortion is wrong.

Argument 2

God does not exist. After all, most college students believe that that is the case.

An **argument** is a statement coupled with other statements that are meant to support that statement. A **statement (claim)** is an assertion that something is or is not the case and is therefore the kind of utterance that is either true or false. A **conclusion** is the statement being supported. A **premise** is a statement supporting the conclusion.



Figure 1.9 Hitler was a master persuader, relying not on good arguments but on emotional rhetoric. How many people today would be persuaded by a contemporary politician with Hitler's rhetorical talents?



PHILOSOPHY LAB

Do you live an examined life? The following statements express some fundamental beliefs—beliefs that countless people have but may never have thought much about. Read each statement and select the ones that you sincerely believe. Then try to recall if you have ever seriously questioned these beliefs. (Passing thoughts and idle revelry do not count.) Be honest. This little experiment could be very revealing—and helpful as you think about your life and values.

1. God exists and watches over me.
2. God sometimes answers prayers.
3. There is a heaven.
4. I have both a body and an immortal soul.
5. My emotions are not under my control; they just happen.
6. It is wrong to criticize other cultures.
7. It is wrong to judge other people's actions.
8. The moral principles that I was raised to believe are the right ones.
9. Political conservatives are wrong about most issues.
10. Political liberals are wrong about most issues.
11. I make free choices; all my decisions are up to me.
12. I can come to know some things by faith alone.
13. My emotions are my best guide to what is morally right or wrong.
14. People are basically bad.
15. People are basically good.

Philosophy asks the simple question, what is it all about?

—Alfred North Whitehead

In Argument 1, the conclusion is “abortion is wrong,” and it is backed by two premises: “It’s wrong to take the life of an innocent person” and “Abortion takes the life of an innocent person.” In Argument 2, the conclusion is “God does not exist,” which is supported by the premise “After all, most college students believe that that is the case.” Despite the differences between these two passages (differences in content, the number of premises, and the order of their parts), they are both arguments because they exemplify basic argument structure: a conclusion supported by at least one premise.

Though the components of an argument seem clear enough, people often fail to distinguish between arguments and strong statements that contain no arguments at all. Suppose we change Argument 1 into this:

Abortion is wrong. I can't believe how many people think it's morally okay. The world is insane.

Now there is no argument, just an expression of exasperation or anger. There are no statements giving us reasons to believe a conclusion. What we have are some unsupported assertions that may merely *appear* to make a case. If we ignore the distinction between genuine arguments and nonargumentative material, critical reasoning is undone.

The simplest way to locate an argument is to *find its conclusion first, then its premises*. Zeroing in on conclusions and premises can be a lot easier if you keep an eye out for *indicator words*. Indicator words often tag along with arguments and indicate that a conclusion or premise may be nearby.

Here are a few conclusion indicator words:

consequently	as a result
thus	hence
therefore	so
it follows that	which means that

Here are some premise indicator words:

in view of the fact	assuming that
because	since
due to the fact that	for
inasmuch as	given that

Just remember that indicator words do not *guarantee* the presence of conclusions and premises. They are simply telltale signs.

Assuming we can recognize an argument when we see it, how can we tell if it is a good one? Fortunately, the general criteria for judging the merits of an argument are simple and clear. A good argument—one that gives us good reasons for believing a claim—must have (1) solid logic and (2) true premises. Requirement (1) means that the conclusion should follow logically from the premises, that there must be a proper logical connection between the supporting statements and the statement supported. Requirement (2) says that what the premises assert must in fact be the case. An argument that fails in either respect is a bad argument.

There are two basic kinds of arguments—deductive and inductive—and our two requirements hold for both of them, even though the logical connections in each type are distinct. **Deductive arguments** are intended to give *logically conclusive* support to their conclusions so that if the premises are true, the conclusion absolutely must be true. Argument 1 is a deductive argument and is therefore supposed to be constructed so that if the two premises are true, its conclusion cannot possibly be false. Here it is with its structure laid bare:

Argument 1

1. It's wrong to take the life of an innocent person.
2. Abortion takes the life of an innocent person.
3. Therefore, abortion is wrong.

Do you see that, given the form or structure of this argument, if the premises are true, then the conclusion *has to be true*? It would be very strange—illogical, in fact—to agree that the two premises are true but that the conclusion is false.

One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes . . . and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.
—Eleanor Roosevelt

6 Recall some statements that you have heard or read in which strong assertions were made but no argument was presented. Did the assertions prove anything? What was your reaction at the time? Were you persuaded or impressed by them?

A deductive argument is an argument intended to give logically conclusive support to its conclusion.

Now look at this one:

Argument 3

1. All dogs are mammals.
2. Rex is a dog.
3. Therefore, Rex is a mammal.

Philosophy, when superficially studied, excites doubt; when thoroughly explored, it dispels it.

—Francis Bacon

Again, there is no way for the premises to be true while the conclusion is false. The deductive form of the argument guarantees this.

So a deductive argument is intended to have this sort of airtight structure. If it actually does have this structure, it is said to be *valid*. Argument 1 is deductive because it is intended to provide logically conclusive support to its conclusion. It is valid because, as a matter of fact, it does offer this kind of support. A deductive argument that fails to provide conclusive support to its conclusion is said to be *invalid*. In such an argument, it is possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. Argument 3 is intended to have a deductive form, and because it actually does have this form, the argument is also valid.

An elementary fact about deductive arguments is that their validity (or lack thereof) is a *separate issue* from the truth of the premises. Validity is a structural matter, depending on how an argument is put together. Truth concerns the nature of the claims made in the premises and conclusion. A deductive argument is supposed to be built so that *if* the premises are true, the conclusion must be true—but in a particular case, the premises might *not* be true. A valid argument can have true or false premises and a true or false conclusion. (By definition, of course, it cannot have true premises and a false conclusion.) In any case, being invalid or having false premises dooms a deductive argument.

An **inductive argument** is an argument intended to give probable support to its conclusion.

Inductive arguments are supposed to give *probable* support to their conclusions. Unlike deductive arguments, they are not designed to support their conclusions decisively. They can establish only that, if their premises are true, their conclusions are probably true (more likely to be true than not). Argument 2 is an inductive argument meant to demonstrate the probable truth that “God does not exist.” Like all inductive arguments (and unlike deductive ones), it can have true premises and a false conclusion. So it’s possible for the sole premise—“After all, most college students believe that that is the case”—to be true while the conclusion is false.

