Welcome to Philosophy 10106.

Class rule #1: no sitting in the last 5 rows! This room is way too big.

What is philosophy?

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philosophy?

'Philosophy' comes from the ancient Greek 'φιλοσοφία' —
philosophia.

philosophia = philo + sophia
philo = love
sophia = wisdom

What does it mean to love wisdom?

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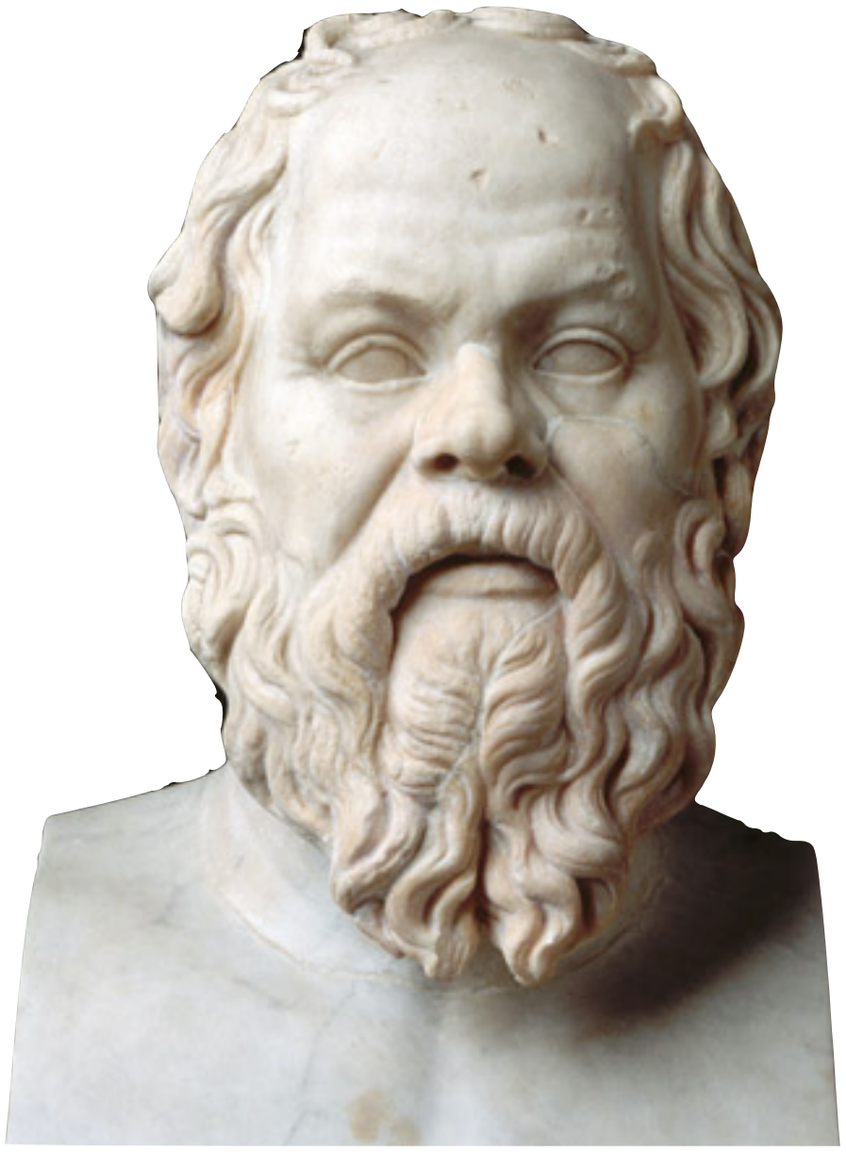
Socrates, who is sometimes considered the first philosopher, contrasted lovers of wisdom with two other sorts of people.

The first were people who formed belief on the basis of custom or tradition rather than argument.

The second were rhetoricians and sophists who used arguments, not to form true beliefs, but to achieve some other end.



Philosophy, by contrast, is the attempt to form true beliefs about the world on the basis of reason.

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Can you think of any other academic departments at Notre Dame that might describe themselves in this way?

Yes, quite a few. Physics, economics, psychology, biology, sociology, political science (maybe) …. the list goes on and on.