If inductive arguments succeed in lending very probable support to their conclusions, they are said to be *strong*. Strong arguments are such that if their premises are true, their conclusions are very probably true. If they fail to provide this probable support, they are termed *weak*. Argument 2 is a weak argument because its premise, even if true, does not show that more likely than not God does not exist. What college students (or any other group) believe about God does not constitute good evidence for or against God’s existence.

But consider this inductive argument:

Argument 4

1. Eighty-five percent of the students at this university are Republicans.
2. Sonia is a student at this university.
3. Therefore, Sonia is probably a Republican.

PHILOSOPHERS AT WORK

Philosophy Takes on Racism

Some people have no patience for philosophy's preoccupation with conceptual analysis, fine distinctions, and argument niceties—the fussy murmurings of pedants and bores, they might say. But this attitude underestimates the power of philosophical precision and the good work it does on some of the weightiest issues of our time.

Consider the issue of racism, a monstrous evil to dispel from society and often a hard topic to discuss without raising voices and elevating blood pressures. What can philosophy possibly say about this issue that could be helpful or enlightening?

Apparently, a great deal. The distinguished philosopher Lawrence Blum, author of the book *I'm Not a Racist But . . .*, draws attention to the “conceptual inflation” of the terms *racist* and *racism*. He and other scholars observe that the words are so overused and misapplied that they are losing their moral power to indict and to shame. Their reckless use causes misunderstanding and resentment. Blum says:

Some feel that the word [racist] is thrown around so much that anything involving “race” that someone does not like is liable to castigation as “racist.” . . . A local newspaper called certain blacks “racist” for criticizing other blacks who supported a white over a black candidate for mayor. A white girl in Virginia said that it was “racist” for an African American teacher in her school to wear African attire. . . . Merely mentioning someone’s race (or racial designation), using the word “Oriental” for Asians without recognizing its origins and its capacity for insult, or socializing only with members of one’s own racial group are called “racist.”*

Blum cuts through popular confusion about racism by offering a plausible definition of the word. All forms of racism, past and present, he says, involve two key elements: (1) an attitude or belief that another race is *inferior* or (2) *antipathy* (hatred, hostility) toward that race.

Inferiorization is linked to historical racist doctrine and racist social systems. Slavery, segregation, imperialism, apartheid, and Nazism all treated certain groups as inferior to other groups. . . .

An equally prevalent argument form is *modus tollens* (or denying the consequent). For example:

Argument 6

1. If the dose is low, then the healing is slow.
2. The healing is not slow.
3. Therefore, the dose is not low.

Though race-based antipathy is less related to the original concept of “racism,” today the term unequivocally encompasses racial bigotry, hostility, and hatred. Indeed, the racial bigot is many people’s paradigm image of a “racist.” . . .

Historical systems of racism did of course inevitably involve racial antipathy as well as inferiorization. Hatred of Jews was central to Nazi philosophy; and it is impossible to understand American racism without seeing hostility to blacks and Native Americans as integral to the nexus of attitudes and emotions that shored up slavery and segregation.[†]

If racism always involves either inferiorization or antipathy, as Blum argues, then many actions that people call racist actually may be something else.

Not every instance of racial conflict, insensitivity, discomfort, miscommunication, exclusion, injustice, or ignorance should be called “racist.” Not all *racial* incidents are *racist* incidents. . . . We need a more varied and nuanced moral vocabulary for talking about the domain of race. . . . All forms of racial ills should elicit concern from responsible individuals. If someone displays racial insensitivity, but not racism, people should be able to see that for what it is.⁸

Blum is careful to point out that we can't conclude from this "conceptual inflation" that racism and inequality have been overstated. Indirect or veiled racism, he says, is likely worse than we might think.

The point here is not that Blum is right about racism (he may or may not be), but that philosophical thinking like this is powerful and can yield very useful insights into real problems.

* Lawrence Blum, *I'm Not a Racist But . . . : The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 1–2.

[†] Blum, 8.

[‡] Blum, 9.

1. If p , then q .
2. Not q .
3. Therefore, not p .

Modus tollens is also a valid form, and any argument using this form must also be valid.

We do not know how many formatted disks from the computer store are in the sample mentioned in Argument 9. But if the number is several dozen and the disks were bought over a period of weeks or months, the sample is probably sufficiently large and representative. If so, the argument is strong. Likewise, in Argument 10 we don't know the size of the sample or how it was obtained. But if the sample was taken from all the likely spots in the sanctuary where hawks live, and if several hawks were observed in each location, the sample is probably adequate—and the argument is strong. In Argument 11, if the sample consists of a handful of Bostonians interviewed on a few street corners, the sample is definitely inadequate and the argument is weak. But if the sample consists of several hundred people, and if every member of the whole group has an equal chance of being included in the sample, then the sample would be good enough to allow us to accurately generalize about the whole population. Typically, selecting such a sample of a large population is done by professional polling organizations.

In the argument form known as *analogical induction* (or argument by analogy), we reason in this fashion: Two or more things are similar in several ways; therefore, they are probably similar in one further way. Consider this argument:

Argument 12

Humans can walk upright, use simple tools, learn new skills, and devise deductive arguments.

Chimpanzees can walk upright, use simple tools, and learn new skills.

Therefore, chimpanzees can probably devise deductive arguments.

This argument says that because chimpanzees are similar to humans in several respects, they probably are similar to humans in one further respect.

Here's an argument by analogy that has become a classic in philosophy:

Argument 13

A watch is a complex mechanism with many parts that seem arranged to achieve a specific purpose—a purpose chosen by the watch’s designer.

In similar fashion, the universe is a complex mechanism with many parts that seem arranged to achieve a specific purpose.

Therefore, the universe must also have a designer.

We can represent the form of an argument by analogy in this way:

X has properties P₁, P₂, P₃, plus the property P₄.

Y has properties P₁, P₂, and P₃.

Therefore, Y probably has property P₄.



Figure 1.10 How much is a watch like the universe? Everything depends on the relevant similarities and differences.

The strength of an analogical induction depends on the relevant similarities between the two things compared. The more relevant similarities there are, the greater the probability that the conclusion is true. In Argument 12, several similarities are noted. But there are some unmentioned dissimilarities. The brain of a chimpanzee is smaller and more primitive than that of a human, a difference that probably inhibits higher intellectual functions such as logical argument. Argument 12, then, is weak. A common response to Argument 13 is that the argument is weak because although the universe resembles a watch in some ways, in other ways it does not resemble a watch. Specifically, the universe also resembles a living thing.

The third type of inductive argument is known as *inference to the best explanation* (or abduction), a kind of reasoning that we all use daily and that is at the heart of scientific investigations. Recall that an argument gives us reasons for believing *that* something is the case. An *explanation*, on the other hand, states *how* or *why* something is the case. It attempts to clarify or elucidate, not offer proof. For example:

1. Megan definitely understood the material, for she could answer every question on the test.
2. Megan understood the material because she has a good memory.

Sentence 1 is an argument. The conclusion is “Megan definitely understood the material,” and the reason (premise) given for believing that the conclusion is true is “for she could answer every question on the test.” Sentence 2, though, is an explanation. It does not try to present reasons for believing something; it has nothing to prove. Instead, it tries to show why something is the way it is (why Megan understood the material). Sentence 2 assumes that Megan understood the material then tries to explain why. Such explanations play a crucial role in inference to the best explanation.

In inference to the best explanation, we begin with premises about a phenomenon or state of affairs to be explained. Then we reason from those premises to an explanation for that state of affairs. We try to produce not just any old explanation, but the best explanation among several possibilities. The best explanation is the one most likely to be true. The conclusion of the argument is that the preferred explanation is indeed probably true. For example:

Argument 14

Tariq flunked his philosophy course.

The best explanation for his failure is that he didn’t read the material.

Therefore, he probably didn’t read the material.

Argument 15

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the defendant was found with the murder weapon in his hand, blood on his clothes, and the victim’s wallet in his pocket. We have an eyewitness putting the defendant at the scene of the crime. The best explanation for all these facts is that the defendant committed the murder. There can be very little doubt—he’s guilty.

The object of studying philosophy is to know one’s own mind, not other people’s.

—Dean Inge

The true function of philosophy is to educate us in the principles of reasoning and not to put an end to further reasoning by the introduction of fixed conclusions.

—George Henry Lewes

Here's the form of inference to the best explanation:

Phenomenon Q .

E provides the best explanation for Q .

Therefore, it is probable that E is true.

In any argument of this pattern, if the explanation given is really the best, then the argument is inductively strong. If the explanation is not the best, the argument is inductively weak. If the premises of the strong argument are true, then the argument is cogent. If the argument is cogent, then we have good reason to believe that the conclusion is true.

The biggest challenge in using inference to the best explanation is determining which explanation is the best. Sometimes this feat is easy. If our car has a flat tire, we may quickly uncover the best explanation for such a state of affairs. If we see a nail sticking out of the flat and there is no obvious evidence of tampering or of any other extraordinary cause (that is, there are no good alternative explanations), we may safely conclude that the best explanation is that a nail punctured the tire.

In more complicated situations, we may need to do what scientists do to evaluate explanations, or theories—use special criteria to sort through the possibilities. Scientists call these standards the *criteria of adequacy*. Despite this fancy name, these criteria are basically just common sense, standards that you have probably used yourself.

One of these criteria is called *conservatism*. This criterion says that, all things being equal, the best explanation or theory is the one that fits best with what is already known or established. For example, if a friend of yours says—in all seriousness—that she can fly to the moon without using any kind of rocket or spaceship, you probably wouldn't believe her (and might even think that she needed psychiatric help). Your reasons for doubting her would probably rest on the criterion of conservatism—that what she says conflicts with everything science knows about spaceflight, human anatomy, aerodynamics, laws of nature, and much more. It is logically possible that she really can fly to the moon, but her claim's lack of conservatism (the fact that it conflicts with so much of what we already know about the world) casts serious doubt on it.

Here is another useful criterion for judging the worth of explanations: *simplicity*. Other things being equal, the best explanation is the one that is the simplest—that is, the one that rests on the fewest assumptions. The theory making the fewest assumptions is less likely to be false because there are fewer ways for it to go wrong. In the example about the flat tire, one possible (but strange) explanation is that space aliens punctured the tire. You probably wouldn't put much credence in this explanation because you would have to assume too many unknown entities and processes—namely, space aliens who have come from who-knows-where using who-knows-what methods to move about and puncture your tires. The nail-in-the-tire theory is much simpler (it assumes no unknown entities or processes) and is therefore much more likely to be true.

When you are carefully reading an argument (whether in an essay or some other context), you will be just as interested in whether the premises are true as in whether the conclusion follows from the premises. If the writer is conscientious, he or she

will try to ensure that each premise is either well supported or in no need of support (because the premise is obvious or agreed to by all parties). The needed support will come from the citing of examples, statistics, research, expert opinion, and other kinds of evidence or reasons. This arrangement means that each premise of the primary argument may be a conclusion supported in turn by premises citing evidence or reasons. In any case, you as the reader will have to evaluate carefully the truth of all premises and the support behind them.

Reading Philosophy

Unfortunately, arguments in philosophical essays rarely come neatly labeled so you can find and evaluate them. You have to do that work yourself, a task that requires careful reading and thinking. The process can be challenging because in the real world, arguments can be simple or complex, clearly stated or perplexing, and apparent or hidden. This is true for philosophical essays as well as for any other kind of writing that contains arguments. In some philosophical prose, the relationship between the conclusion (or conclusions) and the premises can be complicated, and even good arguments can be surrounded by material irrelevant to the arguments at hand. The remedy for these difficulties is instructive examples and plenty of practice, some of which you can get in this chapter.

Let's begin by identifying and analyzing the argument in the following passage. The issue is whether humans have free will or are compelled by forces beyond their control to act as they do (a topic we take up in Chapter 5). The statements are numbered for ease of reference.

(1) The famous trial lawyer Clarence Darrow (1857–1938) made a name for himself by using the “determinism defense” to get his clients acquitted of serious crimes. (2) The crux of this approach is the idea that humans are not really responsible for anything they do because they cannot choose freely—they are “determined,” predestined, if you will, by nature (or God) to be the way they are. (3) So in a sense, Darrow says, humans are like wind-up toys with no control over any action or decision. (4) They have no free will. (5) Remember that Darrow was a renowned agnostic who was skeptical of all religious claims. (6) But Darrow is wrong about human free will for two reasons. (7) First, in our everyday moral life, our own commonsense experience suggests that sometimes people are free to make moral decisions. (8) We should not abandon what our commonsense experience tells us without good reason—and (9) Darrow has given us no good reason. (10) Second, Darrow's determinism is not confirmed by science, as he claims—but actually conflicts with science. (11) Modern science says that there are many things (at the subatomic level of matter) that are not determined at all: (12) they just happen.