This is no accident. All of these other fields — the natural sciences (like physics, chemistry, and biology), the social and human sciences (like economics, sociology, psychology, and political science), and others — were once part of philosophy. Isaac Newton was a philosopher; so was Charles Darwin; so was Adam Smith.

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These great philosophers went on to form systematic new ways of answering the questions in which they were interested. These 'new ways of answering questions' are just what we now call 'sciences.'

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Metaphysics is derived from the Greek prefix μετά (meta), which means after, and the Greek φύσις (physis), which means nature. This might encourage the view that metaphysics is the study of the supernatural. Fortunately, it isn't. Metaphysics is a name for the study of the ultimate nature of reality.

Epistemology is derived from the Greek word ἐπιστήμη (episteme), which was the word for knowledge or understanding. Epistemology is the study of what we can know about the world.

So our topic is a broad one: the nature of reality and what we can know about it.

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In this class, we'll be focusing on five of questions in metaphysics and epistemology.

Is there a God?

Do I have free will?

What am I?

How should I live?

What should I believe?

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The main aim of the course will not be for you to learn what other people have thought about these questions — though you will do that too. The main aim of the course will be for you to develop your own views on these questions. You will be evaluated mainly on the basis of your ability to defend those views by argument.

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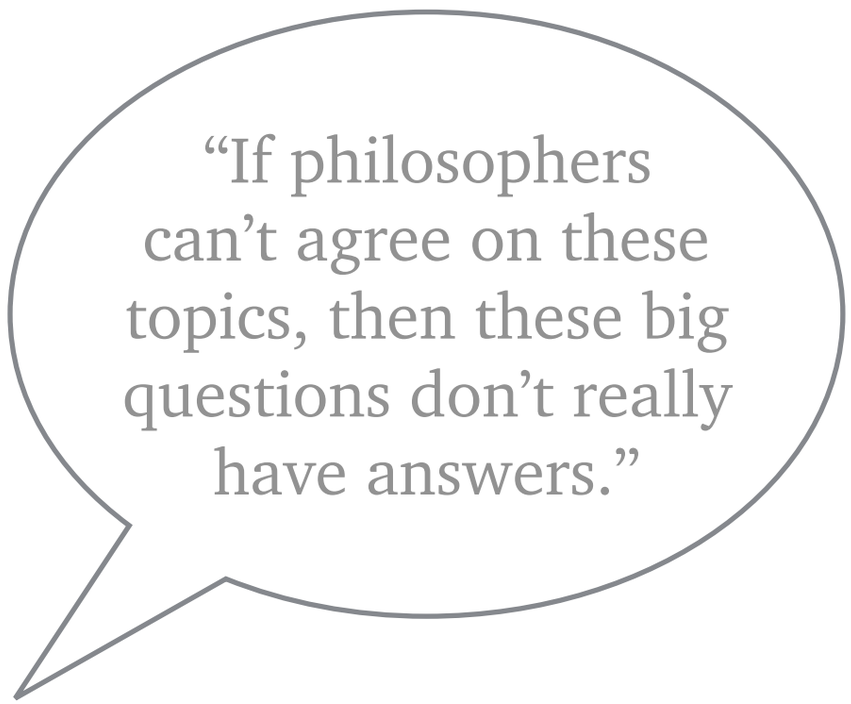
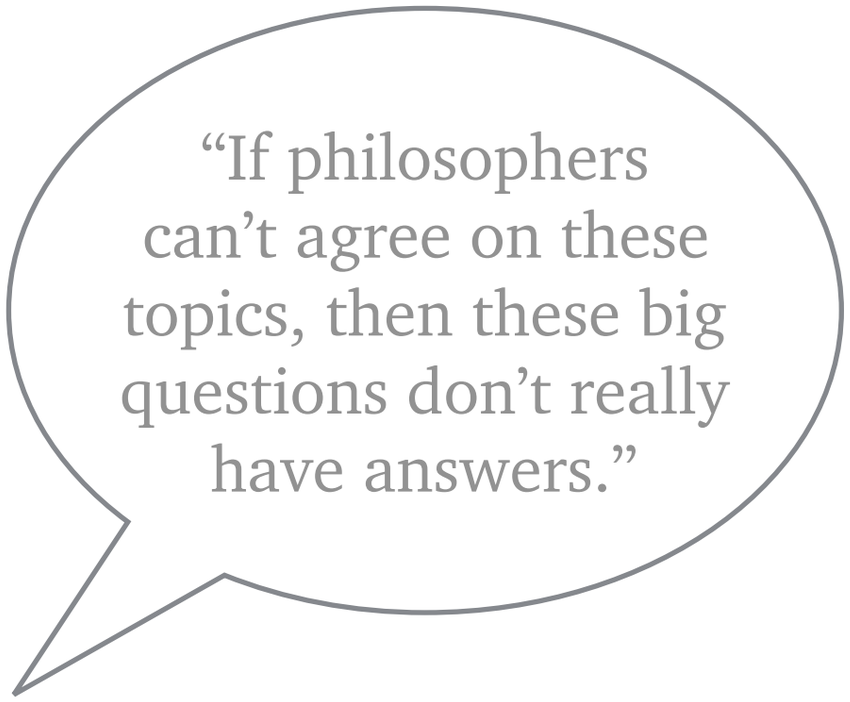
Why is philosophy like this? A short answer: philosophers can't agree.