Indicator words are scarce in this argument, unless you count the words “first” and “second” as signifying premises. But the conclusion is not hard to find; it's



Figure 1.11 Clarence Darrow (1857–1938).

Statement 6: “Darrow is wrong about human free will for two reasons.” Locating the conclusion enables us to see that some statements (Statements 1 through 4) are neither conclusion nor premises; they are just background information on Darrow’s views. Most argumentative essays contain some supplemental information like this. Statement 5 is irrelevant to the argument; Darrow’s agnosticism has no logical connection to the premises or conclusion. Statement 12 is just a rewording of Statement 11. After this elimination process, only the following premises and conclusion (Statement 6) remain:

- (6) But Darrow is wrong about human free will for two reasons.
 - (7) First, in our everyday moral life, our own common-sense experience suggests that sometimes people are free to make moral decisions.
 - (8) We should not abandon what our commonsense experience tells us without good reason.
- w has given us no good reason.
- ow's determinism is not confirmed by science, as he ns—but actually conflicts with science.
- ern science says that there are many things (at the subatomic that are not determined at all.

Statements 7 through 11 are the premises. They are all meant to provide support to Statement 6, but their support is of unequal weight. Statement 10 gives independent support to the conclusion without the help of any other premises, so it is an *independent* premise. We can say the same thing about Statement 11; it too is an independent premise. But notice that Statements 7, 8, and 9 are *dependent* premises supporting the conclusion. That is, taken separately, they are weak, but together they constitute a plausible reason for accepting Statement 6. Statement 10 directly supports the conclusion and in turn is supported by Premise 11.

Now take a look at this passage:

- (1) As the Islamic clerics cling to power in Iran, students there are agitating for greater freedom and less suppression of views that the clerics dislike. (2) Even though ultimate power in Iran rests with the mullahs, it is not at all certain where the nation is headed. Here's a radical suggestion: (3) the Islamic republic in Iran will fall within the next five years. Why do I say this? (4) Because the majority of Iranians are in favor of democratic reforms, (5) and no regime can stand for very long when citizens are demanding access to the political process. (6) Also, Iran today is a mirror image of the Soviet Union before it broke apart—there's widespread dissatisfaction and dissent at a time when the regime seems to be trying to hold the people's loyalty.

Philosophy is a kind of journey, ever learning yet never arriving at the ideal perfection of truth.

—Albert Pike

may encounter several premises with their accompanying analyses, clarifications, explanations, and examples. You may even run into a whole chain of arguments. In the end, if you have read well and the writer has written well, you are left not with a new set of data or a story ending, but a realization—maybe even a revelation—that a conclusion is, or is not, worthy of belief.

The best way to learn how to read philosophy well is to read philosophy often. You will probably get plenty of chances to do that in your current philosophy course. Having a few rules to guide you in your reading, however, may help shorten the learning curve. As you read, keep the following in mind.

1. Approach the text with an open mind. If you are studying philosophy for the first time, you are likely—at least at first—to find a good bit of the material difficult, strange, or exasperating, sometimes all three at once. That’s normal. Philosophy is an exploration of the rugged frontiers of our knowledge of fundamental things, so much of this new territory is likely to seem daunting or unfamiliar. There’s also an excellent chance that your first visits to this terrain will be vexing, perhaps even infuriating, because you may sometimes disagree with what you read.

There is no shame in experiencing any of these reactions. They come with the territory. But if you are to make any headway in philosophy, you need to try your best to counteract these attitudes and feelings. Remember, philosophy at its best is a fair-minded, fearless search for truth. Anything that interferes with this noble quest must be overcome and cast aside.

Avoid making a judgment about an essay's ideas or arguments until you fully understand them and have fairly considered them. Make sure you are not reading with the intent to prove the conclusions false (or true). Be open to the possibility that the essay could give you good reasons to change your mind about something.

Try to maintain a neutral attitude toward the writer, presuming neither that she is right nor wrong, neither sinner nor saint. Don't assume that everything a renowned philosopher says must be true, and don't presuppose that everything a philosopher you dislike says must be false. Give the writer the same attention and respect that you would give a friend who is discussing a serious issue with you.

If you are reading the work of a famous philosopher and you find yourself thinking that his or her ideas are obviously silly or ridiculous, think again. The odds are good that you are misunderstanding what you read. It is wiser to assume that the text offers something of value (even if you disagree with it) and that you need to read more carefully.

2. Read actively and critically. Philosophical reading is intense. It cannot be rushed. It cannot be crammed. It cannot be done while your mind is on automatic pilot.

Philosophical reading is *active* reading. Instead of reading just to get through a piece of writing, you must take your time and ask yourself what key terms and passages mean, how the argument is structured, what the central thesis is, where the premises are, how certain key ideas are related, whether the main conclusion conflicts with propositions you know are true, even how the material compares with other philosophical writing on the same subject.

Small amounts of philosophy lead to atheism, but larger amounts bring us back to God.

—Francis Bacon

Philosophical reading is also *critical* reading. In critical reading, you ask not just what something means but whether a statement is true and if the reasoning is solid. You ask if the conclusion really follows from the premises, whether the premises are true, if the analysis of a term really makes sense, if an argument has been overlooked, if an analogy is weak, whether there are counterexamples to key claims, and whether the claims agree with other things you have good reason to believe.

3. Identify the conclusion first, then the premises. When you first begin reading philosophical texts, they may seem to you like dark thickets of propositions into which you may not enter without losing your way. But your situation is really not that bad. In argumentative writing (the kind you are most likely to encounter in philosophy), you can depend on there being, well, an argument, a conclusion backed by premises. There could, of course, be several arguments that support the main argument, and the arguments could be complex, but these sets of conclusion-plus-premises will all serve as recognizable guideposts. If you want to penetrate the thicket, then, you must first identify the argument (or arguments). And the key to doing that is to find the conclusion first, then look for the premises.

When you find the main conclusion, you thereby identify the main point of the essay, and you then have the number-one clue to the function of all the rest of the text. Once you uncover the point that the writer is trying to prove, finding the supporting premises becomes much easier. And when you isolate the premises, locating the text that explains and amplifies the premises gets easier too. Therefore, the first—and most important—question you can ask about a philosophical essay is, “What claim is the writer trying to prove?”

4. Outline, paraphrase, or summarize the argument. Understanding an essay's argument is so important that testing whether you really "get it" is crucial. You can test your grasp of the argument by outlining, paraphrasing, or summarizing it. If you can lay out an argument's premises and conclusion in an outline, or if you can accurately paraphrase or summarize the argument, you probably have a pretty good understanding of it. Very often students who think they comprehend an argument are surprised to see that they cannot devise an adequate outline or summary of it. Such failures suggest that, although outlining, paraphrasing, or summarizing may seem to some to be unnecessary, they are not—at least not to those who are new to philosophy.

5. Evaluate the argument and formulate a tentative judgment. When you read philosophy, understanding it is just the first step. You also must do something that many beginners find both difficult and alien: you must make an informed judgment about what you read. Simply reiterating what the writer has said will not do. Your judgment is what matters here. Mainly, this judgment is your evaluation of the argument presented by the writer—an assessment of (1) whether the conclusion follows from the premises and (2) whether the premises are true. Only when the answer to both of these questions is yes can you say that the conclusion of the argument is worthy of acceptance. This kind of evaluation is precisely what your instructor expects when she asks you to critique an argumentative essay in philosophy.

Fallacious Reasoning

You can become more proficient in reading and writing philosophy if you know how to identify fallacies when you see them. **Fallacies** are common but bad arguments. They are defective arguments that appear so often in writing and speech that philosophers have given them names and offered instructions on how to recognize and avoid them.

Many fallacies are not just failed arguments—they are also deceptively plausible appeals. They can easily appear sound or cogent, misleading the reader. Their potential for slipperiness is another good reason to study fallacies. The best way to avoid being taken in by them is to study them until you can consistently pick them out of any random selection of prose. Here are some of the more prevalent ones.

A **fallacy** is a common but bad argument.

This is patently absurd; but whoever wishes to become a philosopher must learn not to be frightened by absurdities.

—Bertrand Russell

Straw Man

The **straw man** fallacy is the misrepresentation of a person's views so they can be more easily attacked or dismissed. Let's say you argue that the war in Afghanistan is too costly in lives and money, and your opponent replies this way:

My adversary argues that the war in Afghanistan is much too difficult for the United States, and that we ought to, in effect, cut and run while we can. But why must we take the coward's way out?

Thus, your point has been distorted, made to look more extreme or radical than it really is; it is now an easy target. The notion that we ought to “cut and run” or “take the coward’s way out” *does not follow* from the statement that the war in Afghanistan is too costly.

The straw man kind of distortion, of course, proves nothing, though many people fall for it every day. This fallacy is probably the most common type of fallacious reasoning used in politics. It is also popular in many other kinds of argumentation—including student philosophy papers.

The **straw man** is the fallacy of misrepresenting a person's views so they can be more easily attacked or dismissed.

Appeal to the Person

Closely related to the straw man fallacy is **appeal to the person** (also known as the *ad hominem* fallacy). Appeal to the person is the rejecting of a statement on the grounds that it comes from a particular person, not because the statement, or claim, itself is false or dubious. For example:

You can safely discard anything that Susan has to say about government. She's a dyed-in-the-wool socialist.

Johnson argues that our current welfare system is defective. But don't listen to him—he's a conservative.

Ad hominem arguments often creep into student philosophy papers. Part of the reason is that some appeals to the person are not so obvious. For example:

Swinburne's cosmological argument is a serious attempt to show that God is the best explanation for the existence of the universe.

Appeal to the person is the fallacy of rejecting a statement on the grounds that it comes from a particular person, not because the statement, or claim, itself is false or dubious.

PHILOSOPHY NOW

Philosophy in the News

Very often, behind the headlines we see every day there lurks a deeper philosophical issue. And when people reflect on the stories, they frequently find themselves pondering fundamental questions and beliefs. Philosophy is hard to avoid. Here is a sampling of possible headlines paired with the philosophical questions they raise.

Tea Party Rejects Entitlement and Welfare Programs	Is libertarianism a viable political theory?
Man Claims Out-of-Body Experience	Can the mind (soul) exist independently of the body?
Residents Demand Death Penalty for Child Killer	Is capital punishment ever morally permissible?
Christopher Hitchens Book Says “God Is Not Great”	Does God exist? Does religion do more harm than good?
Japan Tsunami Kills Thousands	Does natural evil show that there is no God?
Scientists Say “Big Bang” Uncaused	Is Aquinas’s first-cause argument doomed?
Attorneys Say Hormones Caused Woman to Kill	Do we have free will? Are all our actions caused by factors beyond our control?
Stem Cell Research Banned	Is the fetus a person with full moral rights from the moment of conception?
China Says It Must Be Judged by Chinese Morality	Is morality relative to cultures? Does “human rights” apply only to the West?

Are most perennial debates in politics really about fundamental philosophical issues that are never discussed? Could these issues be resolved if people, in good faith, applied the Socratic method?

However, he is a well-known theist, and this fact raises some doubts about the strength of his case.

Dennett argues from the materialist standpoint, so he begins with a bias that we need to take into account.

Some of the strongest arguments against the death penalty come from a few people who are actually on death row. They obviously have a vested interest in showing that capital punishment is morally wrong. We therefore are forced to take their arguments—however convincing—with a grain of salt.

support the claim has from good reasons. Large groups of people have been—and are—wrong about many things. Many people once believed that the Earth is flat, mermaids are real, and human sacrifices help crops grow. They were wrong.

Remember, however, that the number of people who accept a claim *can* be relevant to its truth if the people happen to be experts. Twenty professional astronomers who predict an eclipse are more reliable than one hundred nonexperts who swear that no such eclipse will occur.

Genetic Fallacy

A play like the appeal to the person is the **genetic fallacy**—arguing that a statement can be judged true or false based on its source. In an appeal to the person, someone's character or circumstance is thought to tell the tale. In the genetic fallacy, the truth of a statement is supposed to depend on origins other than an individual—organizations, political platforms, groups, schools of thought, even exceptional states of mind (like dreams and intuitions). Look:

That new military reform idea has gotta be bunk. It comes from a liberal think tank.

At the city council meeting Hernando said that he had a plan to curb the number of car crashes on Highway 19. But you can bet that whatever it is, it's half-baked—he said the plan came to him when he was stoned on marijuana.

The U.S. Senate is considering a proposal to reform affirmative action, but you know their ideas must be ridiculous. What do they know about the rights of the disadvantaged? They're a bunch of rich, white guys.

Equivocation

The fallacy of **equivocation** is assigning two different meanings to the same significant word in an argument. The word is used in one sense in a premise and in a different sense in another place in the argument. The switch in meaning can deceive the reader and disrupt the argument, rendering it invalid or weaker than it would be otherwise. Here's a classic example:

Only man is rational.