This sometimes drives students crazy. I'll give the best arguments on both sides of an issue, and students will want to be told which argument is the winner. I won't do this — and this can lead to one of two frustrated responses.

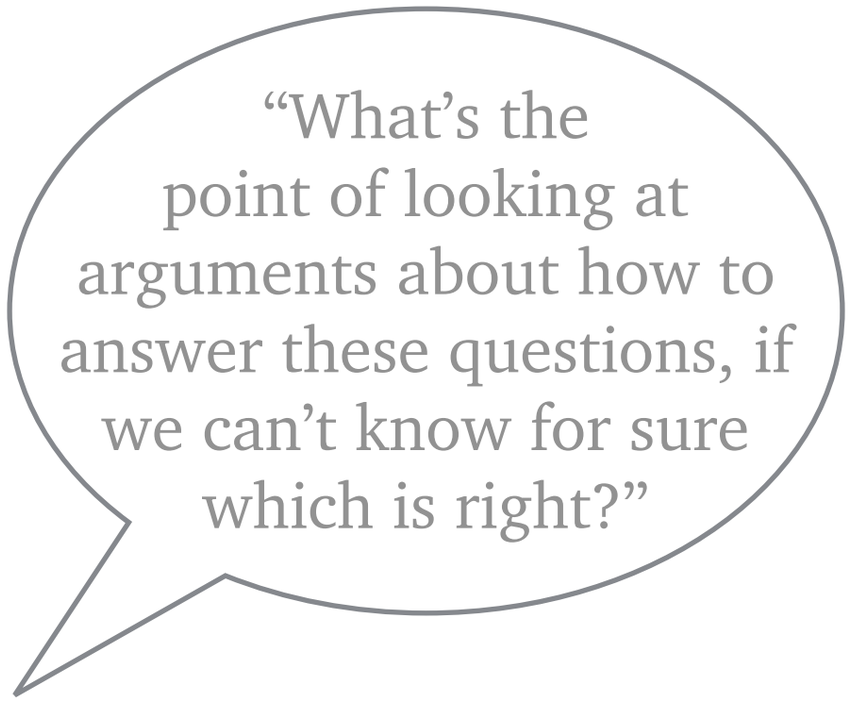




This response does not make a lot of sense.

There are also topics about which scientists disagree. For example, biologists disagree widely about the origins of life on earth. Does that mean that there is no answer to the question of how life on earth really originated? Of course not.

Similarly, whether or not we can figure out the answers to them for sure, questions like `Does God exist?’ clearly do have answers. What’s the alternative — that God sort of exists and sort of doesn’t?



Suppose that you really care about the origins of life on earth. Does that fact that no biologist can tell you what the origins in fact were mean that you should not look at the arguments given for the competing theories? That does not seem reasonable.

Or take a less intellectual example. In the recent past many of you spent some time thinking about where would be the best place for you to go to college. Was there a proof you could find, or some infallible authority you could consult?