No woman is a man.

Therefore, no woman is rational.

And one other:

You are a bad writer.

If you are a bad writer, then you are a bad boy.

Therefore, you are a bad boy.

The first argument equivocates on the word *man*. In the first premise, *man* means humankind; in the second, male. Thus, the argument seems to prove that women

Genetic fallacy is the fallacy of arguing that a statement can be judged true or false based on its source.

There are more things in
heaven and earth, Horatio,
than are dreamt of in your
philosophy.
—William Shakespeare

Equivocation is the fallacy of assigning two different meanings to the same significant word in an argument.

are not rational. You can see the trick better if you assign the same meaning to both instances of *man*. Like this:

Only humans are rational.

No woman is a human.

Therefore, no woman is rational.

In the second argument, the equivocal term is *bad*. In the first premise, *bad* means incompetent; in the second, immoral.

Appeal to Ignorance

As its name implies, this fallacy tries to prove something by appealing to what we *don't* know. The **appeal to ignorance** is arguing that either (1) a claim is true because it hasn't been proven false or (2) a claim is false because it hasn't been proven true. For example:

Try as they may, scientists have never been able to disprove the existence of an afterlife. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that there is in fact an afterlife.

Super Green Algae can cure cancer. No scientific study has ever shown that it does not work.

No one has ever shown that ESP (extrasensory perception) is real.
Therefore, it does not exist.

There is no evidence that people on welfare are hardworking and responsible. Therefore, they are not hardworking and responsible.

The first two arguments try to prove a claim by pointing out that it hasn't been proven false. The second two try to prove that a claim is false because it hasn't been proven true. Both kinds of arguments are bogus because they assume that a lack of evidence proves something. A lack of evidence, however, can prove nothing. Being ignorant of the facts does not enlighten us.

Notice that if a lack of evidence could prove something, then you could prove just about anything you wanted. You could reason, for instance, that since no one can prove that horses *can't* fly, horses must be able to fly. Since no one can disprove that you possess supernatural powers, you must possess supernatural powers.

False Dilemma

In a dilemma, you are forced to choose between two unattractive possibilities. The fallacy of **false dilemma** is arguing erroneously that since there are only two alternatives to choose from and one of them is unacceptable, the other one must be true. Consider these:

You have to listen to reason. Either you must sell your car to pay your rent, or your landlord will throw you out on the street. You obviously aren't going to sell your car, so you will be evicted.

Appeal to ignorance is the fallacy of arguing that either (1) a claim is true because it hasn't been proven false or (2) a claim is false because it hasn't been proven true.

False dilemma is the fallacy of arguing erroneously that since there are only two alternatives to choose from and one of them is unacceptable, the other one must be true.

Philosophy is at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits.
—William James

You have to face the hard facts about the war on drugs. Either we must spend billions of dollars to increase military and law enforcement operations against drug cartels, or we must legalize all drugs. We obviously are not going to legalize all drugs, so we have to spend billions on anti-cartel operations.

The first argument says that there are only two choices to consider: either sell your car or get evicted, and since you will not sell your car, you will get evicted. This argument is fallacious because (presumably) the first premise is false—there seem to be more than just two alternatives here. You could get a job, borrow money from a friend, or sell your DVD player and TV. If the argument seems convincing, it is because other possibilities are excluded.

The second argument asserts that there are only two ways to go: spend billions to attack drug cartels or legalize all drugs. Since we won't legalize all drugs, we must therefore spend billions to assault the cartels. The first (either/or) premise, however, is false; there are at least three other options. The billions could be spent to reduce and prevent drug use, drug producers could be given monetary incentives to switch to non-drug businesses, or only some drugs could be legalized.

Begging the Question

Begging the question is the fallacy of trying to prove a conclusion by using that very same conclusion as support.

The fallacy of **begging the question** is trying to prove a conclusion by using that very same conclusion as support. It is arguing in a circle. This way of trying to prove something says, in effect, “X is true because X is true.” Few people would fall for this fallacy in such a simple form, but more subtle kinds can be beguiling. For example, here’s the classic instance of begging the question:

The Bible says that God exists.

The Bible is true because God wrote it.

Therefore, God exists.

The conclusion here (“God exists”) is supported by premises that assume that very conclusion.

Here's another one:

All citizens have the right to a fair trial because those whom the state is obliged to protect and give consideration are automatically due judicial criminal proceedings that are equitable by any reasonable standard.

This passage may at first seem like a good argument, but it isn't. It reduces to this unimpressive assertion: "All citizens have the right to a fair trial because all citizens have the right to a fair trial." The conclusion is "All citizens have the right to a fair trial," but that's more or less what the premise says. The premise—"those whom the state is obliged to protect and give consideration are automatically due judicial criminal proceedings that are equitable by any reasonable standard"—is equivalent to "All citizens have the right to a fair trial."

When circular reasoning is subtle, it can ensnare even its own creators. The fallacy can easily sneak into an argument if the premise and conclusion say the same thing but say it in different, complicated ways.

Slippery Slope

The metaphor behind this fallacy suggests the danger of stepping on a dicey incline, losing your footing, and sliding to disaster. The fallacy of **slippery slope**, then, is arguing erroneously that a particular action should not be taken because it will lead inevitably to other actions resulting in some dire outcome. The key word here is *erroneously*. A slippery slope scenario becomes fallacious when there is no reason to believe that the chain of events predicted will ever happen. For example:

This trend toward gay marriage must be stopped. If gay marriage is permitted, then traditional marriage between a man and a woman will be debased and devalued, which will lead to an increase in divorces. And higher divorce rates can only harm our children.

This argument is fallacious because there are no reasons for believing that gay marriage will ultimately result in the chain of events described. If good reasons could be given, the argument might be salvaged.

Composition

Sometimes what is true about the parts of a thing is also true of the whole—and sometimes not. The fallacy of **composition** is arguing erroneously that what can be said of the parts can also be said of the whole. Consider:

Each piece of wood that makes up this house is lightweight. Therefore, the whole house is lightweight.

Each soldier in the platoon is proficient. Therefore, the platoon as a whole is proficient.

The monthly payments on this car are low. Hence, the cost of the car is low.

Just remember, sometimes the whole does have the same properties as the parts. If each part of the rocket is made of steel, the whole rocket is made of steel.

Division

If you turn the fallacy of composition upside down, you get the fallacy of **division**—arguing erroneously that what can be said of the whole can be said of the parts:

The house is heavy. Therefore, every part of the house is heavy.

The platoon is very effective. Therefore, every member of the platoon is effective.

That herd of elephants eats an enormous amount of food each day. Therefore, each elephant in the herd eats an enormous amount of food each day.

Slippery slope is the fallacy of arguing erroneously that a particular action should not be taken because it will lead inevitably to other actions resulting in some dire outcome.

Composition is the fallacy of arguing erroneously that what can be said of the parts can also be said of the whole.

Philosophy should quicken
life, not deaden it.
—Susan Glaspell

Division is the fallacy of arguing erroneously that what can be said of the whole can be said of the parts.

ESSAY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SECTION 1.3

1. What is the difference between an argument and an explanation?
What is the difference between an argument and a set of accusations?
or expressions of outrage?
2. How is reading philosophy different from, say, reading a physics text
or reading a novel?
3. Think about the political commentators you've read or listened to.
What fallacies have they been guilty of using?
4. The straw man fallacy is rampant in political debates. Give an example
of such a tactic being used by commentators or politicians, or make up
an example of your own.
5. Devise an argument in favor of the proposition that people should
(or should not) be punished as Socrates was for speaking their minds.

Review Notes

1.1 PHILOSOPHY: THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING

- Studying philosophy has both practical and theoretical benefits. To some, the pursuit of knowledge through philosophy is a spiritual quest.
- Taking an inventory of your philosophical beliefs at the beginning of this course will help you gauge your progress as you study.
- The four main divisions of philosophy are metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and logic. There are also subdivisions of philosophy that examine basic issues found in other fields.

1.2 SOCRATES AND THE EXAMINED LIFE

- For Socrates, an unexamined life is a tragedy because it results in grievous harm to the soul, a person's true self or essence. The soul is harmed by lack of knowledge—ignorance of one's own self and of the most important values in life (the good).
- The Socratic method is a question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth. Usually when Socrates used it in conversations with his fellow Athenians, their views would be exposed as false or confused. The main point of the exercise for Socrates, however, was not to win arguments, but to get closer to the truth.

- Socrates says, in effect, Let's assume that Thrasymachus is right that justice is whatever is in the interest of the powerful, and that people are just if they obey the laws made by the powerful. But the powerful sometimes make mistakes and demand obedience to laws that are *not* in their best interest. So if Thrasymachus's definition of justice is correct, then it is right for people to do what is in the interest of the powerful, and it is also right for them to do what is *not* in the interest of the powerful. His idea of justice then leads to a logical contradiction.
- The basic idea behind *reductio ad absurdum* is if you assume that a set of statements is true, and yet you can deduce a false or absurd statement from it, then the original set of statements as a whole must be false.

1.3 THINKING PHILOSOPHICALLY

- An argument is a group of statements in which one of them is meant to be supported by the others. A statement (or claim) is an assertion that something is or is not the case and is therefore the kind of utterance that is either true or false. In an argument, the statement being supported is the conclusion, and the statements supporting the conclusion are the premises.
- A good argument must have (1) solid logic and (2) true premises. Requirement (1) means that the conclusion should follow logically from the premises. Requirement (2) says that what the premises assert must in fact be the case.
- A deductive argument is intended to give logically conclusive support to its conclusion. An inductive argument is intended to give probable support to its conclusion. A deductive argument with the proper structure is said to be valid; a deductive argument that fails to have this structure is said to be invalid. If inductive arguments succeed in lending probable support to their conclusions, they are said to be strong. If they fail to provide this probable support, they are termed weak. When a valid (deductive) argument has true premises, it is said to be sound. When a strong (inductive) argument has true premises, it is said to be cogent. In inference to the best explanation, we begin with premises about a phenomenon or state of affairs to be explained. Then we reason from those premises to an explanation for that state of affairs. We try to produce not just any explanation, but the best explanation among several possibilities. The best explanation is the one most likely to be true.
- The guidelines for reading philosophy are: (1) Approach the text with an open mind; (2) read actively and critically; (3) identify the conclusion first, then the premises; (4) outline, paraphrase, or summarize the argument; and (5) evaluate the argument and formulate a tentative judgment.

WRITING TO UNDERSTAND: ARGUING YOUR OWN VIEWS

CHAPTER 1

1. Do you believe, as Thrasymachus did, that might makes right, that morality is not about objective right and wrong but about who has the most power? Devise an argument to support your belief.
2. Choose one of your fundamental beliefs that you have not thought much about and write an argument defending it or rejecting it.
3. Socrates said to his jurors, “Are you not ashamed that, while you take care to acquire as much wealth as possible, with honor and glory as well, yet you take no care or thought for understanding or truth, or for the best possible state of your soul?” Do you agree with this attitude? Why or why not?
4. What is the difference between the way philosophy approaches important questions and the way that religion does?
5. Argue the case for using (or not using) the Socratic method in education.

Key Terms

appeal to ignorance The fallacy of arguing that either (1) a claim is true because it hasn't been proven false or (2) a claim is false because it hasn't been proven true. (37)

appeal to popularity The fallacy of arguing that a claim must be true not because it is backed by good reasons, but simply because many people believe it. (35)

appeal to the person The fallacy of rejecting a statement on the grounds that it comes from a particular person, not because the statement, or claim, itself is false or dubious. (33)

argument A statement coupled with other statements that are meant to support that statement. (15)

axiology The study of value, including both aesthetic value and moral value. (6)

begging the question The fallacy of trying to prove a conclusion by using that very same conclusion as support. (38)

composition The fallacy of arguing erroneously that what can be said of the parts can also be said of the whole. (39)

conclusion In an argument, the statement being supported. (15)

deductive argument An argument intended to give logically conclusive support to its conclusion. (17)

division The fallacy of arguing erroneously that what can be said of the whole can be said of the parts. (39)

epistemology The study of knowledge. (6)

equivocation The fallacy of assigning two different meanings to the same significant word in an argument. (36)

ethics (moral philosophy) The study of morality using the methods of philosophy. (6)

fallacy A common but bad argument. (33)

false dilemma The fallacy of arguing erroneously that since there are only two alternatives to choose from, and one of them is unacceptable, the other one must be true. (37)

genetic fallacy The fallacy of arguing that a statement can be judged true or false based on its source. (36)

inductive argument An argument intended to give probable support to its conclusion. (18)

logic The study of correct reasoning. (7)

metaphysics The study of reality, an inquiry into the fundamental nature of the universe and the things in it. (4)

premise In an argument, a statement supporting the conclusion. (15)

reductio ad absurdum An argument of this form: If you assume that a set of statements is true, and yet you can deduce a false or absurd statement from it, then the original set of statements as a whole must be false. (14)

slippery slope The fallacy of arguing erroneously that a particular action should not be taken because it will lead inevitably to other actions resulting in some dire outcome. (39)

Socratic method Question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth. (8)

statement (claim) An assertion that something is or is not the case and is therefore the kind of utterance that is either true or false. (15)

straw man The fallacy of misrepresenting a person's views so they can be more easily attacked or dismissed. (33)

Argument Exercises

(Answers in Appendix B)

Exercise 1.1

For each of the passages that follow, indicate whether it constitutes an argument. For each argument, specify both the conclusion and the premises.

1. Faster-than-light travel is not possible. It would violate a law of nature.
2. You have neglected your duty on several occasions, and you have been absent from work too many times. Therefore, you are not fit to serve in your current capacity.
3. Racial profiling is not an issue for white people, but it is an issue for blacks.
4. The flu epidemic on the East Coast is real. Government health officials say so. And I personally have read at least a dozen news stories that characterize the situation as a “flu epidemic.”
5. Communism is bunk. Only naïve, impressionable pinheads believe that stuff.

6. Current-day Christians use violence to spread their right-to-life message. These Christians, often referred to as the religious right, are well known for violent demonstrations against Planned Parenthood and other abortion clinics. Doctors and other personnel are threatened with death, clinics have been bombed, there have even been cases of doctors being murdered.—Letter to the editor, *Arizona Daily Wildcat*
7. I am writing about the cost of concert tickets. I am outraged at how much ticket prices are increasing every year. A few years ago, one could attend a popular concert for a decent price. Now some musicians are asking as much as \$200 to \$300.—Letter to the editor, *Buffalo News*
8. Homeland security is a cruel charade for unborn children. Some 4,000 per day are killed in their mother's womb by abortion. This American holocaust was legalized by the Supreme Court in an exercise of raw judicial power.—Letter to the editor, *Buffalo News*
9. Witches are real. They are mentioned in the Bible. There are many people today who claim to be witches. And historical records reveal that there were witches in Salem.
10. Stretched upon the dark silk night, bracelets of city lights glisten brightly.

Exercise 1.2

For each passage that follows, list the conclusion and premises.

1. There are those who maintain . . . that even if God is not required as the author of the moral law, he is nevertheless required as the enforcer of it, for without the threat of divine punishment, people will not act morally. But this position is [not plausible]. In the first place, as an empirical hypothesis about the psychology of human beings, it is questionable. There is no unambiguous evidence that theists are more moral than nontheists. Not only have psychological studies failed to find a significant correlation between frequency of religious worship and moral conduct, but convicted criminals are much [more] likely to be theists than atheists. Second, the threat of divine punishment cannot impose a moral obligation, for might does not make right. Threats extort; they do not create a moral duty.—*Free Inquiry*, Summer 1997
2. I love *Reason* [magazine], but [regarding a previous article by Nick Gillespie] I'm wondering if all the illegal drugs that Nick Gillespie used to take are finally getting to him. He has a right to speak out against President Bush, but when he refers to him as "the millionaire president who waited out the Vietnam War in the Texas Air National Guard," it reminds me of the garbage rhetoric that I might see if I were reading Ted Rall, or Susan Sontag, or one of the other hate-mongering, America-bashing, leftist whiners. That kind of ad hominem attack is not only disrespectful to a man who is doing a damned good job as commander-in-chief (with approval ratings of more than 80 percent); it detracts from the whole point of the article.—Letter to the editor, *Reason*, July 2002
3. The fifth way [of proving that God exists] is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act

- for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.—Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*
4. The first thing that must occur to anyone studying moral subjectivism [the view that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the beliefs of an individual or group] seriously is that the view allows the possibility that an action can be both right and not right, or wrong and not wrong, etc. This possibility exists because, as we have seen, the subjectivist claims that the moral character of an action is determined by individual subjective states; and these states can vary from person to person, even when directed toward the same action on the same occasion. Hence one and the same action can evidently be determined to have—simultaneously—radically different moral characters. . . . [If] subjectivism . . . does generate such contradictory conclusions, the position is certainly untenable.—Phillip Montague, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, June 1986
 5. A Florida judge dismissed a lawsuit that accused the Vatican of hiding instances of sexual abuse by priests. The suit was thrown out because Florida's statute of limitations had run out on the case. I submit that the dismissal was proper and ethical considering the community stature and function of priests and the benefits that accrue to society in the aftermath of the decision. Let's consider community stature first. The community stature of priests must always be taken into account in these abuse cases. A priest is not just anybody; he performs a special role in society—namely, to provide spiritual guidance and to remind people that there is both a moral order and a divine order in the world. The priest's role is special because it helps to underpin and secure society itself. Anything that could undermine this role must be neutralized as soon as possible. Among those things that can weaken the priestly role are publicity, public debate, and legal actions. Abuse cases are better handled in private by those who are keenly aware of the importance of a positive public image of priests. And what of the benefits of curtailing the legal proceedings? The benefits to society of dismissing the legal case outweigh all the alleged disadvantages of continuing with public hearings. The primary benefit is the continued nurturing of the community's faith, without which the community would cease to function effectively.

Exercise 1.3

In the following passages, identify any fallacies. Some passages may contain more than one fallacy.

1. The *New York Times* reported that one-third of Republican senators have been guilty of Senate ethics violations. But you know that's false—the *Times* is a notorious liberal rag.

2. Geraldo says that students who cheat on exams should not automatically be expelled from school. But it's ridiculous to insist that students should never be punished for cheating.
3. My sweater is blue. Therefore, the atoms that make up the sweater are blue.
4. Kelly says that many women who live in predominantly Muslim countries are discriminated against. But how the heck would she know? She's not a Muslim.
5. The study found that 80 percent of women who took the drug daily had no recurrence of breast cancer. But that doesn't mean anything. The study was funded in part by the company that makes the drug.
6. The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible, is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people actually desire it.—John Stuart Mill
7. Gremlins exist, that's for sure. No scientist has ever proved that they don't exist.
8. The former mayor was convicted of drug possession, and he spent time in jail. So you can safely ignore anything he has to say about legalizing drugs.
9. I believe that baby-carrying storks are real creatures. No one has ever proved that they don't exist.
10. Only man has morals. No woman is a man. Therefore, no woman has morals.