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But that didn't make it unreasonable for you to think long and hard about the arguments in favor of various options. Just the opposite — because you cared about this question and because there was no authority to consult, it was more important for you to think hard about the arguments.

That is a bit like the attitude I want you to take toward philosophy. Questions about whether God exists, whether you have free will, and what kind of life is best are questions which you should care about. So, just as you cared about the arguments for and against various options for college, you should care about the arguments for and against (for example) the existence of God.

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And to do that, you will have to learn a bit about what arguments are, and what makes arguments good or bad. I will come back to that in a bit. But first, some nuts and bolts about how the course will work.

If the main thing you are going to be asked to do in this class is to argue for your views, and respond to arguments against your views, you need to know something about arguments. The study of arguments is called logic.

A first step in grasping the basic principles of logic is the mastery of four (semi-)technical terms.

Arguments consist of one or more premises and a conclusion. The conclusion is what you are arguing for; the premises are the (alleged) basis for that conclusion.

The two key terms used in the evaluation of an argument are valid and sound.

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an argument is **valid** when it is impossible for its premises to be true and its conclusion false

an argument is **sound** when it is valid and all of its premises are true

Validity and soundness are the two most fundamental concepts for you to grasp in this course. Let's illustrate them by considering some example arguments.

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1. All men are mortal.
2. Brian Kelly is a man.

———————————————

C. Brian Kelly is mortal.

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You'll notice that certain words in the argument are repeated.

To get the form of the argument, replace every repeated expression of this sort with a 'dummy letter' — sort of like a variable. That gives us the following form of the argument:

1. All F's are G.
2. x is G

C. x is F.

Can you think of any argument of this form which has true premises and a false conclusion?

This shows that this form of argument is invalid — which in turn is good evidence that the argument at the top, which is of this form, is invalid.

an argument is **valid** when it is impossible for its premises to be true and its conclusion false

an argument is **sound** when it is valid and all of its premises are true

1. Either Notre Dame will win the National Title in 2019 or USC will.
2. USC will not win the National Title in 2019.

———————————————————————————-

C. Notre Dame will win the National Title in 2019.

What is the form of this argument? Is every argument of this form valid?

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Here's a slightly trickier one:

1. If the moon is made of cheese, then it will soon become moldy.
2. The moon will not soon become moldy.

C. The moon is not made of cheese.

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C. The moon is not made of cheese.

What is the form of this argument?

One way to put it would be as follows:

1. If P then Q.
2. Not Q.

C. Not P.

Is every argument of this form valid?

If an argument is valid, can it have a false conclusion?

If an argument is sound, can it have a false conclusion?

If an argument is invalid, can it have a true conclusion?

If an argument is unsound, can it have a true conclusion?

Mastering the concepts of validity and soundness gives you way to talk about, and criticize, arguments.

Suppose that you are presented with an argument for some conclusion that you think is false, and you want to criticize that argument. The most straightforward way to do that would be to show that the argument is unsound.

Soundness = validity + true premises. So to show that an argument is unsound, you can do one of two things: show that it is invalid, or show that it has a false premise.

But there are other ways to criticize an argument as well.

Here's an argument:

1. The number of beer bottles on Notre Dame's campus right now is odd.

C. The number of beer bottles on Notre Dame's campus right now is not 496.

There's a pretty clear sense in which, if I gave this argument right now, it would be a bad argument. But it is valid; and you can hardly claim that it is unsound, since you do not know whether the premise is true or false.

The right criticism of this argument seems to be, not that it has a false premise, but that we have no reason to believe that the premise is true — and hence no reason to believe that the argument is sound.

A first step in thinking clearly about arguments, and learning how to talk clearly about arguments, is distinguishing between things you can say about individual premises and conclusions, on the one hand, and whole arguments, on the other.

One can sensibly say that a premise or conclusion is true, or false, or unsupported by the evidence. But it makes no sense to say any of these things about arguments.

By contrast, one can sensibly say that an argument is sound or unsound, valid or invalid. But it makes no sense to say any of these things about individual premises or conclusions.

Next time we will put these tools to work discussing an important attempt to answer the first question which will occupy us in this course: